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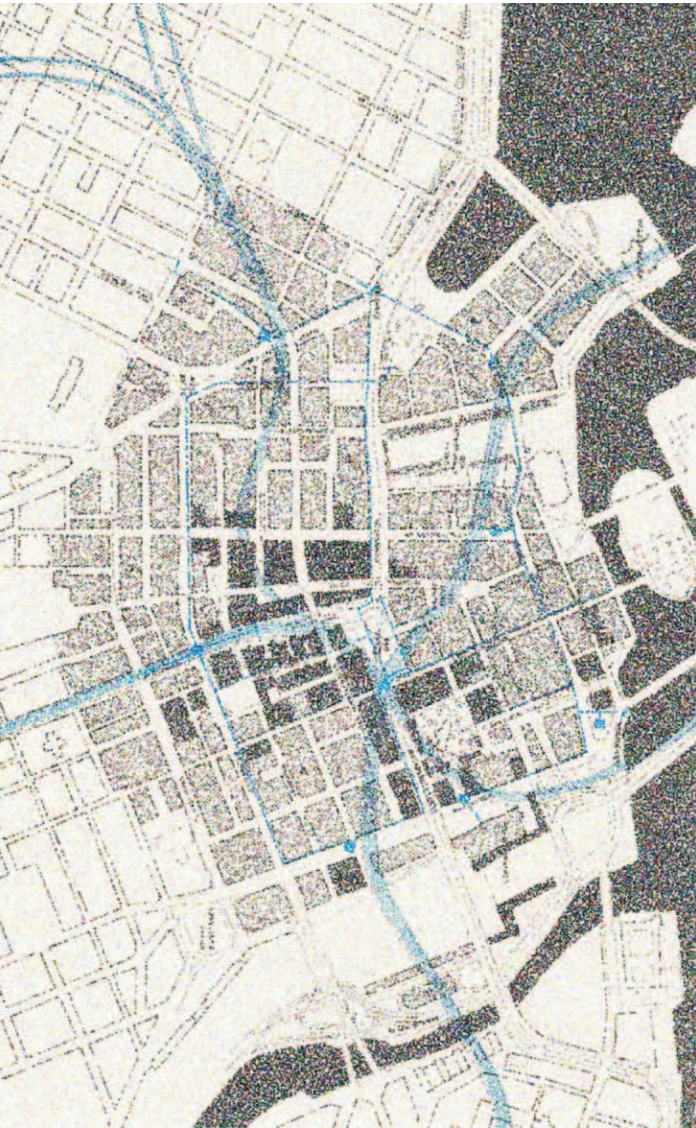
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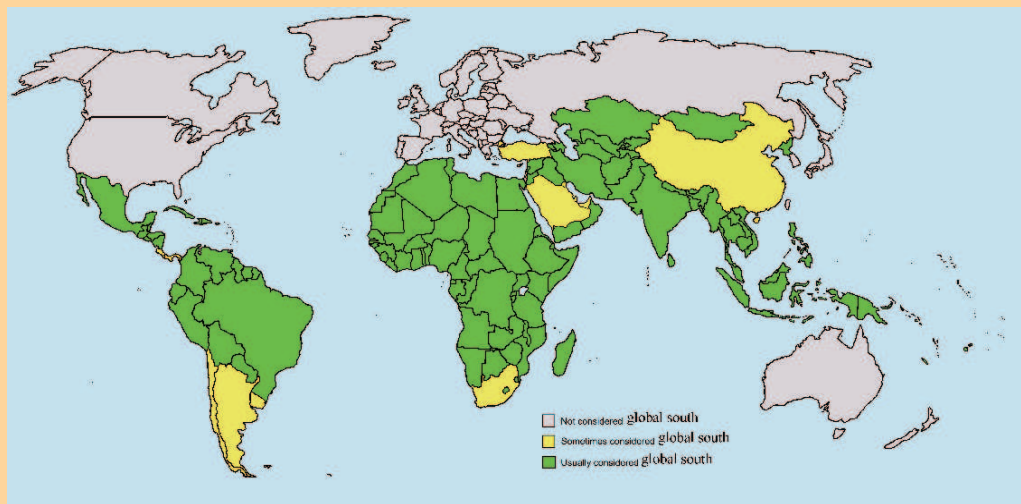


EDITORIAL



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*Happy are these who lose imagination:
They have enough to carry with ammunition.
Their spirit drags no pack.*

Their old wounds, save with cold, can not more ache.

The twentieth century is supposed to be dead for almost a decade now. Yet it is there with us continuously— in its successes of technology and market, and even more so in its violent failures and lost dreams. In its long shadow, no one can now hope to fight even a “war to end all wars”. But, wars happen. They happen in Iraq, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Ireland, Palestine, Rwanda. They happen as the all-engulfing War on ‘Terror’. They happen as attacks on human freedoms— of politics, of civil society, of culture, of race, of sexuality. They happen to abolish— does one really know, unless it is to abolish humanity, or at least human happiness?

But, of course, it is good business. And not just for the old villains of the armaments industry, or even “statesmen” who go to war to divert attention from domestic issues. Our biggest window to wars today is provided by those

who perhaps profit from it the most– the media. In the hyperreal collage of shifting, almost kaleidoscopic images of mangled cadavers, bombed homes, ruined communities only the names and locations of the refugee camps that house emaciated bodies change– slower only than the pace with which we forget the last traces of the fleeting memories of other suffering bodies, homes and communities.

Even as Velupillai Prabhakaran’s destroyed body merges with the bodies of those killed in Palestine, or was it Afghanistan this week, the image that stays is that of suffering and of the impotency of the ‘international community’ to do anything about it– any of it. In May 2009, the Human Rights Council failed, in the face of opposition from South Africa, Cuba, China, India and Pakistan (in what other platform or what other issue would the last named three come together, one wonders), to pass a resolution that asked for mere investigation of allegations of human rights abuses. And before we start defending this as a protection of a South country’s right to limiting access to its ‘internal problems’ and even to international aid agencies, came the statement of Sri Lanka’s Foreign Minister, calling the allegations “both fictional and well-fabricated, with ulterior and sinister motives, in order to discredit the armed forces, as well as to embarrass the government of Sri Lanka.” And the hegemonising tenor of the War on Terror even made short work of the moral/ethical opprobrium that normally associates with attacks on hospitals that Colombo undertook in its war on its own ‘terrorists’– the LTTE. And of course, hardly anyone bothered to waste newsprint or airtime on the subsequent ‘suppression of Jihadis’ in July.

The US-boycott of the Human Rights Council which ended months after the aforementioned meeting has been blamed for the failure of the resolution being carried. While it may have denied Barrack Obama an opportunity to post facto justify his Nobel Peace Prize, one must wonder how many, particularly in the South, and even more so in Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Venezuela, Cuba, Chile, Panama... would miss having the Big Brother’s extended protection of their rights?

And yet, if there is the constant presence of universal war and suffering, there are also diverse histories of coexistence and even resistance, or at least of living. Mohammed Tabishat charts one such story in the Vilayat of al-Burami in Oman, where he shows how the different medical practices– Islamic, Chinese, Ayurvedic, Homeopathic and Biochemical, each drawing from different scientific and regional locations, coexist to serve the different

needs of the denizens of this multi-ethnic town, which is itself located between United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and Yemen. The question of diversity is also a principal theme of the article of Siri and Chamira Gamage as they delve into an analysis of one of the most important debates, scholarly and otherwise, of our time— that of the impact of the hegemonising, unculturising trend of globalisation vis-à-vis the localism of communities and regions.

Finding unity, if only in tentative, crystal ball-gazing understanding of trends, is what Suhit Sen does in his analysis of the maddeningly diverse events, processes and results that make up the fifteenth general elections in the world's largest democracy— India. He shows the emergence of a left of centre consensus in the polity, contrary to many expectations. And if this disturbs our received common sense in the post-Washington Consensus world, then Joao Maia takes on a much older consensus— that about Euclides da Cunha and what this leading Brazilian intellectual of the nineteenth century thought of the indigenes of his country. In doing this, he destabilises many of the established notions of the intellectual history of the post-colonial Brazilian nation-state.

In the *Across the South* section, Wapulumuka Oliver Mulwafu reports on the recently held conference in University of Malawi to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Nyasaland State of Emergency. The issues delved into make for interesting readings of similar crises of state, democracy and governance in other regions of the South. Ritoban Das delves into the varied influences and streams that, drawing on the old traditions of African music, enrich our listening experiences.

For the *Reviews* section, we have for you Patrick Chabal's *Africa: The Politics of Suffering and Smiling*, reviewed by Percyslage Chigora, who brings out how this book takes a new look at issues without diminishing, in any way, from either their importance or their every-dayness. Jerome Teelucksingh in his review, tries to present us with new findings and interpretations on Eric Williams, while locating him in the historical context of the Caribbean.

Half a decade ago, the Sephis e-Magazine started its career as a pioneer in the field of electronic academic publications. The success of its web-based magazine opened new possibilities of a different (and affordable) kind of academic 'publishing'. It has been a long trek since and our abiding challenge is to keep pace with the developing technology of digital publication. We realised that our website needed upgrading even as we had

ourselves just mastered its possibilities. Even though we (along with many of our regular readers) have grown used to the format of the e-Magazine, it was in crying need of a make-over, given the possibilities offered by new software. We decided to go the whole hog and to change the .pdf layout together with the *Global South* webpage. We know that those who are used to the existing layout will probably have to spend a few minutes getting used to the new one; we have tried to keep it simple and easy to use; and we hope the new format too will appeal to our friends and well wishers across the global south. Given the gradual dissemination of the boon of high-speed internet connectivity we are hopeful that our readers will not face difficulties in navigating the magazine and the webpage. We will be very grateful if you let us know how the new set up is working for you and especially if there are any difficulties. We are treating the first quarter as an experimental phase and will be happy to incorporate changes in accordance with suggestions from our readers.

A new look for the new year... greetings from the team to all our readers.



Body Perceptions in Contexts of Plurality and Hybridity: An Exploratory Study of Al- Buraimi, Oman

This paper explores therapeutic resources in al-Buraimi of Oman and the interactions between them as parts of a plural changing system. I suggest the latter must involve the production of hybrid forms of healing that simultaneously influence the perceptions of the individuals utilising them. I revisit the notion of embodiment and compare it with the idea of “ensoulment.” I argue that the latter presents human body experiences in a more holistic fashion. I present illness experiences illustrating interactive ideas and perceptions and thus providing opportunities to view culture not as static entity but as globalised construct in constant motion.



Mohammed Tabishat

Mohammed Tabishat is an assistant professor of anthropology and sociology at the United Arab Emirates University. He did his graduate course in cultural anthropology and cultural study of science at the New School for Social Research, New York (1993-1995). He then earned a doctorate in social anthropology at the University of Cambridge (2002), and has been a fellow of the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin (2007/2008). Tabishat’s work experience includes teaching (1999-present) at universities and liberal arts colleges in the USA and the United Arab Emirates. His interests are in social relations of power represented in health care practices, education and religion. He conducted field research on health care systems in Jordan, Egypt and Oman. Currently, Tabishat is conducting two research projects focused on aspects of the modernising systems of health care and education in the UAE.

Introduction

Medical care has always been central to human life across time and space. Therapeutic procedures are intricately connected to social orders¹ through material and symbolic links that assist to maintain or subvert existing relations of power.² As they are focused on the body they form a suitable terrain to view society well beyond the impossible poles of a Cartesian science.³ These observations have long been empirically demonstrated by anthropologists and other social scientists.⁴ Recently, they have been critically examined and reformulated.⁵ But these studies tend to construct therapeutic systems in ways excluding possibilities of change due to interaction between them. Moreover, the body perceptions of people who use several therapies simultaneously have rarely, if ever, been investigated as a separate theoretical problem with implications for life in globalised societies.

This paper is an anthropological exploration of a medically plural community living in Al-Buraimi. My central query is how medical resources rooted in different traditions are changed as they are interconnected locally. Empirically, this paper aims at describing therapeutic dispensaries representing different medical systems including those called Islamic, Chinese, Ayurvedic, homeopathic and Biochemical. I seek to describe the health complaints these dispensaries treat, their physical characteristics, the qualifications of the staff operating in them and the people using their services. Significantly, I address the question of whether a referral system, though an informal one, exists between these clinics. The latter issue is significant to explore how these facilities are connected to the local community, and globally.⁶

First, I describe the socio-cultural setting of al-Buraimi. Second, I define medical plurality and pluralism especially in the present globalised society and discuss meanings that medical pluralism may have taken in contexts of this recently modernised and globally well-connected town. Third, I discuss the methods I used to collect the data on the medical services before I describe the different therapeutic dispensaries, their practitioners and relevant individual experiences using them. Finally, I present concluding remarks and questions.

In conclusion, my research demonstrates that medical practices in this context are well connected locally, regionally and globally. They are not static but dynamic and changing. There is evidence for exchange between them and with other health resources located beyond the borders of the town and the region. Second, coexistence of medical practices rooted in different traditions indicates that acculturation is underway through processes of embodiment; processes of adopting and internalising methods, concepts and beliefs underlying the therapeutic techniques sought by individual help-seekers. My argument is that such interaction must have also influenced traditional body perceptions of individuals and groups involved. Given the diversity of medical resources as well as the society within which they operate, the paths that this influence and development may take must be very complex and unpredictable. This paper is a first step toward a fuller exploration into these paths as will be noted in the methodology section below.

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines traditional medicine as:

The health practices, approaches, knowledge and beliefs incorporating plant, animal and mineral-based medicines, spiritual therapies, manual techniques and exercises, applied singularly or in combination to treat, diagnose and prevent illnesses or maintain well-being.

[Http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_medicine](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_medicine) accessed on 08.01.2010.

The Setting

Al-Buraimi is an ethnically diverse town with a population benefitting from a prosperous oil-based economy and a market offering lower prices for the local and neighbouring populations for diverse services and goods including those referred to as medical or therapeutic. I argue that the latter are maintained and developed because they serve their respective immigrant communities. Today however, as the town is easily accessed by visitors and consumers from outside the local community, including those searching for traditional therapies, there is greater possibility for the town's diverse

health resources to thrive and change to respond to increased and new demands.

Al-Buraimi is a governorate (*wilayah*) of Oman located in the northwest of the country which borders the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea and Yemen (see the Map below).⁷ Around 3.3 million people live between these boundaries on an area of 212,460 square km. The residents, for a long time, prospered due to their proximity to the Indian Ocean, the Persian Gulf and East Africa. The country has been ruled as a Sultanate starting from the eighteenth century with enduring links with the United Kingdom. Starting from the seventies of the last century, the country experienced intensive processes of development through which a modern infrastructure was developed. Now, Oman is considered to be a modern economy based on oil, agriculture and trade.⁸

**Map of Al-Buraimi in North Western,
between Oman and the UAE**



Al-Buraimi represents the ethnic and cultural diversity as well as the continuing regional links of Oman. Historically, al-Buraimi was a settlement that developed around sources of water which have great significance for this mostly desert land. The present neighbouring town across the borders called al-Ain used to be an integral part of al-Buraimi. Since the middle of the twentieth century and upon a dispute between Oman and Saudi Arabia, al-Ain passed under the control of the emerging emirate of Abu Dhabi, which subsequently became the emirate that, along with six other emirates, formed the state of United Arab Emirates. The partitioning of al-Buraimi however did not result in closing the borders with al-Ain until recently.

Given the rise of a powerful oil-based economy in the United Arab Emirates, al-Ain now forms a source of income to many businesses based in Al-Buraimi. Likewise, many of those who live or work in the UAE and cannot afford the country's living costs can always cross the border to obtain cheaper and more varied services including health care service. Together with al-Ain, the population of Al-Buraimi grew manifold, rising from a few thousands in the sixties to more than 450,000 in the late 1990s. These numbers represent tens of ethnic and national groups stretching from Asia (especially India, Pakistan and the Philippines) to Africa (especially Egypt, Sudan and North Africa) to Europe and North America, in addition, of course, to people from the rest of the Middle East including Iran, Yemen, Syria, Jordan, Iraq, Lebanon, Palestine and others. Now, the immigrants greatly outnumber the indigenous population. Exact figures are not entirely relevant here. The point is that such transformations have had tremendous impact on the local culture and society. The immigrant communities maintain significant aspects of their cultural heritage including language, religion and therapeutic traditions.

Today, al-Buraimi hosts a whole variety of medical facilities sought by customers coming from even more complex ethnic backgrounds. The town is now easily accessible through many routes including (most importantly) from al-Ain, which directly connects it to Saudi Arabia, and the whole Gulf region. With airports, highways, telecommunications being readily available for this rapidly changing region, the town and its medical facilities are visited and utilised by numerous kinds

of people from many parts of the world. Furthermore, modern forms of communications have made it quite easy for those seeking help to obtain medical advice and therapies. The latter can be obtained via dispensary, the internet, or shipped through relatives and friends. I saw these processes in operation when I first visited the town five years ago in 2004.

Throughout the last five decades, immigrants, as individuals and groups, contributed to an important aspect of al-Ain and Al-Buraimi by forming small communities which provided culture-specific services for themselves and for the region as a whole. Interestingly, these were open to provide their services to the public not as medical care dispensaries in the strict sense of the term. They are thus not licensed by the health care authorities, but by the municipalities. So far, as there are no legal codes that prevent work of these dispensaries from providing services to the public, they would continue to flourish and contribute to the cultural diversity of the area. Specifically, they would enrich the multicultural aspect through medical pluralism.

Plurality and Pluralism

Plurality simply means more than one system existing side by side.⁹ Medical pluralism in present globalised societies, such as the one under consideration, must be flourishing due to compressed time and space and juxtaposition of different traditional cultures that globalisation brings about. This pluralism, however, should not imply a sense of equality in power between different medical resources. Power as such too is both representational and practical. I am concerned with the latter; how in practice different therapies are used, evaluated and rated by those who apply them on their bodies. To pursue this question I argue for a holistic view of human life and healthcare that gives a sense of “docile agency” to the help-seekers linked less with the notion of embodiment than with “ensoulment”.¹⁰ Finally, I suggest that Nicther's formulation of the concepts of mimesis, mindful body, local biologies and somatic idioms of distress present a useful framework to represent the health experiences of the subjects included in this research; individuals living and negotiating different therapies in a globalised, multi-cultural and rapidly changing environment.



A street of al-Buraimi:
http://lh5.ggpht.com/_TW6IGLpmdOI/RzXyY7IECM/AAAAAAAAAM0/_JIMHpmPQyM/IMG_9012.jpg, accessed on 08.01.2010.

The contemporary globalised society is witnessing powerful processes leading to increasingly porous national boundaries, and increased movements of capital and labour, including those concerned with medical care. In addition, there is increased immigration and unprecedented rates of expansion and infiltration of mass media materials into ever larger groups. It is under such circumstances that medical pluralism and the synthesis of new forms of therapy flourish. It is common today to see a Chinese clinic next to a modern biochemical one. The two may even be housed in the same medical facility next to a third clinic from India or elsewhere in the world. Consequently, medical pluralism does not indicate static systems. On the contrary, it implies movement, interaction and change. As such, my aim is to explore not the mere constituents of the present context, but to further focus on processes of borrowing between different therapeutic systems as well as on the social and technical operations aiming at adapting different techniques to local and individual circumstances and needs. The processes of exchange are based on mutual recognition of legitimacy and efficacy. It is within this nexus that plurality turns into pluralism; when coexistence of medical resources is a normal constituent of the overall discourses on culture and society under consideration.

Medical pluralism in present globalised societies, such as the one under consideration, must be flourishing due to compressed time and space and juxtaposition of different traditional cultures that globalisation brings about. This pluralism however should not imply a sense of equality in power between different medical resources. Power as such too is both representational and practical.

Medical pluralism is a concept closely connected to the notion of hierarchy because different medical resources in socially stratified communities are likely to possess different amounts of social power that ultimately assist in reproduction of social order.¹¹ The reason offered to explain such hierarchy is the social power possessed by the social groups the medical resources represent. As such, when social differentiation stems from economic disparities, medical pluralism becomes an index of social inequality. In such cases, issues of class, race or ethnic group acquire a critical role in reproducing the social order via therapeutic means. Baer, Singer and Johnson, for example, present a programmatic paper that illustrates different medical systems organised in a hierarchical manner. By hierarchy they mean that the therapies of these systems are unequal in status and perhaps efficacy. The authors explain the hierarchy in terms of “levels,” perhaps to indicate the element of inequality between different “systems” of therapy. The top level in this hierarchy, according to the authors, is called “macro-social level.” It encompasses plural medical systems in which modern biomedicine “enjoys a dominant status over heterodox and ethnomedical practices”.¹²

If dominance is conceived in terms of power then we should distinguish between disciplinary power which operates through the normalisation of everyday life, and sovereign power which is mainly representational.¹³ And if we are to construe human practice accurately we better focus on the diverse ways these two forms are articulated in everyday life.¹⁴ In addition, to address different forms of power we need to research several cultural sites where different modalities may be diversely configured and thus shaping body perceptions in new ways.¹⁵ Furthermore, in the present increasingly cosmopolitan communities, we need a perspective that is able to account for multi-layered realities in which relations of power in practice may not always conform to those in representation. As far as the epistemological status of accounts on power are concerned, I believe the approach that could respond to such situation is one that allows observers to question their own assumptions and embodied knowledge as they develop abstract accounts of the world around them.¹⁶

Medical anthropologists share at least the assumptions that practices labelled as “medical” are products of the interplay between human consciousness and processes of producing and debating cultural meanings and psychological and physical realities. They bring together powerful emotions, perceptual activities and practical interventions that assist in the reproduction of the material and

socio-political realities that give rise to them.¹⁷ I use the term perception as a question on “whether we can ever directly perceive the physical world”¹⁸ including our bodies¹⁹ “essentially indeterminable ... social agents meaningfully engaged in processes of re-interpreting and re-signifying the brute materiality of fleshy bodies.”²⁰

Nichter provides a useful analysis of the literature on this issue by focusing on six concepts including, embodiment, the mindful body, mimesis, somatic idioms of distress, local biologies and the work of culture.²¹ The above note on embodiment is probably too individualised because it focuses on processes of internalisation. Nichter suggests a more comprehensive definition that refers to one’s lived experience of one’s body as well as one’s experience of life mediated through the body as this is influenced by its physical, psychological, social, political, economic and cultural environments. Further, I would suggest that if embodiment is to provide an integrative approach to human life, it should be formulated and phrased in ways that includes processes and aspects operated through culture. Talal Asad suggests that such construction could be realised through the concept of ensoulment “the idea that the living human body is an integrated totality having developable capacities for activity and experience unique to it, the capacities for sensing, imagining, and doing that are culturally mediated”.²²

In this ‘mindful body’²³ exist one’s sensorial, cognitive and phenomenological operations.²⁴ Most interesting is a third concept of mimesis that refers to the social and visceral correspondences that mirror each other as copies through iconic association. Through mimesis the body is inculcated by culture and is taught how to simultaneously process and memorise recurring as well as exceptional traumatic events that ultimately shape its memory or more generally its habitus.²⁵ It is at this nexus that somatisation occurs as a normal bodily “mode of experiencing personal, social, and political distress, not a more primitive or less adaptive substitution for verbal articulation”.²⁶ I agree with Nichter that mimesis is a good standpoint to observe and interpret human life holistically through work routines, unconscious desires and feelings, drugs, food habits etc.



A medical technician at work at the Sultan Qaboos University, Oman
[Http://www.omanet.om/english/oman2000/sec9/images/lab.jpg](http://www.omanet.om/english/oman2000/sec9/images/lab.jpg)
 accessed on 08.01.2009.

Bodies are inseparable from the way they are treated, sensed, named, classified and conceived in local cultures. These processes, as Nichter points out, ultimately lead to, and constitute ‘local biologies’: Specific analytical theories that assist to understand and feel the body within particular cultural contexts. It is through local biologies that we can appreciate how somatic idioms of distress, which is the fourth concept included in Nichter’s formulation, are articulated collectively in localised contexts. Strongly related to this concept are my research results on *al-dhaght* (pressure) in Cairo.²⁷ The term *al-dhaght* in Cairo originated in the disease of high blood pressure or hypertension but has taken a life of its own after it was immersed within local idioms of Cairenes to express their emotions

about having to live in large families residing in small and overpopulated neighbourhoods that proliferate in a polluted and impoverished city. I argue that *al-dhaght* is thus a somatic term of distress emblematic for a wide range of adverse life conditions that can best be felt when communicated within a group of individuals living or have lived in Cairo. The meanings of *al-dhaght* are thus results of “work of culture” unique to contemporary Cairo. It is through this work, which is the sixth concept suggested by Nichter, that *al-dhaght* is publicly accepted, manipulated and ultimately materially translated into practical steps.

The questions central to my present research are on the implications of living in and seeking help in pluralistic healthcare and cultural milieus offering several remedies to single problems or complaints. In other words, using the case of *al-dhaght* as an example, how would the body perceptions of a Cairene evolve upon prolonged use of multiple resources to tackle this complaint? My research here deals with persons living in multicultural environments; when they encounter a single problem, they may have on offer several ways to go about it. The question I pursue is both theoretical and ethnographic: Upon prolonged interaction of different therapies belonging to different cultural systems, what hybrid forms of treatment are produced and what implications these forms have for those who apply mixed therapies on their bodies. My research is not about the “work of culture” *per se* but rather, I use Nichter’s formulation delineated above on cultures and acculturation in an age of compressed times and space characterised by production of more hybrid forms of practice.

Exchange and interaction between the two clinics and other forms of therapy is evident in both diagnosis of health problems, treatment and the social organisation of the service. Both use biochemical laboratory tests for purposes of examining the patients. Lab tests are also used to follow up the impact of the therapies used. Such tests are occasionally used to manipulate patients’ feelings; chemical tests help to present the therapies provided as complimentary rather than as an alternative to western medicine. People trust Western medicine and thus practitioners of different systems of therapy tend to show that they are not essentially different from such dominant means of cure; they benefit from the authority that western medicine already enjoys while not having to follow its rules and instructions.

Methodology

The methodology most appropriate for this kind of research has to be a combination of different techniques and methods. It is an engaged methodology that seeks to include as many aspects of health care as possible. Furthermore, it includes not only objective data but subjective aspects such as feelings of uncertainty, whether on the part of the community that is the subject of research or the researcher.

I first started my visits to al-Buraimi in January 2005 and continued until very recently when I last visited al-Buraimi May 2009. My first visit was to collect some tea for some medical complaint my brother had, and who in his place of living (in Jordan) heard about al-Buraimi’s ‘ethnic clinics’. As I explained why he needed the tea, I was struck by the variety of therapies the shop-keeper offered for a single complaint. On my way back the surrounding area aroused my ethnographic curiosity. I decided to turn my visits into a research project focused on a number of shops and clinics and then conducted systematic observations and interviews in the most popular ones.²⁸

My relation with this town is not restricted to research. I am a participant who is trying to step back to reflectively present a lived reality. During this period, I gathered information on more than twenty places providing therapy and visited the seven biggest ones at least twice each. Throughout this period, I met tens of men and women but had focused discussions with ten of them

including of course the ones included in this paper. One of the key factors in my research was the relation I developed with Dr. Hisham. He is a practitioner of biochemical medicine with vast knowledge of herbs used in what he calls 'alternative medicine', which is a broad category including herbs and methods originating in different traditions. Dr. Hisham has built many connections and learned many new techniques and methods in the years he spent in al-Buraimi. As such he was an invaluable guide to further learn about the surrounding area and its medical facilities.

The systematic research lasted over three months with three to four visits every week. As a resident of this town my general relationship with the place never ceased. Since then, it is a normal part of my life here to continue visiting herb-shops as a customer which often turns me into a complete participant who needs extra-conscious reflection to extrapolate observations. Throughout all my visits for research, the primary method I used was participant observation. Meanwhile, and for purposes of uniformity, I used a brief open-ended questionnaire to collect information on all the individuals and medical facilities I met. Questionnaire is the most familiar means for research in this part of the world. As such, it was of great value for collection of brief notes upon which this paper is based. These notes were handy for collection of detailed case studies and life histories to be used for further description and analysis.

Future research however will aim at collecting detailed case studies focused on particular categories of illness.²⁹ The aim is to provide a description and analysis for further exploration and detailed investigation. Particularly, I have already prepared a research project on the epidemiological, social and cultural aspects of cancer in the UAE. The project will be carried out by two more researchers working as a multidisciplinary team combining methods and perspectives from community medicine, sociology and anthropology. The ethnographic part aims at describing narratives of seeking healthcare in greater detail including the therapies used, the practitioners consulted and the local and global institutional arrangements of support. All will be presented as strategies for coping with sickness and living with outcomes of therapy. As such, this research is to present how individual healthcare seeking processes ultimately embody local, regional and global discourses on the body that is not necessarily monolithic but diverse and changing.

Al-Buraimi's Plural Therapeutic Practices

The plural system of medicine in al-Buraimi is composed of five main components including, Western biochemical medicine, Arabic-Islamic medicine (which is partly based on Greek medicine), Ayurvedic medicine and homeopathy, in addition to Chinese medicine. These medicines are organised in separate or joint facilities and provided with many means for communication and exchange.

A. Western biochemical medicine

Al-Buraimi is now provided with several medical and health facilities modeled after the Western medical system financed by both the public and private sector. These services represent the official medical system authorised by the state of Oman. This system also provides the philosophy and rationale underlying the entire system of public health services. In al-Buraimi, biomedical services are presented as the only service worth official license from the health authorities. As such, they are the services most connected and trusted by the legal and political system and so they enjoy the highest authority among all the other services.

All the population of the region around al-Buraimi has access to these services. Nevertheless, such services fall short of people's needs due to issues familiar to those concerned with the problems of Western biomedicine including affordability, cultural appropriateness, as well the inability to cure chronic illnesses. As elsewhere in the world, such issues contribute to the continuation, development and spread of the therapeutic resources included in this paper.

As discussed above, the power of Western biomedicine has to be discussed and contextualised if it is to be properly appreciated in abstract and concrete forms. I argue that some of this power is

representational as evident in the following instrumental use of its icons. Next, there is the practical embodied aspect of therapy that may rely mainly on differing forms of cure and healing. I am concerned mostly with this latter form, for the role of anthropology is to show how different concepts and methods are embedded within the larger matrix of social life, which the next discussion tries to do.³⁰

B. Arabic Islamic therapeutic services

This system is far from isolated or immune to influences from other practices of medical care. The following illustrates its connections to other practices through one case study focusing on two professionals operating in al-Buraimi. To view this system correctly, we have to place it within a mobile culture of incoming systems of medical care and not static sets of abstract ideas. Such a view requires a dynamic approach that focuses on the practical rather than the textual or theoretical sides of the therapies concerned.

Arabic medicine is provided in a whole variety of places and in numerous ways and methods including families, friends and full-time practitioners. I am concerned with the latter form of therapeutic services, which are run by a group of shops and what may be termed as neo-traditional therapeutic facilities. These are composed of small dispensaries (two to three rooms each) providing herbal therapies and other equipments used for examination and treatment. These dispensaries are run by individuals hired by the owners who are often from among the citizens of the UAE and Oman.

These dispensaries deal with a great variety of complaints including those that can be called purely physical to problems that are variously called spiritual, psychological or mental. Most important problems are those defined by both kinds of terms or what physicians refer to as 'psychosomatic problems'. I think these problems are the main reason underlying the continuance of this form of health care because many of these complaints are defined and well-diagnosed, but nevertheless left uncured by biochemical medicine. These thoughts however need further investigations and detailed case studies for further substantiation. The project on cancer is expected to produce health experiences of individuals using multiple therapies while belonging to particular traditions.

A salient feature of therapies provided by these practitioners is that they are products of the local traditions mixed, successfully as it seems, with traditions imported from other countries in the Arab region and the rest of the world. The mixing occurs spontaneously between the people working there who come from different national backgrounds including Egypt, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Pakistan, Afghanistan, India and China. The result is a great opportunity to form new composite cultural forms, including medical therapies, based on this rich ground of multicultural experiences.

These processes of exchange are illustrated by the following cases of Dr. Hisham, Shaikh Ma'moon and an epileptic patient called Marwan.³¹ I met Dr. Hisham at his newly furnished, shiny shop (or therapeutic centre for alternative medicine as the big new sign above the front door declares) located on the main road of Buraimi. Dr. Hisham is in his early forties, originally from Palestine but has lived part of his life in Jordan and graduated from a former republic of the Soviet Union. Dr. Hisham's enthusiasm and hospitality allowed me to interview him at great length.

Upon obtaining his degree, Dr. Hisham searched for a job in his own town of residence in Jordan. But he was not satisfied with the payment or methods of evaluating his credentials. So he decided to move to this part of the world to look for a better job. Dr. Hisham accepted the job because as a physician he "always had an interest in herbal medicine and believed that all medicines are ultimately based on the same principles." According to him, he was hired to work at this clinic because of his modern knowledge in the "physiology of the human body."

Next to modern science, Dr. Hisham could assist Shaikh Ma'moon in making his shop "look like real doctors' clinics, or modern shops with medicines that are packaged in safe and glittery ways." Such representation has a tremendous effect on people's acceptance of Dr. Hisham's medicines that combine traditional therapies and modern means of curing. As an example which

sheds more light on this, Dr. Hisham mentioned the method of *hijama* or “cupping”. Traditionally this technique has been used in this area for centuries. With the advent of modern therapies the use of *hijama* has decreased. Now Dr. Hisham uses a plastic, pre-packaged and sterilised syringe-like instrument to do this technique. According to him, this instrument has enhanced people’s trust in this therapy because it included the form of the highly regarded modern medicine.

The context in which Dr. Hisham operates helps to understand the plural character of the medical resources in this area. This context could be elaborated through my conversations with Sheikh Ma’moon, who owns the clinic run by Dr. Hisham. Sheikh Ma’moon, like many people in this area, profess various kinds of indigenous medical practices. Further he owns several clinics of what he collectively calls “natural therapies” (*iyadat tib tabi’i*), as he calls his dispensaries distributed throughout al-Ain, Dubai, Abu Dhabi and Jeddah in Saudi Arabia. This fifty-three year old man with a religious education has an extensive knowledge in the herbs of the area. Furthermore, he has firm belief in the healing powers of the Quran. Still, “the Shaikh has no idea on how parts of the body work, and how different herbs affect these parts”. Here comes Dr. Hisham’s role who says: “I tell the patients how exactly different therapies work in a scientific way.” Shaikh Ma’moon is in complete agreement with Dr. Hisham’s ideas. I met the Shaikh only once but that was enough to sense his strength and clarity about what he wants; he aims at combining modern knowledge of physiology with traditional Islamic medicine.

In addition to his technical knowledge, Shaikh Ma’moon is somewhat of an activist. He does all in his power to garner support from all the people who benefit from clinics, especially those who occupy powerful positions in the government or belonging to local tribes with significant influence on public opinion. Such opinion has tremendous potential impact on preserving traditional medicine in this society that has just been introduced to modern ways of living and thus may be privileged to further reflect upon problems of medicine.

Shaikh Ma’moon’s case arouses a certain interest and needs further examination in later stages of my research. What concerns this paper however is the fact that this therapist-activist brings together the four kinds of medicine included in this paper. He is originally from Yemen where he received his traditional religious education within which he acquired his knowledge about Islamic or ‘Prophetic’ medicine. Later in his life he traveled to India in search for further knowledge in medicine. There he acquainted himself with homeopathy and Ayurvedic medicine. Then he returned to Yemen and finally decided to go up to the United Arab Emirates. He invested in his medical skills. He hired people trained in the four systems mentioned above.

In conclusion Dr. Hisham and Shaikh Ma’moon represent one important channel for communication between different medical systems. Dr. Hisham is ultimately embedded in a larger matrix of knowledge and professional relations that is far from homogenous or uniform. He himself acknowledges that since his arrival he acquired many techniques and learned how to synthesise new *khaltaat* (concoctions or mixes) that combine different medicines from Arabic Islamic to Ayurvedic to Chinese medicine.

C. Chinese Medicine

This section illustrates a recent arrival of a group of therapists. I aim at illustrating that their interaction with the local population is more limited than the above two systems. Furthermore, my initial conclusion is that Chinese medicine in this area seems rather closed to outside effects except those coming from Western biomedicine. For example, Chinese therapists liberally use Western instruments for diagnosis. In place of interaction patterns such as those noted in the case of the above instances, the Chinese clinics themselves constitute a complex and well-connected network of therapeutic dispensaries. This independence, I would suggest, is explained by the distinctive theories underlying this therapeutic system which differ markedly from those of biomedicine. This idea however is tentative and needs further research in the upcoming project mentioned earlier.

Chinese clinics provide several services including acupuncture, herbal medicine and

therapeutic massage. They share one pattern: Each is housed in a simply and cheaply furnished apartment composed of several rooms to receive patients, run examinations and provide therapies. The clinic is run by a group of Chinese practitioners brought from China by local sponsors from the citizens of Oman and the UAE. Most of the practitioners are women.

These clinics started in the early nineteen nineties and has continued to increase in number ever since. Now, they provide many services including acupuncture for a great host of bone and muscle pains, pains resulting from surgical operations in addition of course to herbal therapies for indigestion, headache, skin problems and many others. It is too early to generalise or put a list of the problems treated by these clinics. It is sufficient to indicate ways of interaction between Chinese medicine and other systems of therapy.

The clients are almost totally non-Chinese. The Chinese community in al-Buraimi and al-Ain is too small to support them, as an administrator of a major clinic confirms. This woman who speaks Arabic, English and Mandarin, adds, “All people come to us for a variety of purposes and ends, they believe that Chinese therapies are complementary to all other ways of curing. They also feel that it gives relief for chronic diseases and pains left uncured by other kinds of medicine”. An example of these diseases is the treatment of haemorrhoids, which according to the same worker, has been the initial success that contributed to the good reputation Chinese clinics now enjoy.

D. Homeopathy and Ayurvedic medicine

I surveyed these kinds of medicine, which form one therapeutic ‘tradition’ in our context, by visiting two of the clinics providing it. It is based mainly on homeopathic medicine and Ayurvedic medicine. They provide therapies for patients complaining from joint pains, respiratory problems, rheumatoid, haemorrhoid and a variety of problems of reproduction and sexual life of men and women.

Both clinics are linked to other medical resources through professional and social connections. One of them is located in a bigger centre that includes one Chinese clinic, next to two dispensaries providing biochemical therapy including a general practitioner and an ophthalmologist. Exchange and interaction between the two clinics and other forms of therapy is evident in both diagnosis of health problems, treatment and the social organisation of the service. Both use biochemical laboratory tests for purposes of examining the patients. Lab tests are also used to follow up the impact of the therapies used. Such tests are occasionally used to manipulate patients’ feelings; chemical tests help to present the therapies provided as complimentary rather than as an alternative to western medicine. People trust Western medicine and thus practitioners of different systems of therapy tend to show that they are not essentially different from such dominant means of cure; they benefit from the authority that western medicine already enjoys while not having to follow its rules and instructions.

VI. Health Experiences

Following are excerpts from my field notes on persons I met in al-Buraimi searching for remedies for their chronic or brief episodes of illness. I have to note here that these experiences do not cover all the resources mentioned above. Nevertheless, they provide sufficient material to discuss the central theme of changing body perceptions upon using several therapies in a medically plural environment.

A. Lula

Lula is forty-six years old Western expatriate female English teacher who has been living and working in al-Ain for the last seven years. Last year she underwent hysterectomy in a prestigious and advanced foreign hospital in Dubai. Recently she experienced what she calls ‘typical menopausal problems’: Hot flushes, mood changes and pains in the knees, feet and hands. Lula has faith in Western biomedicine but cites many limits to its capabilities.

With regard to her own case however, Lula was not particularly thrilled by the hormonal treatment prescribed by her physicians to overcome her dispensary-operation symptoms. She openly

refused to use the prescribed medicine. Her refusal was based on aesthetic and ethical grounds and supported by a strong sense of incompatibility between humans and animal instincts.

Lula has similar criticisms about some practices of Chinese practitioners. Interestingly, Lula has high regard for the treatment she received at the Chinese clinics because it was all natural but, more importantly, derived from plants and not animals. She comments on the medicines prescribed in one clinic in al-Buraimi: “When I asked for explanation about the ingredients, I was assured that it was all natural and could not harm even in mistaken doses.”

Lula has been to many countries. In her narrative she kept contrasting her visits to Chinese clinics to her experience in Western medical dispensaries back home. She views the way she was treated by the Chinese practitioners as less formal and less private than the Western practitioners. In addition, she is aware that in Chinese medicine the body is conceptualised differently from Western medicine. Nevertheless, such difference does not sound as total or exclusive because her treatment involves using a mix of instruments from Chinese and biochemical medicine.

Tentatively, we could conclude that Lula’s case may represent a specific kind of help-seekers who travel between systems and thus are developing body perceptions that have different roots. I would suggest that such processes would produce ever-new forms of perceptions characterised by experimentation, fluidity and change.

B. Jawaher

The following case brings into focus one health complaint that has been treated repeatedly but to little avail. Jawaher is a help-seeker who sounds like an experimenter who developed a strong sense of both curiosity, scepticism and determination to find a cure; the therapies she tried and the range of ideas she entertains are quite impressive; from chemical creams to herbal medicine, to meditation and spiritual means of healing and coping to thinking about acupuncture, the health experience present a complex string of interlinked causes and effects. In addition, the therapeutic resources the person has access to opens ways for these practices to be in continuous motion and change. Furthermore, this change involves views of the body rooted in different medical traditions including biomedicine, herbal Arabic/Islamic medicine and Chinese medicine. I argue that these cases bring into focus a significant aspect of life in the contemporary globalised society: Acculturation and change through somatisation.

Jawaher is in her early thirties, married for the last five years and a mother of two: A three year old son and a one year old daughter. Prior to her marriage, she was employed for three years as a primary school teacher in Syria where she and her husband were born, raised and educated. She has a master’s degree in primary education. Her husband has a BA in chemistry. When she married, she had to quit her low-paid job to relocate and live with her husband who won a contract to work for a well-financed oil company in this prosperous region. A housewife and mother of two, Jawaher thinks that it feels like a full time job; the entire family and household are her responsibility because her husband is busy at work until early evening six days a week.

I first met Jawaher in Dr. Hisham’s clinic with a female friend and neighbour of hers. The friend came to keep Jawaher company, when the latter came to look for some “herb, soap, cream or whatsoever that may help recover the skin of my hands.” As I took a quick look at the hands I could see a very rough surface with tiny bloody cracks with bloody tips. Jawaher swiftly took her hands back into the long sleeves of her *‘abaaya* (black gown used by women on top of their regular clothes) and explained: “It started almost ten years ago, around the time when my father died after struggling with a disease in the nerves. Back then, I did not see doctors for the problem. I had to just listen to my mother who prepared some herbs and mixed them with henna. My hands recovered in a few days but few weeks later as I started to help with the housework and use chemicals necessary for that, my hands started to itch so badly and then became so rough and started to crack like this.”

Dr. Hisham, who sees his visitors from behind a well-polished wooden desk in a newly polished room overlooking the main road of al-Buraimi with a wide window, intervened to ask his

client a few questions while looking at the hands. Then he walked into the next room. The noise of the blender mix he uses to grind herbs followed shortly. In this small room Dr. Hisham has tens of assorted herbs, liquids, powders and other things that he gathered from different places he visits including his neighbouring clinics and shops.

"How often does this happen?" I asked. "It comes and goes, I hardly know. Whenever I don't take good care of them, my hands go really bad" Jawaher complains. "Good care? What do you mean?" I inquire. "I use gloves to clean dishes, then I put lots of Vaseline immediately after that. Before I go to sleep I put loads of cream I collected from all over the place. I also know that the problem of my hand have to do with my state of mind (*hala nafsiyaa*); if I am tired, worried, sad, or tense my hands deteriorate. It is important sometimes to pray and read the Holy Quran for me to relax and feel better. I know through my whole upbringing back home that prayers bring peace of mind."

Jawaher is not very sure but as I ask her whether she thinks giving birth and nursing may have contributed to the problem of her hands, she waits before answering: "You never really know for sure. The other time we (she and her husband) went to Dubai and visited a big clinic which had medicines in all colours and shapes: Chemicals, Chinese, etc. There, they advised that the problem may be linked to nursing. At the end however, they gave me creams that worked for a while but the problem came back." Jawaher says she wishes to have asked for Chinese medicine because they may be very different: "My husband told me the Chinese don't use chemicals but food medicines that help one to relax. They also take into account one's mind and feelings. That could make a big difference."

Salem

This case presents simultaneous use of different therapies associated with a strong sense of uncertainty about the efficacy of each single therapeutic system. Despite the ambiguity that this case presents, much of the ideas evoked for the significance of holistic approaches not simply to physical complaints but for human life as an integrated totality. Interesting in this case is the fact that in cases of chronic illness, different and at times seemingly contradictory explanations may coexist with no determinate result to the benefit of any of them. Furthermore, issues of hierarchy and dominance may not apply at the level of practical use of therapies.

Salem is a man in his early fifties, originally from a small town in Jordan who often travels to this country to visit his sister who has been here with her husband and five children for the last twenty five years. He has one teenage daughter from a marriage that ended eleven years ago. Since then, Salem has been living as a divorcee as he was unable to find a partner. I met Salem several times in al-Buraimi during this two-month stay. He was very cooperative and loved to talk.

As I met him at a Chinese clinic Salem looked open for chats especially about the status of his health. In the small waiting room and before I invited him to talk he expected me to know about the place and whether he could benefit from Chinese therapies. I answered with a question about what he thought. "I think it can be very useful. The Chinese must be very smart. They have very old therapies, acupuncture, herbs and others... these things are very old, they must have been successful", he reported but with an apparent sense of doubt; "I don't really know... I tried many things but with little success... it wouldn't hurt to try acupuncture." As I explained that the place was for massage rather than acupuncture, Salem said he was not interested and wanted to leave.

As we walked out into the daylight he looked well-dressed. He is educated and holds a B.A. in accounting which he obtained at The Arab University in Beirut thirty years ago. During the Lebanese Civil War, the university had to relocate courses and exams to Cairo and Amman: "There, I have learnt a lot; I could mingle with and benefit from contact with open-minded people who were also well-informed about modern life." Since his graduation in the nineteen eighties, he worked for the Government and travelled in official trips to Europe where he has "learnt a great deal." Salem says he has read many books in the initial years of college. Later, "I got bored of long books, because

one can get the same thing from soap operas (*musalsalaat*) and other TV programmes.” This is how Salem got to learn about Chinese medicine: “It is through the TV, friends and now just from touring around and noticing these signs of these clinics. When you have a problem you keep looking for a solution for it, right?” Salem asks but this time without waiting for a response.

Salem has been suffering from a general state of distress that he could not give one single label. It is a kind of general state of discomfort: “I often feel very tired, even when I get up in the morning. After I eat my meals I feel extremely down, which sometimes lasts for hours.” He says he suffered from constipation for a long time and for years he could not recover despite all the kinds of “regular chemical drugs they sell in shops, herbs and medicinal food I used for long.” Some years ago Salem says he became unable to sleep regularly. Back then he says he experienced “very fast pulse which was so scary, I was taken by friends and brothers many times to emergency rooms feeling I was about to pass out. After many times doctors decided I have a problem in the pace-maker or the heart arteries, I am not sure. They placed something called “*shabaka*” (literally a network) there and since then I felt ok.”

“Why is this happening to you?” I asked him with a sense of astonishment. Salem answered with even more uncertainty. He sounded like he was resisting placing his general problem under one single label. “You really cannot know for sure. Doctors say it is a kind of hereditary disease of the heart, which makes the whole body feel bad. Those doing popular medicine (*attib asha'bi*) say I have a problem in the belly called *colon asabi*, some sort of inflammation. But I don't buy all this. Humans are a bunch of emotions and feelings (*kutlat masha'ir*). When these get upset or damaged there is no way back. I don't know, I may be wrong, it may be hereditary and I am ultimately doomed to this. It may be misfortune (*naseeb*), or due to something my ex-wife made me eat. You never know.”

Later, I gathered that Salem went to visit Dr. Hisham, whom I recommended. There, he was given some herb-based pills prepared by Dr. Hisham who once told me “they contained things from all over the world.” Fortunately, I could remain in touch with Salem through email. Weeks after his departure, he responded to my queries about his health saying that the pills worked immediately and made a big difference: “My stomach now feels much better, but I still feel very tired (*ta'baan jiddan*).”

D. Haj Kareem

Medicines are integral parts of what people use and eat not only to recover from illness but also to maintain good health and prevent disease. This is similar to what Nichter calls ‘medicinal foods’³² and refers to a complex host of rules that are habitually followed by inhabitants of this area. This kind of practice presents local cultures in a position incomparable to single systems of medical care. The former is concerned not with health *per se*, but with the far more comprehensive notion of ‘well-being’, including preventative care. Culture of course is not evenly distributed and varies with the amount of exposure and training, conscious and unconscious individuals receive through education or mimesis, to use the notion discussed above.

Shaikh Ma'moon described above, represents this aspect of culture. He has professed medical care and turned it into a purchasable service. There are men and women who have not done so. But they possess a great deal of knowledge on how to maintain health and are open to acquire even more in this plural and changing arena. Haj Kareem who is a fifty-three years old man is a good example: He lives with a family of a wife and five children and works here as a shopkeeper that sells carpets and various kinds of new furniture. He is originally from Yemen but has travelled to Saudi Arabia, UAE and Oman. Throughout, Haj Kareem gathered knowledge not only about traditional culture of healthcare in Arabia, but also about old and recent therapies that arrived with immigrant labourers from China, India, Europe and Africa.

I met him at a Chinese clinic when he was waiting to have acupuncture. A brief interview shows that he has a good grasp of the uses of modern surgery, Arabic medicine and Chinese

medicine. He benefitted from them all. Last year Haj Kareem had a serious road accident that left him with major injury in the backbone. He underwent successful surgeries and could walk and live normally: “Yes, I can walk, sit and sleep... I am all right. But my back at times hurts so badly. The pain is all over.” “What do you do for it”, I enquired. Many things, Haj Kareem offered: “I go for *hijama* (blood cupping) which helps me for few months. They take the bad blood out. It is good and was used and recommended by the Prophet.” “Why the Chinese then”, I asked. Haj Kareem thinks acupuncture “makes the nerves work better.” Next to these professional techniques Haj Kareem offered that he takes several local herbs and recipes that keep him “light, and happy,” as he phrases it.

VII. Conclusion and further questions

So far I presented views and data on al-Buraimi as a medically plural community bestowed with several facilities providing therapies rooted in different traditions. The following preliminary conclusions can be drawn. First, al-Buraimi is not necessarily a pluralistic medical community since it does not explicitly recognise different medical resources. The relationship between different medical resources is hierarchical with Western biomedicine enjoying a dominant position. But this is true mainly about representational power. In practice, these relations may vary especially with issue of embodiment and specific roles played by specific medicines. As such, exchange between different medical resources is evident and could provide ways to study cultural change through focusing on medical care and body experience. Second, the exchange between modern medicine and Arabic medicine occurs through combining modern knowledge of physiology to traditional knowledge of herbs and spiritual healing. Fourth, Chinese medicine shows signs of being closed to exchange to other medicinal practices, except Western biomedicine. Fifth, health narratives could provide powerful ways to show how experiences with different medical resources are reworked into the consciousness of the patients. Finally, the study of medical pluralism in such a rapidly changing context could provide ways that illustrate cultural change occurring in globalised societies at large. Further research on body perceptions in globalised contexts should take into consideration that shifting and multiple realities are in continuous processes of making and remaking. The construction of these realities requires new methodologies that pursue the formation of these realities not only in terms provided by the worldview of the subjects involved but in those terms produced via complex processes of interaction between different and juxtaposed cultures.

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3 Judith Farquhar and Margaret Lock, “Introduction”, in Judith Farquhar and Margaret Lock (eds.), *Beyond the Body Proper: Reading the Anthropology of Material Life*, Duke University Press, Durham, 2007.

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8 Information on Oman are readily accessible on website of the government include <http://www.omanet.om/english/regions/buraimi.asp?cat=reg> and <http://www.mofa.gov.om/mofanew/index.asp?id=31>

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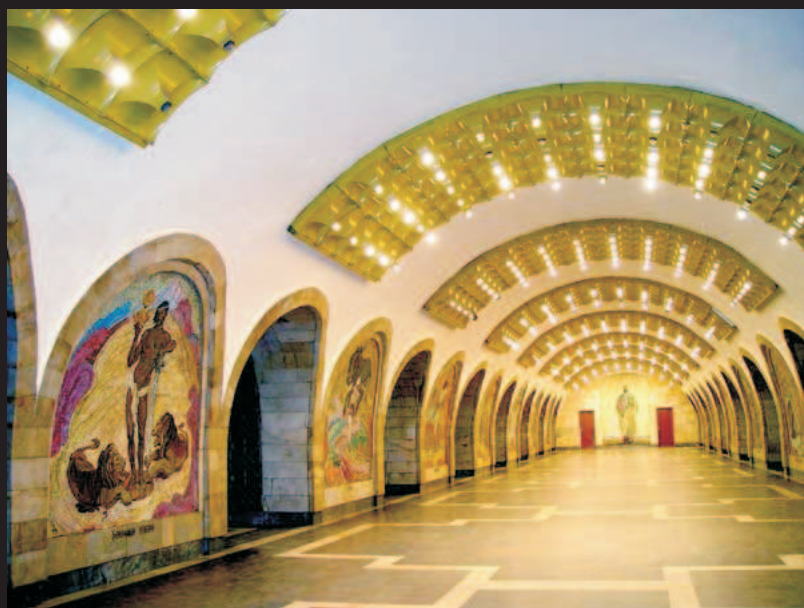
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- 18** Eddie Smith, *The Problem of Perception*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2002, p. 1.
- 19** Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 73.
- 20** Lee F. Monaghan, "Corporeal Indeterminacy: The Value of Embodied Interpretive Sociology", in Dennis Waskul and Philip Vannini (Eds.), *Body/Embodiment: Symbolic Interaction and the Sociology of the Body*, Ashgate Publishing Limited, Aldershot, Hampshire, 2006, p. 126.
- 21** Nichter, "Coming to Our Senses".
- 22** Asad, *Formations of the Secular*, p. 89.
- 23** Hughes Scheper, Nancy and Margaret Lock, "The Mindful Body: A Prolegomenon to Future Work in Medical Anthropology", *Medical Anthropology Quarterly*, N. S. 1, 1, 1987, pp. 6-41.
- 24** Nichter, "Coming to Our Senses", pp. 164-165.
- 25** Pierre Bourdieu, *Practical Reason: On the theory of Action*, Stanford University Press, California, 1998, pp. 6-8.
- 26** Nichter, "Coming to Our Senses", p. 165.
- 27** Mohammed Tabishat, "Al-daght: Pressures of Modern Life in Cairo", in Cynthia Nelson and Shahnaz Rouse (eds.), *Situating Globalization: Views from Egypt*, Transcript, Bielefeld, 2000.
- 28** Dr. Su'ad Zayed joined this project shortly after the initial period. She greatly helped in building rapport with the interviewees not the least because she belongs to the community that was the subject of research, coupled with her long experience in sociological research. Due to logistical issues Dr. Zayed and I decided to write separately for the present. We plan to jointly write on this research later on.
- 29** For an interesting distinction between concepts of disease, illness and sickness see Young, "The Anthropology of Illness and Sickness".
- 30** For a discussion on these lines, see Asad, *Formations of the Secular*.
- 31** All people included in this paper are given pseudonyms for purposes of protecting the rights of the research subject.
- 32** Nichter, "Coming to Our Senses".



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Thinking from the South: Brazilian Social Thought and the Case of Euclides da Cunha

The article presents the main ideas of Euclides da Cunha (1866-1909), a famous Brazilian intellectual from the beginning of the twentieth-century. Da Cunha was one of the first writers to provide a proto-sociological account of subaltern people in Brazil. The aim of the article is to review his contributions in the light of contemporary discussions concerning postcolonialism and decolonisation.



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On 15 August 1909, Euclides da Cunha, the famous Brazilian writer, was shot dead by his wife's lover at the age of forty-three. He was one of the main figures of Brazilian intellectual life, mostly because of his book *Os Sertões* (*The Backlands*).¹ First published in December 1902, its first edition was sold out by February 1903. This was a major success in a largely illiterate country. In the wake of such an impressive reception, Da Cunha was elected in 1903 to a chair in *Academia Brasileira de Letras* (Brazilian National Academy), one of the standard-bearers of the country's literary establishment.

A hundred years after Da Cunha's death, Brazil celebrated "Euclides da Cunha National Year", proving that not only did his writings survive, but became the core of a national tradition. Now, one can say that he was not just a Brazilian writer, but also a peripheral intellectual coping with the problems of nation-building in a postcolonial society. As many other thinkers at the margins of the "civilised" world at the beginning of the twentieth century, Da Cunha was trying to articulate a nationalist agenda in terms of a scientific discourse produced in Europe.

After *Os Sertões*, Rio Branco Baron, the then Brazilian foreign minister, asked Da Cunha's help in a diplomatic mission in the Amazon region concerning a frontier dispute with Peru. From December 1904 until 1905, he explored rivers and remote areas along the countries' borders. Upon his return to Rio he prepared two more texts. *Contrastes e Confrontos* (Contrasts and Confrontations) and *Peru versus Bolivia*, which were released in 1907 and were further evidence of Da Cunha's baroque style and his use of scientific theories about geography, weather and races. The tragedy of 1909 that followed soon after thus put an untimely stop to a remarkable career.

A hundred years after Da Cunha's death, Brazil celebrated "Euclides da Cunha National Year", proving that not only did his writings survive, but became the core of a national tradition. Now, one can say that he was not just a Brazilian writer, but also a peripheral intellectual coping with the problems of nation-building in a postcolonial society. As many other thinkers at the margins of the "civilised" world at the beginning of the twentieth-century, Da Cunha was trying to articulate a nationalist agenda in terms of a scientific discourse produced in Europe. The aim of this article is to present an analysis of Da Cunha's ideas in a broader theoretical framework concerning the problems of nationhood in postcolonial thought and territoriality in peripheral areas. I draw on works by Partha Chatterjee, Walter Mignolo and Fernando Coronil in order to present a Southern perspective concerning these subjects.²

Chatterjee shows in his work how concepts and practices related to the nation-building process in India were closely linked to European political theory. This resulted in a nationalist ideology that denied a proper place for subaltern forms of political expression. I believe this perspective is helpful in understanding Da Cunha's ambivalent statements concerning the people of the Brazilian backlands. Mignolo and Coronil, in turn, discuss modernity and colonialism in order to demonstrate how European epistemology is universalised and disembodied. Moreover, both authors

argue that spatiality is crucial to a de-colonial critique of modernity and Occidentalism³ because it stresses alternative cognitive performances. I draw on their work to review Da Cunha's statements concerning the geography of the hinterland. These statements could work for a contemporary agenda in social theory based on a critique of false universalism. I elaborate this issue further in the final section of the text.

Although I draw on the works of Chatterjee, Mignolo and Coronil I do not agree with every aspect of their theories. My goal is to show how contemporary discussions could be enriched by an intellectual history from the Global South. I am thus concerned with concept formation and the need for a perspective about modernity that addresses its problems from the periphery.

The Backlands and the search for nationality

Os Sertões (The Backlands) puzzled Brazilian audiences when it was published in 1902. The book drew heavily on positivistic theories that were very popular in mid-nineteenth-century Europe, but it was written in a very baroque style. Da Cunha employed very long paragraphs and confusing sentences that altered the regular order of speech. The structure of the book translated Taine's model⁴ of race, milieu and moment in a threefold structure: Land, Man and Struggle. But which struggle was Da Cunha was writing about?

For many people at that time, the War of Canudos seemed a battle between "civilisation" and republicanism against barbarian monarchists. Critical statements by Conselheiro about the "evilness" of the recent established Republican system reinforced the fear that the struggle was conducted by disloyal monarchists. Da Cunha was one of these republicans. He was educated as a military engineer in the Military School in Rio de Janeiro during the last days of Empire and learned much about Comtean positivism and republicanism there. His first article about Canudos was called "Our Vendée", a strong evidence of his intellectual standpoint. However, the voyage to the backlands shocked him. The cruelty of the Republican army and the strong convictions held by the *sertanejos* lead him to question the opposition between civilisation and barbarism, although he did not change all his views on this subject. *Os Sertões* was the outcome of this confused mix of feelings.

In 1897, Da Cunha was sent by Júlio de Mesquita, editor of *O Estado de São Paulo* (a famous Brazilian newspaper) to an arid region in the heart of the state of Bahia. In a location known as Canudos, a group of *sertanejos* (people who lived in the backlands of the North-East region) was fighting against the Republican army under the leadership of a religious leader named Antônio Conselheiro.⁵ The struggle was called War of Canudos and began in 1896, drawing great attention from intellectuals, politicians and military men. *Sertanejos* assembled apocalyptic visions and criticism of some Republican decrees (such as civil marriage). They soon began to gather around Conselheiro in a valley where a religious community was being organised. Landlords feared this peasant mobilisation that seemed to disorganise the traditional discipline of rural workforce. Soon the police was called to put down the rebellion.

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In the first part of the book, Da Cunha⁹ depicted the nature of the backlands, putting together geographical theories with impressionistic statements about soil and plants. His aim was not just to present the setting but to explore the relations between nature’s configuration and *sertanejo* habits and way of life. This section is still a matter of research for contemporary interpreters who argue about the evaluation of the text. Is it a scientific work or a literary book? Recent studies have pointed out that Da Cunha used geological data freely, assembling theories and concepts that helped him to express the symbolic quality of the space.¹⁰ Thus his representation of the region’s geography was quite inaccurate,¹¹ mostly because of the romantic tone of his writing.

The section about nature is a fine example of the curious intellectual background of Da Cunha. His positivist training is easily detected in passages of the text where he quotes geography books and geological data and writes down statements about the role of land in the explanation of human behaviour. But his search for a representation of the backlands as an expressive totality full of meaning lead him to a more literary tone, typical of romantic novels that depicted nature as a character in the plot. This combination is also seen in the section concerning the men of the backlands.



Euclides Da Cunha

Euclides Da Cunha:
http://www.clicrbs.com.br/blog/fotos/211131post_foto.jpg
 accessed on 08-01-2010.

Da Cunha drew on evolutionist racial theories and portrayed the *sertanejos* as ambivalent characters who combined heroic qualities such as courage and bravery with rude personalities. The



Canudos Map

<http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/8/81/Canudos-map.jpg>, accessed 08.01.2010.

famous expression used by Da Cunha to characterise people in the backlands is much known to his readers: *Hercules-Quasimodo*. This oxymoron is a common feature of Da Cunha's style to praise the *sertanejos* as epic figures. At the same time he outlined them as backward. The backwardness of these people was supposedly produced by the isolation of the backlands, an area that looked like a desert far away from the coast. Da Cunha saw the region and its inhabitants as a civilisational unit "frozen in time", a geographical setting that was authentic due to its distance from the "European" frontier of the Brazilian coast. This twofold perspective works in Da Cunha's texts as a metaphor for a more "authentic Brazil"— the isolated backlands that was fighting against a "civilised" one, located in cities like Rio de Janeiro.¹²

But how did the author assess this struggle? Da Cunha drew on scientific theories about race and nature that looked down on *sertanejos*. These theories depicted this group as backward figures that were destined to disappear in the civilising process. His vision was much influenced by his readings on the Polish sociologist Glumpowicz and his thesis about "war of races". In the preliminary note that opens the book, Da Cunha states that civilisation would develop in the backlands pushed by the defeat of weak races by the strong ones, a law of History established by Glumpowicz, whom he regarded as "greater than Hobbes".¹³ But Da Cunha's search for a true nationality also led him to evaluate the backlands as the geographical source of a more authentic Brazil. In a famous passage, he called the *sertanejos* "the rock of nationality". These opposing ideas resulted in the third and final section of the book, where he composed a tragic narrative dedicated to analyse the battles in the War of Canudos.¹⁴

In this final section, the *sertanejos* were represented as brave warriors fighting an army that spoke in the name of civilisation but, in reality, were guilty of carrying out massacres. Barbarism and civilisation are constantly interplayed in the final parts of the text and Da Cunha shows more empathy for backland people in these extracts. The text reaches its climax with the final battle that

destroys the community of Canudos on 5 October 1897. In a moving, though cryptic statement, Da Cunha says “Canudos did not surrender”.¹⁵

According to Bertold Zilly, this tragic epic works as an aesthetic solution for Da Cunha, who could not otherwise resolve the tension that characterised his approach to the backlands.¹⁶ Canudos are constructed at the same time as a great utopia, an egalitarian community of the poor, and a historical impossibility, a place that did not fit into Da Cunha’s theories. Costa Lima goes further and argues that the book suffered from a huge paradox: Da Cunha employed evolutionistic theories that stated the necessary disappearing of “backward people”.¹⁷ At the same time he saw the *sertanejos* as authentic expressions of Brazilian identity. The tension is left unresolved here, but Da Cunha’s later texts provide some clues into what that solution could have been to the author.

Map of the Amazon



<http://www.rain-tree.com/graphics/map2.jpg>, accessed on 08.01.2010.

Paradise Lost

Da Cunha intended to write an entire book on the Amazon region. It was to be called “Paradise Lost”, an obvious reference to John Milton. But his death in 1909 stopped him and left us with an unfinished work. And what can one infer from the analysis of the unfinished text?

It is possible to say that Da Cunha’s perspective changed. In *Os Sertões* there was a permanent tension between the unique nature of the backlands and the scientific discourse employed to analyse it. Costa Lima states that this tension culminated in a literary style in which poetic expression conflicted with theoretical discourse. Thus the text was split into a foreground written in a scientific fashion and a poetic, metaphor-ridden background, wherein the author addresses the novelty of the backlands. But in his text on the Amazon, Da Cunha realised that the extreme nature of the gigantic forest did not fit into any textbook categories. The Amazon was a forever changing territory where rivers altered routes and the whole space seemed absolutely unpredictable. He felt as if he was gazing at a land which was not finished yet, one that was in a process of labour.

Da Cunha wrote dozens of pages trying to describe a nature that seemed too large and varied to be depicted by the positivistic discourse he employed in his previous book. The Amazon was not a land frozen in time, as were the north-eastern backlands he described earlier. It was more like a frontier zone distinguished by market forces that transformed latex into a global commodity. People who colonised the Amazon were not isolated *sertanejos*, but men and women from different parts of Brazil and the world. Da Cunha wrote about capitalist exploitation in the forest, portraying the terrible conditions that surrounded the rubber business.¹⁸

How did he see subalterns in the Amazon? He described them as very religious and silent people who worked in extreme conditions and behaved like characters from Dostoyevsky novels. At the same time, he saw them as adventurers who managed to settle down and engage in a stable relation with land. Contrary to the *caucheiros* Peruvian workers who extracted the *caucho*, the Brazilians in the Amazon were like pioneers, facing the jungle and conquering the “Green Hell”. Da Cunha drew on neo-Darwinist theories about the weather and “natural selection”, arguing that only the strongest men could survive in the forest.

The Amazon was for him like a new chapter in civilisation. Da Cunha praised the subaltern efforts in the colonisation of Acre, a state in the south-western Amazon, and compared it to other colonial processes in the tropics. He believed that Europeans usually recreated their own norms and rules in the tropics. In the case of the Amazon, however, the somewhat anarchic colonisation process was distinguished by the power of invention. People were not emulating norms and cultural codes from European countries. Instead they were adapting their behaviour in order to create a new kind of social order.

As one can see, Da Cunha’s writings on the Amazon are not well read, and could be seen as providing clues to understand his intellectual development. In the next section I investigate Da Cunha’s vision in a broader theoretical perspective.

Thinking from the periphery

In this section, I briefly address two main issues: The relation between nationalism and the subaltern in peripheral countries and the relevance of space in decolonisation debates.

Nationalism was a major political and intellectual force in postcolonial countries during the twentieth century. Partha Chatterjee has convincingly argued that political elites in these countries drew heavily on the language of nation and civil society in order to impose a modern order. Thus subaltern forms of political expression were set aside from the legitimate definition of modernity.¹⁹

Da Cunha’s ambivalent approach to the relation between *sertanejos* and the civilising process is a good example of the problem detected by Chatterjee. Da Cunha drew on racial theories that held no place for subaltern peoples in peripheral areas. He was also disturbed by the lack of cultural homogeneity in Brazil, which seemed to threaten national unity. Da Cunha depicted the backlands as a unique geography that seemed to represent a past experience. In doing so, he treated difference as

an obstacle for nationalism and this assumption resulted in a distorted view of the *sertanejos*. At the same time, Da Cunha believed that *sertanejos* represented authenticity.

This ambivalent approach was the outcome of a cognitive performance that would become common to other writers in the future. In the 1910s and 1920s, Brazilian intellectuals wrote and spoke extensively of “embracing the backlands” in the modernisation process. These intellectuals perceived the subaltern as lacking cultural skills demanded by modernity. Thus nationality was perceived as the result of a state-conducted action based on education and public policies.²⁰

Da Cunha was the precursor of this nationalist generation. On the one hand, he was searching for a national essence that could not be provided by urban and Europeanised Brazil. On the other hand, his scientific discourse depicted the north-eastern hinterland as a barbarian region. He also outlined *sertanejos* as a degenerate race who did not fit into evolutionary process. Could Da Cunha get rid of this colonial perspective? I believe that his writings about the Amazon offer a possible answer. One must analyse the language of space employed by Da Cunha and its possible connections with contemporary de-colonial perspectives.

The colonisation of space by time is a feature of modernity. In his book on the Renaissance, Walter Mignolo states that colonialism and early modernity were closely linked. Mignolo claims that the epistemology of European modernity subsumed the co-existence of different perspectives and modes of classifying the world.²¹ This epistemology translated spatial differences into temporal differences, a theoretical move that Mignolo conceptualises as “the denial of coevalness”.²² The rationalisation of colonial space left no room for local histories and turned these territories into peripheries in a global order. One could say that Da Cunha framed the backlands exactly in this fashion. His writings depicted these places as remains of an ancient Brazilian time which had no place in modern times. But the language of space is dubious and it can also serve as an intellectual tool for de-colonisation.

Mignolo also states that alternative territorialities did not vanish with colonial conquest. Negotiations and conflicts between European and Amerindians resulted in the establishment of a space-in-between. This space worked as a subject position that denied the “denial of coevalness” and reaffirmed other perspectives about space.

This link between critical thought and a spatial approach can be inferred from an article Mignolo wrote with M. Tlostanova.²³ In this piece, the authors draw on the concept of “double consciousness” in order to address an alternative epistemology that avoids the false universalism of colonial modernity. In doing so they resort to the concept of border thinking, which indicates the space-in-between produced by modernity in colonial territories. This locus of discourse is characterised by an exteriority which challenges the universalistic assumptions contained in colonial discourse. It means that knowledge in peripheries is constructed from a spatially rooted point of view.

In a similar vein, Fernando Coronil argues that it is possible to work with non-imperial geo-

historical categories.²⁴ He rejects spatiality as it is conceived in classical western representations and argues that one should consider colonial territories as crucial places in the making of global capitalism. These colonial settings must be seen not as empty places but as territories which play a major role in the production of commodities. This theoretical perspective deeply based on a de-colonial spatiality would help to de-centre western conceptions of modernity.

The works of Mignolo, Tlestonova and Coronil display some features of a peripheral territoriality that can also be grasped in Da Cunha's writings on Amazon. He portrayed the nature in the tropical forest as almost impossible to analyse through scientific discourse and thus recognised the existence of a difference rendered in spatiality. Amazon was depicted as a new geography with features unknown to European colonialism. It was part of the global logic of capitalism (latex was a relevant commodity in the beginning of the twentieth century) but at the same time its people experimented with forms of living that did not exist in central countries. Migrants in the forest had no common cultural background and did not possess the intellectual and emotional qualities associated with the modern self.²⁵ However, they managed to adjust to the "Green hell".

As a place that combined exploitation and invention, Da Cunha's Amazon could be seen as an example of the alternative territoriality claimed by Mignolo and Coronil. In the same way, the ambivalent ideas of Da Cunha could be interpreted as a typical condition for "border thinking".

Of course it is easy to read in Da Cunha's texts just another example of internal colonialism, a white intellectual from the elite spreading prejudices against the subaltern. He resorted to nineteenth century theories that reaffirmed both the inferiority of non-Europeans and the identification between Europe and civilisation. Mignolo denounces this internal colonialism and criticises Latin American intellectuals that tried to articulate nationalistic projects drawing on Eurocentric epistemology. As José Maurício Domingues states, Mignolo's intellectual project rests on a full critique of modernity.²⁶ Mignolo identifies it with colonialism and seeks an exterior subject position that he considers an alternative to modernity and not just an *alternative modernity*. Domingues criticises this perspective and claims that modernity has another side characterised by autonomy and emancipation, a view I am in agreement with. Critical thinking in Latin America and in the Global South is not an exterior form of thinking, but a subject position that recognises its colonial origins and addresses global modernity.

If one is interested in discussing social theory from a southern perspective,²⁷ it is crucial to understand our past histories. Jeffrey Alexander states that classical works occupy a central place in social sciences because they provide us with a repertoire of concepts that allow intellectual exchange today.²⁸ One does not, after all, read Marx, Weber or Durkheim in an uncritical fashion. According to Alexander, these authors are part of a hermeneutical dialogue which draws on past theories in a creative way. Why not open this dialogue with the aid of other intellectual histories? It is not a matter of making uncritical and nationalistic claims about Brazilian classics but a necessary step in a process of de-centring social theory.

Mignolo's concept of border thinking helps us to review our intellectual history looking for

concepts and metaphors that open up the discussion about modernity in the South and *from* the South. The search for exteriority is not a matter of setting ourselves aside from modernity but of finding a point of view that addresses global modernity from postcolonial borders. That is why peripheral intellectual histories are so relevant in the contemporary debate on social theory.



DVD Cover of a recent film, *Guerra de Canudos*, which draws heavily on Da Cunha's account

<http://www.culturabrasielpo.brlmagazine.com.br/canudos.jpg>, accessed on 08.01.2010.

- 1 An English translation of the book by S. Putman titled *Rebellion in the Backlands*, was published by Chicago University Press in 1944.
- 2 Although Mignolo works and lives in the USA, he provides an interesting theory about knowledge and power from a Southern perspective.
- 3 The concept of Occidentalism is used by Coronil.
- 4 Hyppolyte Taine (1828-1893) employed this model in order to understand the social contexts of works of art. Thus he stated that an artist's genius could be explained by his cultural dispositions (race), the particular circumstances or in which he is located (milieu) and the historical development of his personality (moment).
- 5 Da Cunha also employs the word *jagunços*, especially when he tries to describe the *sertanejos* who were engaged in battles and armed struggles. *Jagunços* was a much known word in Brazil to describe men from the backlands who worked as gunmen to landlords.
- 6 A Republic was established in Brazil by a military movement in 1889. Until that year, Brazil was an Empire ruled by a constitutional monarchy.
- 7 Augusto Comte (1798-1857) was a French philosopher widely read in Brazil between 1870 and the beginning of the twentieth century. Comte claimed that the science of society must discover the laws of evolution and thus guide the progress of mankind.
- 8 The Vendée (1793-1796) was an uprising of Catholics and royalists against the recently established French Republic. The uprising drew support from local peasants.
- 9 E. da Cunha, *Obra Completa*, 2 vols, Nova Aguilar, Rio de Janeiro, 1995. I am working with the

1995 edition of Da Cunha's complete works. All references to his texts are related to this edition.

10 L. Bernucci, *A Imitação dos Sentidos: Prólogos, Contemporâneos e Epígonos de Euclides da Cunha*, EDUSP, São Paulo, 1995.

11 José C. B. Santana, *Ciência e da arte: Euclides da Cunha e as ciências naturais*, Hucitec, São Paulo, and UEFS, Feira de Santana, 2001.

12 N. Lima, *Um sertão chamado Brasil. Intelectuais e representação geográfica da identidade nacional*, Revan, Rio de Janeiro, 1999.

13 Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, p. 99.

14 The *sertanejos* guerrillas defeated three military expeditions. Only the fourth one, commanded by general Artur Oscar Guimarães, was able to crush Canudos.

15 Da Cunha, *Obras Completas*, p. 513.

16 B. Zilly, "Sertão e nacionalidade: formação étnica e civilizatória do Brasil segundo Euclides da Cunha", *Estudos Sociedade e Agricultura*, 12, 1999, pp. 5-45.

17 L. Costa Lima, *Terra ignota: A Construção de Os Sertões*, Ed Civilização Brasileira, Rio de Janeiro, 1997.

18 In the beginning of the twentieth century, the Amazon was a relevant part of the global market due to the extraction of latex for the production of rubber. This link between the region and central capitalist economies resulted in a fast modernisation process that left a fancy opera-theater in Manaus and a very unequal pattern of social development.

19 P. Chatterjee, *Nation and its fragments: colonial and post-colonial histories*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993.

20 See N. Lima, *Um sertão chamad.*

21 W. Mignolo, *The Darker Side of Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality and Colonization*, Michigan University Press, Michigan, 2003.

22 Ibid, p. xi.

23 W. Mignolo and M. Tlostanova, "Theorizing from the borders: shift to geo- and body-politics of knowledge", *European Journal of Social Theory*, 9, 205, 2006, pp. 205-221.

24 F. Coronil, "Beyond Occidentalism: Toward Nonimperial Geohistorical categories", *Cultural Anthropology*, 11, 1, 1996, pp. 51-87.

25 For a discussion about the modern self, see C. Taylor, *Sources of the Self: the making of modern identity*, Harvard University Press, Massachusetts, 1989.

26 J. M. Domingues, "Global modernization, 'coloniality' and a critical sociology for contemporary Latin America", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26, 1, 2009, pp. 112-133.

27 R. Connel, "The northern theory of globalization", *Sociological Theory*, 25, 4, 2007, pp. 368-385.

28 J. Alexander, "The Centrality of the Classics", *Social Theory Today*, 1987.

GLOBAL SOUTH

SEPHIS e-magazine



Globalisation of Culture in the Context of Globalism/Localism and Homogenisation/Fragmentation Debates

Globalisation and culture as well as globalisation of culture are the focus of intense academic debate and discussion. The subject includes themes such as Western domination of non-Western regions and nations by the use of various instruments such as multinational corporations (MNCs), new communication technologies, movement of capital, products and expertise operating in culture related fields. This paper surveys selected literature relating to these themes, identify and discuss relevant arguments with a view to clarify the globalisation of culture process, its changing nature and related arguments. The central questions addressed in this paper are whether cultural globalisation (CG) is leading to globalism and global culture, what happens to localisms or local cultures in the face of CG, and whether CG leads to cultural homogenisation or fragmentation. The main argument advanced here is that if we are to understand cultural globalisation in its changing complexity, we have to adopt frameworks of analysis rooted not only in the Changing cultural flows, infrastructures and content but also specific economic and cultural zones as well as localities around the world.



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Introduction

Like any globalisation process, cultural globalisation is a two-way process involving the ‘global’ and the ‘local’. Understanding the interactions between the ‘global’ and the ‘local’ is vital to fully appreciate the nature of contemporary cultural globalisation.¹ Prasad and Prasad describe several debates involving cultural globalisation. Among these are (a) Whether or not cultural globalisation is creating (or, has already created) a ‘global culture’, (b) How cultural globalisation is differentially experienced in different individual countries/localities, and (c) Whether or not cultural globalisation might be leading to the obliteration of cultural differences across the world and producing global cultural homogenisation.²

According to Richardson, Wyness and Halvorsen, “Culture has become significant– a dominant reference point for many communities and groups– just at the point when arguably a global frame of reference has started to loosen many of our taken-for-granted ways of thinking about ourselves. Culture has become important precisely because it has come under attack”.³ Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst state that “Many globalisation theorists want to abolish the distinction between the global and the local, yet it is also clear that without some reference to the ‘local’, the meaning of the ‘global’ also becomes obscure”.⁴ They describe five ways to look at the local within the globalisation theory, i.e. the local as context, as the particular in opposition to the ‘universal’, as historical residue, as a hub in a network, and locality as bounded construction.

Some argue that the current phase of globalisation is a continuity of what went on before in terms of global capitalist development. Others argue that what happened since the late nineteen eighties is a different and more intense phase of such development. Therefore the label ‘globalisation’ is to be used to refer to this phase. This new phase is described as a rupture with the past, a disjuncture, a fragmentation in the course of history, and a new era.

Globalisation and Cultural Globalisation

Some argue that the current phase of globalisation is a continuity of what went on before in terms of global capitalist development. Others argue that what happened since the late nineteen eighties is a different and more intense phase of such development. Therefore the label ‘globalisation’ is to be used to refer to this phase. This new phase is described as a rupture with the past, a disjuncture, a fragmentation in the course of history, and a new era. “The de-territorialisation of production and finance is a key element of this phase.”⁵ The deepening and intensity of relations between various regions and continents due to globalisation have had an impact on areas such as trade, nation and its sovereignty, migration, travel, education and learning, music, media, local communities and identities, and culture. Some writers emphasise flows– trade, people, images– whereas others focus on the impact.

Changing nature of cultural transmission across regions and the globe is an area drawing the attention of scholars alongside the players involved, media outlets and the objects of such transmission. Flow of cultural elements across national and regional boundaries is one area of focus.

For example, Prasad and Prasad describe cultural globalisation as a “vast and highly complex process involving the ongoing mixing, transformation, and flow of cultural elements in multiple and heterogeneous ways across diverse national and regional boundaries”.⁶ Held et al., state that “In the past imperial states, networks of intellectuals and theocracies were the key agents of cultural diffusion. In the contemporary world their role has been displaced by that of large media industries as well as by the greater flows of individuals and groups. MNCs are at the heart of these interconnected processes.”⁷ If globalisation is the movement of objects, signs and people across regions and intercontinental space, the globalisation of culture involves the movement of all three of these. “Alongside people, cultural forms and ideas have been spatially diffused through books, written records and cultural artifacts of all kinds.”⁸ They believe that cultural globalisation has entered an enhanced phase with the new technologies and “with the emergence of telecommunications, the artefactual nature of cultural transmission has diminished as disembodied signs– in the form of electrical impulses– circulate, almost instantaneously, through space and time.” The enhanced phase is characterised by the “(d)igitisation of information and images, satellite broadcasting and telephony systems, new cable and fibre-optic technologies and the integration of computer and telecommunications networks whose ultimate expression are the global networks of the World Wide Web.”⁹ Thus the enhanced speed with which cultural transmission across countries, regions and the world takes place in the current phase in multiple directions has become a unique feature of cultural globalisation.



Photo courtesy:
Ritoban Das

One important element of cultural globalisation is “the establishment of the infrastructures of cultural production, transmission and reception, and the extent to which cultural flows and processes are institutionalized.”¹⁰ Globalisation of culture requires infrastructures and institutions of cultural transmission, reproduction and reception on a global– transregional or transcontinental– scale. In the development of an international market in television programming, the establishment of transnational television production and distribution companies, the global diffusion of television sets to publics, transnational systems of satellite broadcasting, and relevant regulatory regimes consist of such

infrastructure.¹¹ This is an aspect that requires serious examination but not covered in this paper in any great detail.

These details provide us with an understanding of the enhanced nature and avenues of cultural globalisation, including the technological nature of cultural transmission.

Globalism-Localism and homogenisation/heterogenisation

In this section, we focus on the development of global culture and globalism (global reflexivity, attitudes and life style), its various forms, and their impact on local cultures, while paying attention to cultural homogenisation-heterogenisation arguments.

According to Scholte, “Globalization introduces a single world culture centred on consumerism, mass media, Americana, and the English language. Depending on one’s perspective, this homogenisation entails either progressive cosmopolitanism or oppressive imperialism.”¹² Others, like Arjun Appadurai, have associated globalisation with increased cultural diversity.¹³ “Through so-called ‘globalization’, global news reports, global products, global social movements and the like take different forms and make different impacts depending on local particularities.”¹⁴ Emergence of a global culture is the subject of other discussions as well: Increasingly, more and more people across different parts of the world seem to watch the same (or similar) TV news/entertainment programmes, frequently listen to similar music, consume products bearing common global brands, live and work in buildings often designed along parallel architectural lines, and even wear clothes (e.g. blue jeans) and consume items of food and drink (e.g. Coca Cola or burger in a fast food restaurant) that share considerable commonality, and that these and other comparable developments in cultural practices around the globe are suggestive of the emergence of something that may appropriately be called a global culture.¹⁵

However, such arguments do not take into account the interpretive capacity of human beings when they are exposed to such cultural flows— however uniform they are— and the ability to attach different meanings in the social and cultural contexts they live. There are disagreements among various authors about the emergence of global culture and its effects on local/national cultures also. Some of the views are given below:

- The emerging global culture is unitary and cohesive and others suggest it represents an untidy hodgepodge of cultural practices bearing only surface resemblance.
- Others like Smith and Street argue that the fact of greater cultural mix, flux, and flows should not be seen as a sign of emerging global culture because there is no accompanying global consciousness. National sentiments and experiences still play a role.¹⁶
- Some suggest that national cultures and identities are destroyed by cultural globalisation.
- Others suggest that “cultural globalization often make people more intensely aware of the existence of a multiplicity of (national) cultures in the global arena, and national cultures are strengthened by cultural globalization.”¹⁷



McDonald's image interspersed with Arabic letters, http://news.bbc.co.uk/olmedia/1615000/images/_1619221_chinamac330.jpg accessed on 08.01.2010.

Some argue that seemingly similar cultural products and practices are experienced differently across localities e.g. going to a fast food outlet in Asia as a different and exotic experience vs. going to an inner city McDonald's in the US as an experience in economic and cultural deprivation.¹⁸

These differing views show the complexity of situations created by cultural globalisation and the need to give local understandings, meanings, values and practices a place in the analysis of globalism and localism.

One strong line of argument is centred on the way that 'global capitalism' impacts on local cultures and communities. According to Arif Dirlik, "Global capitalism represents an unprecedented penetration of local society globally by the economy and culture of capital: so that the local understood in a 'traditional' sense may be less relevant than ever."¹⁹ The transnationalisation of production by using the mechanism of Multinational Corporations (MNCs) leads to the homogenisation of the globe economically, socially, and culturally. It is also associated with a parallel process of fragmentation, i.e. more and more countries and regions are adopting capitalist mode of production, and it is no more the territory of the West only. Corresponding to economic fragmentation is cultural fragmentation, or multiculturalism, where the native culture is articulated into a capitalist narrative.²⁰ Dirlik further states that the managers of large corporations know that they are manipulating "peoples, boundaries, and cultures to appropriate the local for the global, to admit different cultures into the realm of capital only to break them down and to remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption, and even to reconstitute subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and consumers more responsive to the operations of capital."²¹ Thus the interpenetration of global and local—culturally in terms of cosmopolitanism and localism—can be explained by the situation created by global capitalism.

Here Dirlik looks at local cultures through the prism of global capitalism and its need to convert people into producers and consumers. A better part of such cultural globalisation involves the

propagation of signs, products, processes associated with global capitalism. In this sense, a process of homogenisation is at play. However, there is an element of resistance also embodied in this process. “Ironically, global capitalism enhances awareness of the local, pointing to it also as the site of resistance to capital. The local in the process becomes the site upon which the multifaceted contradictions of contemporary society play out.”²² This shows that cultural globalisation is creating both homogenisation and fragmentation simultaneously.

Fetherstone contends that there is no “unified world society or culture— something akin to the social structure of a nation-state and its national culture.”²³ However, he admits the existence of ‘third cultures’— sets of practices, bodies of knowledge, conventions, and lifestyles which are independent of nation-states.

Wilson and Dissanayake talk about the new world space of cultural production and national representation “which is simultaneously becoming more globalised (unified around dynamics of **capitallogic** moving across borders) and more localised (fragmented into contestatory enclaves of difference, coalition, and resistance).”²⁴ How far these global, national or third cultures and cultural spaces are driven by the needs of capital and culture of capital is an issue requiring greater scrutiny by emerging scholars in the South.

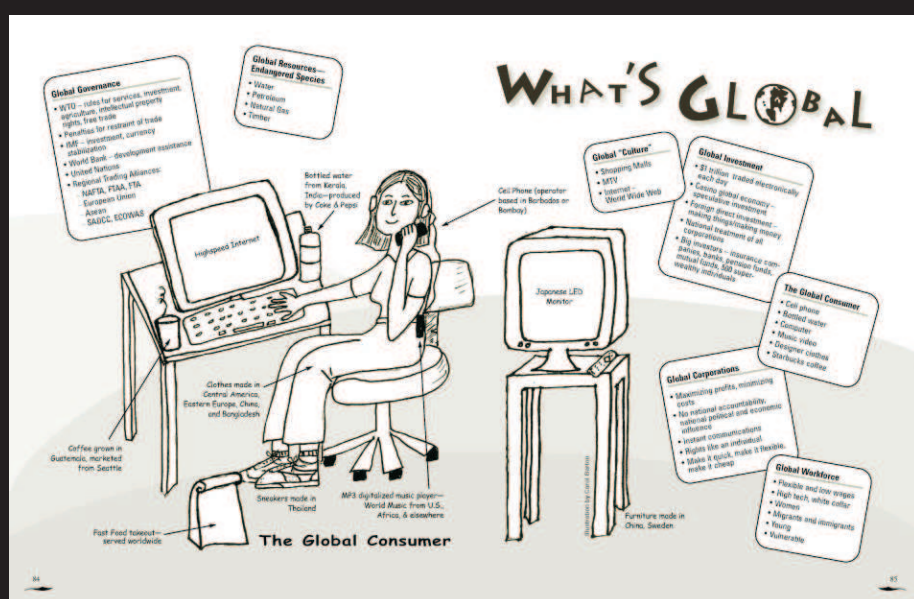
Fetherstone points out another aspect of cultural globalisation relating to cities, namely “the deregulation of markets and capital flows produce homogenisation in procedures, working practices, and organizational cultures and some convergence in the lifestyles, habitus, and demeanours of various professionals. The integration of services located in particular quarters of world cities produce transnational sets of social relations, practices and cultures— even though one may not find such groups in every city of the world.”²⁵

However, he cautions against “the mistake of assuming that the extension of various social and cultural forms to different parts of the world is necessarily producing a homogenisation of content. That is, the globalization process is seen as producing a unified and integrated common culture.”²⁶ As examples, he cites “theories of cultural imperialism and media imperialism that assume local cultures are necessarily battered out of existence through the proliferation of consumer goods, advertising, and media programs stemming from the West (largely the United States)”. They carry “a strong view of the manipulability of mass audiences by a monolithic system with little empirical evidence about how goods and information are adapted and used in everyday practices.”²⁷ For instance, the nation-state plays a role as a mediator between market culture and local culture. This is an important argument to bear in mind as it authenticates players other than those motivated by capital alone. We can take this argument further to a level even below the national— to the local community, family and individual levels.

The role of multinational corporations in cultural globalisation is another issue to examine. Held et al. provide information about the role of multinational corporations in the field of culture and their expansion in the post-war era.²⁸ At the heart of the expansion were the companies that can actually

manufacture the products to be distributed through new telecommunications, broadcasting and computing infrastructures. In this context, a truly global set of media-entertainment-information corporations has emerged. Around twenty to thirty large MNCs dominate global markets in entertainment, news, television, etc. They have acquired a very significant cultural and economic presence on every continent.²⁹ “All of these corporations have their home based in OECD countries and the majority of them in the USA.”³⁰ Of these twenty firms, the largest number come from the USA, including Time-Warner, Walt Disney, Capital Cities-ABC, CBS, McGraw Hill and Viacom. This highlights the dominating role played by OECD countries in the global markets so far as the manufacture and transmission of cultural products, information and services are concerned. We need to wonder about the homogenisation effects of such domination when it comes to individual and group consumption of such products, information and services.

Macbride and Roach further contend that at the centre of cultural homogenisation process is the mass media. “Controlled mainly by American and European companies, the media impose their powerful images, sounds, and advertising on unprepared peoples who succumb meekly to their messages, which are designed to increase the profits of capitalist firms.”³¹ Thus they explain cultural globalisation as part of the ‘symbolic and psychological means of control’ adopted by neo-colonial powers to subjugate the Third World. Moreover, the major news organisations provide biased views of the world. In this context, MacBride and Roach even provide “an argument in favour of global governance structures to reduce Western media domination.”³²



The Global Consumer, <http://new.gbmg-umc.org/media/missionstudies/whatsglobal.jpg>, accessed on 08.01.2010.

Against these kinds of arguments about cultural homogeneity, Sinclair see the world as divided into several regions with their own internal dynamics and global ties. They claim that this view helps them to analyse multidirectional flows of television in the world, among other processes.³³ Held et al also believe that Western dominance in cultural globalisation is changing and we are witnessing a reverse cultural globalisation pattern today. “Flows have begun to be reversed, primarily through migration but also through other cultural forms shifting from South to North and East to West. Music, food, ideas, beliefs and literature from the South and East have been percolating into the cultures of the West, creating new lines of cultural interconnectedness and fracture.”³⁴ These are powerful suggestions that counter Western domination and cultural homogenisation arguments.

Some research studies explore these issues in specific country/local contexts. For example, Woodward, Zkrbis, and Bean studied cosmopolitanism in Australia. They define cultural cosmopolitanism as “openness to other cultures, values, and experiences” and investigated “cosmopolitanism as a set of practices and outlooks that seek out, and value, cultural difference and openness”.³⁵ They contend that global mobility does not necessarily mean cosmopolitanism because many do not hold cosmopolitan values. “Indeed, exposure may even lead to increased insularity and parochialism.” Their hypothesis was that “it is through engagements with various forms and representations of the global that cosmopolitan, or anti-cosmopolitan, values surface and find expression.”³⁶ They studied the cosmopolitan commitments among Australians, using measures that tap into national and international belonging while exploring whether cosmopolitan values displace local and national attachments or whether they co-exist. Among the people they studied, almost two-thirds of respondents felt like citizens of the world as well as of the nation indicating a high degree of hybridity.³⁷ Among the respondents there was “robust support for certain elements of the cosmopolitan agenda— particularly those based around personal consumption, sampling and learning about diverse cultures, and the promotion of rights for humans and the environment. Yet, this support seems tempered by stronger feelings of national interest on matters relating to the economy that have the potential to impact negatively on one’s own living standards, and the protection of local culture.”³⁸

The study by Savage, Bagnall and Longhurst provides insights from another context. It is a study of middle class culture in Manchester focusing on the nature of local belonging in a globalising world. They examined whether globalisation constructs local identities, attachments and belonging. Drawing upon network and relational concepts, they emphasise “the need for an account of the local which is not contrasted with the global, but which situates the local against other locals in an environment”.³⁹ They concluded that “(i)dentities are developed through the networked geography of places articulated together people routinely invoked a networked sense of place, comparing their locations with those that were meaningful and important to them through the infrastructure of global communications— tourism, the media, and so forth.”⁴⁰ The authors suggest an alternative framework for understanding the dynamics of globalisation and belonging.⁴¹ They detected a white, Anglophone

diaspora. “Here respondents feel at home among the cultural values and objects of English, American and (to a much lesser extent) Australian and Canadian nations. Reference is occasionally made to cultures outside these zones, but they are nearly always seen as ‘difficult’ or ‘exceptional.’”⁴² They also found that the respondents had a northern English white middle class cultural imaginary rather than a national one.

These findings of Savage et al provide us with another avenue of thinking about the global-local debates where they emphasise the need to go beyond global-local contrasts, and the need to focus on the ‘geography of places articulated together’ by people. In this sense, cultural globalisation has to be examined in a place and people-specific manner rather than through grand and abstract theorisations that are supposed to apply universally. This seems to be the challenge that the Southern scholarship faces when theorising about the North-South issues related to globalisation, in particular cultural globalisation. While a degree of cultural homogenisation goes on, particularly in relation to capital– the diversity, interconnectedness and fracture created by global cultural flows cannot be ignored. It is not a binary process. Rather it has multiple directions, meanings and players.

Discussion and Conclusion

Globalisation of culture has assumed new dimensions in its recent phase characterised by the spread and deepening of global capitalism and globalism. While there was domination by the Western empires in the past, new centres of economic and political power have emerged in the world. As Held et al say, reverse cultural globalisation pattern from South to North is today creating new lines of cultural interconnectedness and fracture. Along with the expansion in communications, transport, trade, migration etc., the production and distribution of culturally relevant goods and services such as television news and entertainment, film, music, tourism have been shifted to countries and regions outside the West also. Close examination of the interchange and flows of such cultural goods, information and services between regions show that it is indeed not a one-way process. The relationship between the global and local can take a number of forms depending on the historical, geographical, political situation of the case in point and place as well as people-specific factors and fractures. Overgeneralisations about what is happening are not helpful– except that they can present further problematics for critical thinking and assessments. One idea emerging from this survey is that global mobility does not mean cosmopolitanism for all. Some may even exhibit more insularity in their new places of habitation compared to places of birth and early growing. Thus specific research-based information related to specific places and people is necessary for a better understanding of cultural globalisation.

Analysing and interpreting globalisation and culture purely in terms of global capitalism or through the role of MNCs, or even the Western domination thesis, have significant pitfalls due to the changes in world economy and trade, emergence of new centres of power such as India and China, communication and technology, production of cultural content for the media in non-Western

countries. Considering local communities as producers and consumers only as subject to powerful advertising and marketing by MNCs is a reductionist approach, for it does not allow any role for the agency of individuals, families or communities. Expansion of the internet, migratory flows and the flow of music, food, religion etc., from the South to the North have also made the picture somewhat complex and requiring further place-specific research. Hybridisation of culture is taking place both in the West and the East. Thus, what we see is a very complex picture in the developed as well as the developing world. This cannot be explained purely through either globalism-localism or homogenisation-fragmentation perspectives by using binaries.

As Prasad and Prasad point out, the more benign visions of globalisation such as ‘global village’ or ‘relatively menacing cultural imperialism’ that threatens the very survival of different cultures and cultural diversity in the world are too simplistic.⁴³ To understand cultural globalisation in its changing complexity, we have to adopt frameworks of analysis rooted not only in the changing cultural flows, infrastructures and content but also specific economic and cultural zones as well as localities around the world.

Theoretically, a question requiring further attention is how far we can differentiate culture from capital in the debates about globalisation of culture? We already saw some arguments about their close nexus leading to articulation of the homogenisation thesis, where the multinational corporation (MNC) ‘structure’ is emphasised. We also saw counter-arguments about heterogeneity in the individual and group experiences in the face of such arguments about the close nexus between culture of capital and homogenisation where ‘agency’ is emphasised. Researchers need to be aware of both these streams of thought when examining cultural globalisation in the South as well as the North.

1 A. Prasad and P. Prasad, “Mix, Flux and Flows: The Globalization of Culture and its Implications for Management and Organizations”, *Journal of Global Business Issues*, 1, 2, 2007, p. 17.

2 Ibid, p. 14.

3 A. Richardson, M. Wyness, A. Halvorsen (eds.), *Exploring Cultural Perspectives: Integration and Globalization*, ICRN Press, Edmonton, 2002, p.v.

4 M. Savage, G. Bagnall, B. Longhurst, *Globalization and Belonging*, Sage Publications, London, 2005, p. 2.

5 T. C. Lewellen, *The Anthropology of Globalisation*, Bergin & Garvey, Westport- Connecticut, 2002, p. 10.

6 Prasad and Prasad, “Mix, Flux and Flows”, p. 14.

7 D. Held, A. McGrew, D. Goldblatt, J. Perraton, *Global Transformations: Politics, Economics and Culture*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 1999, p. 368.

8 Ibid, pp. 329-330.

9 Ibid, pp.367-369.

10 Ibid, p. 330.

11 Ibid, pp. 330-331.

12 J. A. Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, St. Martin’s Press, New York, 2000, p. 23.

13 Arjun Appadurai, “Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy”, *Theory, Culture and Society*, 7, 1990, pp. 295-310.

- 14 Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, p. 23.
- 15 For detailed discussions on this, see M. Fetherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity", in R. Wilson & W. Dissanayake (eds.), *Global/Local: Cultural Production and the Transnational Imagery*, Duke University Press, Durham, 1996, pp. 46-77; A. Giddens, *Consequences of modernity*, Polity Press, Cambridge, U. K, 1990; and R. Robertson, *Globalisation: Social Theory and Global Culture*, Sage, London, 1992.
- 16 See, for instance, A. D. Smith, "Towards a global culture?", in D. Held and A. McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader*, Polity Press, Cambridge, UK, 2003; and J. Street, "Across the universe", in A. Scott (ed.), *The Limits of Globalisation*, Routledge, London, 1997.
- 17 J. Tomlinson, "Globalisation and Cultural identity", in Held and McGrew (eds.), *The Global Transformations Reader*.
- 18 Prasad and Prasad, "Mix, Flux and Flows", pp. 14-15.
- 19 Arif Dirlik, "The Global in the Local", in Wilson and Dissanayake (eds.), *Global/Local*, p. 28.
- 20 Ibid, pp. 29-30.
- 21 Ibid, pp. 32-33.
- 22 Ibid, p. 35.
- 23 Fetherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity", p. 60.
- 24 Wilson and Dissanayake, *Global/Local*, p. 1. Capitallogic here refers to capitalist logic or logic of capitalism.
- 25 Fetherstone, "Localism, Globalism, and Cultural Identity", p. 61.
- 26 Ibid.
- 27 Ibid, pp. 61-62.
- 28 Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton, *Global Transformations*, pp. 346-350.
- 29 Ibid, p. 347.
- 30 Ibid, p. 349.
- 31 S. MacBride and C. Roach, "The New International Information order", in F. Lechner and J. Boli (eds.), *The Globalization Reader*, 2nd edition, Blackwell Publishing, Carlton, Victoria, 2004, p. 287. For the following discussion, see pp. 287-288 of the same book.
- 32 Ibid, p. 288.
- 33 J. Sinclair, E. Jacka, S. Cunningham, "Peripheral Vision", in ibid, pp. 297-302.
- 34 Held, McGrew, Goldblatt, and Perraton, *Global Transformations*, pp. 367-369.
- 35 I. Woodward, Z. Skrbis and C. Bean, "Attitudes Towards Globalization and Cosmopolitanism: Cultural Diversity, Personal Consumption and the National Economy", *The British Journal of Sociology*, 59, 2, 2008, p. 209.
- 36 Ibid, p. 210.
- 37 Ibid, p. 214.
- 38 Ibid, p. 219.
- 39 Savage, Bagnall, Longhurst, *Globalization and Belonging*, p. 7.
- 40 Ibid, p. 208.
- 41 Ibid, pp. 205-208.
- 42 Ibid, 208.
- 43 Prasad and Prasad, "Mix, Flux and Flows", p.11.

Election 2009: New democracy in the works?

This essay explores the changing contours of Indian politics in the twenty first century. In particular it argues that the salience of communitarian mobilisation patterns and networks based on religion and caste is waning. These are being replaced by more individuated voting behaviour based on a material calculus and expectations about governance and delivery of goods and services. It also makes a related point: That there seems to be a shift towards a more welfarist governance agenda and a consolidation of a left of centre space in national politics.



Suhit Sen

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India's fifteenth round of general elections has not just thrown up some unexpected results in the shape of the Indian National Congress's unexpected showing throughout the country, it has also thrown up some trends that could form the basis of unexpected optimism for the future. Before venturing into necessarily uncharted and quite possibly treacherous terrain, the disclaimer that with the dust barely beginning to settle, a shot at plotting trends in a crystal ball must be a tentative business at the best of times can hardly be too heavily emphasised.

As far as trends are concerned, there was both continuity and change, depending on the state or union territory you are looking at. A good starting point would be an examination of a few states in which electoral fortunes were conspicuously overturned and some in which the popular mandate was reaffirmed. In no state was the plot rewritten so unforeseeably as in Uttar Pradesh, electorally the country's largest, and in West Bengal, the most stable. Equally, Delhi, Bihar and Chhattisgarh, in the north, demonstrated high degrees of continuity, while the same was true of Andhra Pradesh in the south.



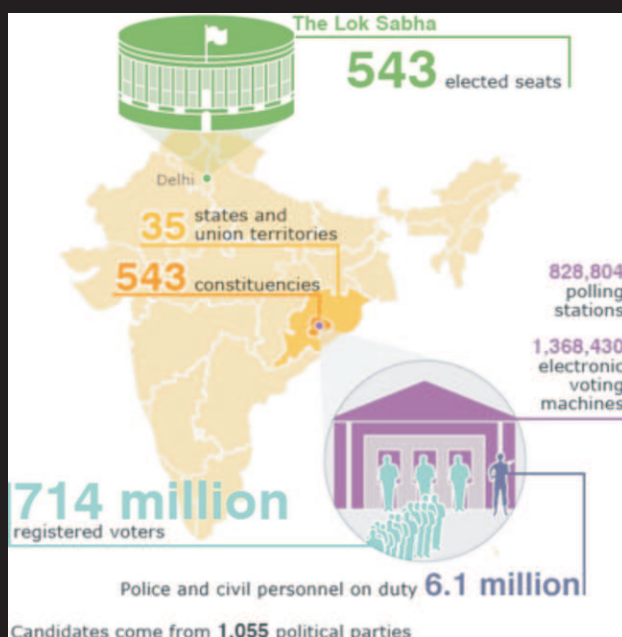
Map showing the states of the Indian Union.

[Http://www.indiasurgery.net/indiasurgery/images/indiamap/IndiaMap_tourism.gif](http://www.indiasurgery.net/indiasurgery/images/indiamap/IndiaMap_tourism.gif), accessed on 08.01.2010.

The Left Front, led by the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI-M), has been in power in West Bengal for over three decades beginning in 1977, when it swept into power at the end of Indira Gandhi's Emergency. In the past three decades, it has not only won power in the state by comfortable margins, it has also dominated the parliamentary elections— nine, excluding the just concluded vote. Its worst showing was in 1984 when it picked up twenty six of the forty two seats in the state. This was in the wake of Indira Gandhi's assassination and in the face of a massive, countrywide pro-

Some statistics about
general elections 2009

[Http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_ajYOFiN_m9k/SedW2iBKgDI/AAAAAAAAAYs/iDfZtHVboDY/s400/India+election+2009.png](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_ajYOFiN_m9k/SedW2iBKgDI/AAAAAAAAAYs/iDfZtHVboDY/s400/India+election+2009.png),
accessed on 08.01.2010



Congress swing. In 1999, after the Kargil war, when the alliance led by the rightwing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) came to power on the back of a wave of sorts, the Left Front cornered twenty nine seats. For the rest, its tally of seats has always been in the region of thirty five out of the forty two.

In 2009, the Left Front suffered a battering that no one came close to predicting. Its tally plummeted from thirty five in 2004 to fifteen. The principal opposition party in the state the All India Trinamul Congress, formed by Mamata Banerjee in 1998 by splitting the Congress party in the state picked up nineteen seats, more than double the nine CPI-M managed. In the run-up to the elections, the expectation that the Left Front would suffer serious reverses had certainly been growing. Optimistic supporters of the opposition cause, nevertheless, would have settled for twenty five at best for the anti-Left alliance of the Trinamul Congress and the Congress party, while the most pessimistic adherents of the Left Front were not looking at anything less than twenty five-odd for themselves.

In the aftermath of the elections, the Left parties are trying to come to grips with this catastrophic decline, no less so for the statistics that show in the unpacking of the results that the Left lost in 193 of the 294 state assembly segments that form the forty two parliamentary constituencies, which prefigures an uncomfortable loss of power when the next state elections roll around in 2011. The process of what is in such circumstances called introspection has begun and the party has prepared a 'rectification' programme. The introspection, however, shows in varying measures denial arising from sheer disbelief and a genuine impulse towards self-criticism, preliminary perhaps to getting back on track the badly derailed business of governance. A small group of leaders in the CPI-M, with the vociferous support of leaders from the long disaffected junior members of the front, mainly the Communist Party of India, the Forward Bloc and the Revolutionary Socialist Party, are

arguing that the results indicate principally the people's disillusionment with Left rule. Another, influential, section prefers the argument that the results indicate, in fact, a nationwide swing in favour of the incumbent Congress-led alliance at the federal centre and the CPI-M politburo's mistaken tactical manoeuvres in New Delhi, mainly its decision to jettison its alliance with the Congress party over the nuclear deal with the United States of America in search of what the Left in its overblown rhetorical fashion is pleased to call an anti-imperial (meaning anti-Congress), anti-communal (anti-BJP) front of smaller, regional parties.



The Prime Minister and his leader

[Http://www.akbari.in/control/images/250709122556manmohan_sonia_3.jpg](http://www.akbari.in/control/images/250709122556manmohan_sonia_3.jpg), accessed on 08.01.2010

Clearly, the indictment of General Secretary Prakash Karat's anti-Congress line by CPI-M leaders, especially the multiple-term MPs who lost their seats, is an attempt at a cover-up. It is no secret that in terms of governance, the Left government's record in Bengal has been disastrous. It has not only presided over the de-industrialisation of the state leading to a severe constriction of employment opportunities and a general impoverishment of the people, it has also failed to deliver in the social sector. Its belated industrialisation drive has floundered, not least because it has not been thought through. Primary and secondary education in the state sector is in a woeful condition, with drop-out rates among the highest in the country. Bengal is fourth from the top when it comes to the number of children out of school. Higher education, too, is in a mess. In addition to the constriction of employment opportunities in the state, the clamp on English instruction in state schools has rendered a generation much less competitive in the job market outside the state as well. The healthcare infrastructure is also in a mess especially in the districts. Sanitation, electrification and housing, both urban and rural, are other areas in which the government has failed to deliver despite new and well-funded federal programmes for the social sector in general and poverty-alleviation in particular.

The Left Front's enduring contribution is supposed to be in the area of land reforms. But the benefits of the pathbreaking *Operation Barga*, by which sharecroppers got deeds to the land they

cultivated as tenants-at-will, was carried out in the first decade or so of Left rule. It has since then been vitiated by the takeover of the party machinery by substantial farmers and by well-documented allegations that the benefits of land reform in the later years were channeled through the party machinery for the benefit of party adherents and to promote the stranglehold of the party over the state. Moreover, the Left Front failed to take the land programme to the next level, aborting thereby any possibility of a radical reconstitution of rural society along more egalitarian lines. For all its rhetoric, the CPI-M's land reform programme did not go beyond the ambitions laid out by the Congress party in the 1930s and 1940s.

But all this has been true for a couple of decades now. Why did the Bengal electorate choose 2009 to break with the Left Front, which it had voted to power unquestioningly over so many elections? The current conjuncture combined a number of elements. Though the Left Front has been all but unassailable for thirty two years and counting, its share of the vote has always been just about or just over the halfway mark. Up until 1998, the opposition Congress party was undivided for the most part, but could not effectively counter the Left for a variety of reasons, of which factionalism, disunity and complicity with the regime were important. Since 1998, the opposition vote has been divided. This time it was consolidated. But that is just one part of the story. The important thing was that there was a major swing away from the Left, which brought about its downfall.

The reaction against the Left in the countryside has come mainly from the small peasantry, which has the most to lose because the ruling party has not opened access to non-agricultural opportunities, and marginal peasants and the landless, who have got very little out of this regime, though a substantial section of the latter groups could still be with the Left.... Despite the Left Front's slogans about industrialisation and employment-generation it is on the run in urban areas as well a phenomenon deeply underlined by heavy losses in municipal elections in the state within a couple of months of the general elections.

That swing was brought about, I would argue, by a crisis of legitimacy, centring on the popular rural disaffection created by the Left's land acquisition programme, which ironically allowed the opposition to hijack the populist agrarian platform of the Left itself. The manner in which the Left government went about acquiring land and especially the fact that it did so to give it to a private player at substantially concessional rates in the Singur Nano factory case alienated large sections of the rural constituency, which had been the bulwark of the Left regime. As discontent peaked and the government responded with repression, popular opposition to the Left congealed. It was this widespread and unfavourable popular reaction to the government's land acquisition and industrialisation programme and the questions raised about the Leftist credentials of the regime that created the crisis of legitimacy. And it was this erosion of legitimacy that opened the space for a new critical interrogation of the Left's record of governance and, unsurprisingly, it was found wanting. Voting trends available indicate that the reaction against the Left in the countryside has come mainly

from the small peasantry, which has the most to lose because the ruling party has not opened access to non-agricultural opportunities, and marginal peasants and the landless, who have got very little out of this regime, though a substantial section of the latter groups could still be with the Left. The towns and cities have hardly compensated for this loss. Despite the Left Front's slogans about industrialisation and employment-generation it is on the run in urban areas as well a phenomenon deeply underlined by heavy losses in municipal elections in the state within a couple of months of the general elections.

The point to note, and it is one to which we shall return, is that after a very long time, voters exercised their franchise on the basis of some calculation of self-interest in terms of what they can legitimately expect of the government and what they have in fact received. In large swathes of territory, there has been, in fact a popular vote rather than one micro-managed by the CPI-M's electoral machine. The 2009 election in Bengal has been largely an exercise in rejection rather than affirmation.

Uttar Pradesh, with eighty seats in parliament, was the other turnaround state. It was expected that Mayavati's Bahujan Samaj Party (BSP) would emerge the big winner in this election, following through after its unprecedented success in the state elections in 2007. The Samajwadi Party (SP), which won the most seats in the 2004 general elections, was supposed to be the main rival and the two national parties the BJP and the Congress were supposed to clock in a fair way behind. In the event, the SP won the most seats (twenty three), down from thirty nine. The BSP, at one point expected to get around forty seats, won just twenty, overtaken by the Congress party, with twenty one seats, despite its being written off, despite having just a vestigial organisational presence and despite going solo. The BJP with its ally, the Rashtriya Lok Dal, was in the rearguard.



**'The First Family of India':
The Gandhis**

[Http://ktsarangan.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/indias-congress-party-president-sonia-gandhi-r-her-daughter-priyanka-gandhi-2r-her-son-rahul-gandhi-2l-and-husband-of-priyanka-robert-vadra-c-walk.jpg](http://ktsarangan.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/indias-congress-party-president-sonia-gandhi-r-her-daughter-priyanka-gandhi-2r-her-son-rahul-gandhi-2l-and-husband-of-priyanka-robert-vadra-c-walk.jpg), accessed on 11.01.2010

The reasons for the Congress party's unexpected showing can largely be attributed to the failure of the two main regional parties, an analysis of which will bring us to the larger lessons of these elections. First, the BSP's sweep in the 2007 UP elections was attributed to an astute mobilisation of communitarian vote blocs. Till 2007, the BSP had worked aggressively towards the consolidation of its *Dalit* constituency, countrywide notionally, but most successfully in UP. In the 2007 state elections, it was successful in stitching together the Brahmin and *Dalit* constituencies, historically the Congress party's formula in the north Indian heartland along with the Muslim bloc, on its way to getting the first decisive mandate in UP for over a couple of decades. The question is why the BSP's performance was substantially below par, given, it must be emphasised, that the party was not long ago handed a decisive majority for the first time since the 1980s. Several factors have been advanced by way of explanation. First, the Brahmins had voted for the BSP in 2007 mainly to get the existing, and irrevocably inimical, SP dispensation out of power. Once Mayavati's government came into power, they did not get the kind of immediate gains and leverage they expected from the regime and broke ranks. Second, and more important, the Mayavati regime was seen to have failed completely in delivering on the governance front, mainly in cracking down on crime, an election promise, which had snowballed during the SP regime. We shall return to this. The SP lost seats partly because its credibility had been badly damaged during its stint in power it had not been expected to reach anywhere near replicating its 2004 general election performance in any case. Additionally, the Muslims, who along with the backward caste Yadavs part of the SP's formidable vote bloc, defected, partly because of the party's nakedly opportunistic alliance with Kalyan Singh, the rightwing Hindu backward caste leader, who as chief minister did nothing to prevent the 1992 demolition of the Babri mosque in Ayodhya the SP was not seen to be a safe bulwark against Hindu communalists. This brings us to the Congress party and to the heart of the matter.

The Congress party has virtually no organisation in the state outside a few pockets. Unsurprisingly, over the past two decades, its electoral pickings in the state have been slim. Its social constituencies upper castes, *Dalits* and Muslims have been lost over the years to the BJP, BSP and SP respectively. The Congress party's decision in this context, pushed by Rahul Gandhi, to plough a lone furrow, was dismissed by almost all commentators as suicidal. But what did happen was that the party ended up with the second highest number of seats, up to twenty one from the paltry nine it had won in 2004. What caused this dramatic shift? Since, clearly, there has been no significant, if any, revamp in organisational terms, the agents of change were clearly the voters, by and large unprompted, swinging the Congress party's way because of a set of push and pull factors that changed the party's profile in popular perception. There is the possibility that just as the force of the mobilisational force of communitarian networks and the intimidation that is inalienably a part of it is waning so, is the salience of machine politics and the intimidation and electoral manipulation central to it. It is being replaced by more volitional, individuated voting patterns.

There were negative factors too. The BSP had discredited itself by failing to govern and

returning to a narrow sectarian agenda in terms of *Dalit* interests. It is important to note here that the solidity of the BSP's *Dalit* base rests not just on communitarian mobilisation or the symbolic politics of memorial-building but on a material programme that puts a premium on actualising land-redistribution programmes and filling up government job quotas in the teeth of opposition from both the upper castes and backward castes. The SP has nothing going for it. And, this I believe is important. There was a rejection of the shrill, sectarian politics concocted by the BJP, almost as a default platform through the leadership's condoning of the hate speeches of Varun Gandhi against Muslims and its projection of Narendra Modi, the man responsible for the post-Godhra pogrom against Muslims in Gujarat, as a mascot. The result of this backdoor Hindutva push was not the kind of successful Hindu consolidation Modi has achieved in Gujarat, but in fact a backlash that consolidated Muslim votes behind the Congress party and also drove a lot of Hindu voters away from the BJP towards the SP and the Congress.

The Congress party was seen in this context as a centrist force that would help foster solidarities and make for a more stable social compact that would be reflected, too, in a more stable, less fractious political regime. I would argue that the movement of votes away from all the other parties, *Dalits* marginally from the BSP, Muslims from the SP and high castes from the BJP and BSP, reflects a consolidation of votes on non-sectarian considerations or, conversely, on material considerations that had to do with expectations about governance, development and poverty-alleviation. In this, the Congress party, as the leading light of the ruling alliance at the centre of the United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was greatly, and not just in UP but countrywide, assisted by its governance record, especially in the area of the social sector. It has been widely recognised that the National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (NREGS) and a raft of other 'populist' programmes oriented towards improving the education, healthcare and housing infrastructure helped the Congress party gather support and speed as did its initiatives in the rural sector, including a huge farm loan waiver for beleaguered cotton farmers in Maharashtra who were committing suicide in large numbers. It is a matter of not inconsiderable irony that the Left, which played a significant role in framing that agenda, fell by the wayside as did the Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD), whose ministerial nominee was widely credited for making rural development initiatives a success during the tenure of the first UPA government. The Left may have lost out because what it pushed for at the centre and claimed credit for, it did not implement in Bengal, where it was in a strong position to do so. Similar was the juxtaposition of the Congress party's relative sincerity in creating social safety nets with the BSP's poor record in implementing NREGS both UP and Bengal had an extremely poor report card.

Let us consider the affirmative verdicts, beginning with Bihar. This was a state long considered a basket case, so badly off the rails that getting it back on the governance track was considered close to impossible. On taking over as chief minister, Nitish Kumar did, however, bring to the table an agenda for governance to a large extent by empowering the bureaucracy vis-à-vis the political establishment. Though Bihar's story of revival is still very much in its infancy, some things

seem to be clear. In terms of routine administrative matters, the government functions now, if only after a fashion the tide of lawlessness that had marked the last years of the RJD government has been turned back. Ordinary citizens can move around with some sense of normality. It will obviously take some time to get development projects on the ground, but the centre's social sector and poverty alleviation schemes are being better implemented than in many parts of the country. Kumar has also targeted the poorest tenth, metaphorically speaking, for many schemes. This has delivered to the chief minister's party new constituencies among the 'Mahadalits' and the poorest strata of Muslims, despite his alliance with the Hindutva-peddling BJP. Given that the core social constituency of Kumar's Janata Dal (United) remains roughly the same as that of Lalu Prasad's RJD sections of the rich backward caste peasantry with fingers in many other pies it is possibly too much to expect that Bihar's fundamental problem of land reform will be addressed any time soon in an attempt to narrow social and economic disparities in the countryside, though that is precisely what a committee appointed by the government has recommended. But with some measure of development trickling in, a beginning could well have been made. Kumar is reaping the benefits of these governance agenda.



One of the regional players who made good, Nitish Kumar, inaugurating another project

<http://static.panoramio.com/photos/original/17707293.jpg>, accessed on 11.01.2010

The Bihar story of affirmative voting has been repeated in Delhi, Andhra Pradesh and Chhattisgarh. In Andhra Pradesh, the Congress government took care to avoid the mistake of being too urban-centric, the price for which was paid by the previous Telugu Desam government led by Chandrababu Naidu, who was unfortunately for his own sake taken in by the media campaigns that portrayed him as a corporate chief minister the chief executive officer of the state and became intent on developing the state and its capital city as an information technology destination while ignoring the all too real challenges in the countryside, not least of which was a rash of suicides among the state's farmers in its cotton-producing belt, not to mention bone-crushing underdevelopment in all senses just a few miles out of Hyderabad, the state capital. In Delhi, the Congress regime has

balanced populism and urban infrastructure development to win all the seven parliamentary seats there on the back of three straight victories in assembly elections.

The governance agenda is being driven, I think, by a variety of social groups, not just the urban middle class that is growing in numbers. They might be vocal, but it is possible to argue that the urban and rural poor are also seeing possibilities in the welfarist push of the federal government and they are voting at the booths though they may not be visible in the television studios.

What seems to emerge provisionally from these elections is that there has been a loosening up of the existing channels along which voting behaviour has by and large been directed in India. It would be much too optimistic and sanguinary to insist that the patronage networks provided by caste and community are on their way to becoming irrelevant, but they could be getting weaker, allowing for more individuated voting patterns, which could signal voting based more sharply on material rational calculations. This would make governance and delivery more important in the electoral calculus. Concomitantly, a shift in this direction would signal a weakening of sectarian mobilisation. With a reworking of the government/party-citizen compact, one could see not just more individuated voters, but, alongside, the forging of group solidarities with a different, more material, basis. The secular/communal divide in Indian politics could be recalibrated if this tendency were to play out. The BJP's quandary, deepened by the results of these elections, over how to play its hardline sectarian agenda seems to be a pointer in this welcome direction, as is the increasing reluctance of opportunistic regional parties to do business in too clumsy a bear hug with the Sangh Parivar's Hindutva fraternity. A straw, too, in the wind, was a statement by a group of Muslim clerics, who, rather than bemoan the fact that the number of Muslims in parliament has fallen this time around, expressed satisfaction with the outcome of the fifteenth general elections, because, in its view, suitable candidates had been elected and criminal elements weeded out.

A related lesson of the elections is one that market fundamentalists would want to take good note of. The mandate, as we have seen, has been one for governance from Bihar in the east, through Madhya Pradesh in the centre to Andhra Pradesh in the south, a key element of the governance thing has been increasing delivery of basic services to those who do not enjoy access to them. Similarly, from Bengal in the east to UP in the north the vote has been against those who have not delivered. The ground left of centre has been clearly staked out in the past five years just as the ground right of the centre both in the arena of the economy and society had been in the five years previous to that, and rejected. This government and those to come cannot afford to abdicate the state's welfare responsibilities in favour of technical, technocratic solutions that genuflect to the deity of Washington Consensus-style efficiency.

Some important matters need to be taken up expeditiously, however. In response to a long march staged in 2007 from central India to Delhi mostly by farmers displaced by development projects, the central government had promised a new blueprint for land reforms and the setting up of a commission to oversee that exercise at the federal level. A report has been submitted now by a

committee constituted by the federal rural development ministry and headed by the rural development minister advocating land reforms and ceilings on holdings along the lines implemented in Bengal, but going a tad further. Its recommendations are not binding. But they must be implemented to drive further the government's rural reform and poverty-alleviation programme. The lessons of welfarism and equity-centric, inclusive development seems to have been learnt by the political managers of the Congress party. Possibly one reason why Planning Commission Deputy Chairperson Montek Singh Ahluwalia did not make it to the finance ministry despite the Prime Minister's generous backing.

The year 2010 will present the big challenge of climbing out of the meltdown pit and the finance minister, veteran Pranab Mukherjee, has indicated expansionary policies will be pursued even if budgetary prudence is a casualty in the short term. And populism need not be the dirty word it is in the lexicon of technocrats, economists and the middle classes in general. Perhaps there will be a need to frame debates about 'socialism' and the 'market' in more creative, non-doctrinaire ways so that real questions about equity and entitlements are not obscured by smoke and mirrors.

Finally, another question has been posed by commentators about federalism, in a general sense, as it applies to the functioning of Indian democracy. The 1990s and beyond have seen the intensification of processes of regionalisation. It is tempting to argue that the growth of regional parties in this period was a response to the weakness of the federal impulse in the Indian political setup, which tended towards greater centralism largely because of the historical conjunctures that attended the transfer of power in 1946-47 and the transition from colonial to constitutional rule. The fragmentation of the party-political sphere allowed, in fact, a greater interplay between central authority and regional ambitions and allowed the articulation of regional/sub-national demands in various arenas. This had been necessitated all the more because of Indira Gandhi's excessive centralisation of the Congress party, which had blocked the channels within the organisation for the articulation of regional aspirations and powers in what was effectively a dominant-party system.

An argument now being tested is that the ascendancy of the Congress party, with over 200 seats in parliament (up from 145-odd) and the simultaneous diminution of the strength of regional parties signal a new phase in Indian politics in which the electorate has indicated that it would prefer a stronger, more coherent central authority in the shape of a stronger national party to ensure better governance and a smoother development push. The argument is perhaps overstated. Even though the number of seats gained by the national parties— the Congress and the BJP combined— has grown somewhat, the regional parties remain powerful forces in Orissa, Bengal, Bihar, UP and Tamil Nadu especially (contributing over forty per cent of the seats in the Lok Sabha) and in Punjab, Jammu and Kashmir and the northeast. What is more important is that as long as the channels for the articulation of regional aspirations remain constricted in the formal state sphere, they will find an expression in the party system. India can look forward in the medium term at the very least to the persistence of a seriously fractured party political space and a political process that is extremely competitive.

The parties themselves are now confronted with a new set of choices as they hunker down to make sense of what has transpired. For the Congress the process will be the hardest because it will be woven into the job of exercising the mandate it has been given. On the economy front anything other than a further push in a welfarist direction seems unthinkable. The choices already made seem to rule out an uncritical dose of liberalisation. On the social and political fronts, it is to be hoped that the Congress party will try to keep a rein on its repeated, regrettable and wholly opportunistic tendency to appease obscurantism and play to the Sangh Parivar gallery with its soft majoritarian politics. It is to be hoped that these elections will have disabused it of the notion that it is either necessary or particularly productive.

The Left has two sets of tasks. As a political force on the national stage, it will have to decide first on priorities. Is it more important to contribute towards strengthening the ground left of the centre of the political spectrum by pushing the government towards a set of policies that maximise welfare and equity, as it has productively done over most of the tenure of the last government, and strengthen the ramparts against the sectarian politics and anti-modernist, obscurantist social vision of the BJP and its holy family, or is it more important to open the front against western imperialism as a matter of priority? In other words, should it still pursue the fantastic, almost surreal, third front alternative with the most opportunistic, unprincipled cast that can possibly be assembled or should it try to resurrect some kind of relationship with the Congress in time to come?

The regional parties, as motley a crew as can possibly be imagined, have their local compulsions much of which has to do with the intricate arithmetic of caste and community. But all of them will perhaps be forced to reflect on how best to remain relevant on the national stage— whether that end will best be served by articulating the interests of their regional constituencies within the federal system and its development paradigm and pushing growth models for marginalised regions and social groups or by further consolidating their constituencies through various sectarian idioms of mobilisation.

The BJP will probably not count itself fortunate that it has sufficient leisure to reflect on the lessons of election 2009, but that it does have time and leisure is scarcely in doubt. Its ideological mentor, the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh, has already made it clear that in its estimation the party's electoral debacle was a result of too small a dose of sectarian medicine and bad campaign mismanagement. Many in the BJP, however, feel that the sectarian medicine was itself at fault and a campaign of sanitisation is necessary to reposition the party. Clearly, the electorate, or a substantial section thereof, did not buy the over-the-top theatrical fanaticism indulged in by Varun Gandhi, despite the fact that he himself won handsomely from his UP constituency. Nor did trotting out Gujarat Chief Minister Narendra Modi help overmuch.

Modi's experiment in polarisation has unquestionably worked electorally in Gujarat. Equally clearly that experiment is bound to fail on a nationwide scale in the kind of dazzlingly diverse stage that India provides, as indeed it has. Modi in his incarnation of the butcher of Gujarat cannot be

acceptable as a pan-Indian leader, let alone a candidate for high office. He himself realises that as evidenced by his attempt to reposition himself as a champion of development. For the party, though, this poses a problem. Shorn of its atavistic sectarianism, if that surgical procedure is at all possible, the BJP will cease to be the BJP it will, in fact, be left without an identity. At the same time, the indications are that the Hindutva line has played itself out. It is questionable whether even another high-octane mobilisational initiative replicating the *rathayatra* model of the early 1990s will work. The marginalisation of the BJP and its brand of sectarianism is good news for Indian democracy but it might be a little premature to write off that agenda, given the BJP's success in Karnataka, its new laboratory of majoritarian mobilisation.

There are, certainly, indications that Indian democracy is headed in a sane centre-left direction. Much will depend on how responsibly the current regime acquits itself and how its allies, natural and otherwise go about consolidating what seems to be the new mandate. Results of state elections in Maharashtra, Haryana and Arunachal Pradesh have not indicated any change in direction. Maharashtra has voted in a Congress-led alliance for the third successive time because its lack of delivery was cancelled out by the fact that the opposition parties offered nothing other than a sectarian agenda. In Haryana, too, the Congress party came back to power with a reduced majority as its delivery record was mediocre but the opposition was divided. In Arunachal, the Congress party faced virtually no opposition and it cruised past the finishing line.



Uttar Pradesh, a key battle ground state in 2009

<http://blogs.reuters.com/faithworld/files/2009/04/india-election-ayodhya.jpg>, accessed on 11.01.2010

The time's they are a changing...

Ritoban completed his Masters in Philosophy from the University of Calcutta. Even more than his crazy actions, he is known for his varied musical interests and activities especially in the genres of Rock and Jazz. His band, Cassini's Division, has changed the way people look at original English Rock Music in India. He is also the editorial assistant of *Global South*.



Ritoban Das

Dylan never thought when he wrote this song the in numerous ways it will be interpreted and used all over the world by various people. I found it very appropriate while describing the changes that are taking place in the music scenario of the entire Latin American and African countries. The origin of music is primarily divided into two major sections– the African music and the Oriental music. This broad division is not very accurate, but still for the sake of convenience, scholars and musicians all over the world have always used this division. In this write up we, shall restrict ourselves only to African music. The music that originated from Africa and eventually came to Latin America with African slaves and then got mixed with the local tribal art forms is what is known today as the Afro-Cuban music. Afro-Cuban music is a pretty vast subject and an art form developed over many centuries. This genre of music became very popular all over Latin America and gradually spread to the North American states and also to Europe.

The obvious question then, is how do we relate modern day music with this traditional, mostly aboriginal, form of music? To understand that first let us gaze into the world of modern music as it is today. Many of the predominant music genres in

today's world such as Jazz, Blues, Rock, Hip-hop, R&B... All have in some form or the other, in their roots, some element of this Afro-Cuban music. Though it is difficult to point to any one art form as the root of all other genres, still the music played by the black people whether in a North Country or a South Country shared some commonalities. The tribal folk music of Africa and Latin America became more polished and sophisticated as they were adopted by other genres. For example, there have been great Latin jazz ensembles like the "Buena Vista Social Club"¹ from Cuba. Famous Blues guitarist "Ry Cooder"² collaborated with this ensemble and produced brilliant albums which are landmarks in the history of Jazz music. Another very prominent figure who introduced Brazilian music to the whole world is Airtó Moreira,³ who went to the United States in the early sixties and collaborated with jazz giants like late Joe Zawinul⁴ and Miles Davis⁵. There are a number of such legendary musicians and bands that have enriched the world of music with their contribution of Afro-Cuban art forms. Afro-Cuban genres like mambo, salsa, cha cha cha etc have played pivotal roles in shaping the modern music scene. For example, "Son" music which was widely popular in Cuba was a major hit in the U.S. market in the sixties. One of the pioneers in this genre was the Tito Puente orchestra and their massive hit "Oye como va" became a sensational chartbuster.

Airtó Moreira



[Http://www.healdsburgjazzfestival.org/images/musicians-2009/hjf_2009-airto_moreira-03.jpg](http://www.healdsburgjazzfestival.org/images/musicians-2009/hjf_2009-airto_moreira-03.jpg),
accessed on 08.01.2010

But this write up is not about how Afro-Cuban music has enriched the world music and has been one of the main pillars of modern genres of music, but rather about how this lovely genre of music is losing ground to these modern musical genres, which somewhere down the line has Afro-Cuban music as one of their roots. A classic example of this is the eighties death metal band Sepultura.⁶ This band is from the city of Belo Horizonte in Brazil. But they do not play the traditional music of Brazil, which is Samba. Rather they chose metal which is a very popular genre of music among the youth of today's world. Metal is an offshoot of the wider genre of Rock music, which in turn has been born out of Jazz and Blues where Afro-Cuban patterns are used amply. So in a way the cycle is complete.

But responses to outside influences in Latin American music has not been uniform and it has

even called for state intervention occasionally. For example, in the early 1950s Cuban artistes began to cover American bands and translated the lyrics to Spanish. But the Fidel Castro government banned rock music from Cuba calling it a corrupt American influence. Later this ban was lifted and the Cuban rock scene began to flourish once more. Recent rock bands like Moneda Dura and Los Kent are very popular within the country.



Buena Vista Social Club

[Http://amyha.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/buena-vista-social-club.jpg](http://amyha.files.wordpress.com/2009/05/buena-vista-social-club.jpg), accessed on 08.01.2010

Another very famous artiste who has emerged out of Latin America and has become a global pop icon in recent years is Shakira. Shakira Mebarak is originally from Columbia who sings and produces an earthy concoction of Latin, Arabic and Rock music. Somehow Shakira is one of the very few artistes who are trying to establish the root music in a new format and present it to the public at large.

Miles Davis



[Http://www.mosaiko.gr/admin/calendar/images_large/1192009140006_MilesDavis20.346181151.jpg](http://www.mosaiko.gr/admin/calendar/images_large/1192009140006_MilesDavis20.346181151.jpg), accessed on 08.01.2010

When it comes to the African continent the scene is even more interesting. Almost everywhere in this continent more and more artistes are choosing modern genres of music rather than traditional forms. For example the band Metal Orizon from Botswana calls themselves a tribal African rock band.⁷ But somewhere down the line the richness of the older genres are getting diluted in these new avatars. One of the traditional and most popular forms of music in Africa is the Soukous⁸ music, also known as the African Rumba, that originates from Congo. Antoine Kolosoy, also known as Papa Wendo, became the first global star of African Rumba, touring Europe and North America in the

1940s and 1950s with his regular band, Victoria Bakolo Miziki. But this traditional music has also been changed and modified to suit modern tastes. The fast Soukous music currently dominating dance floors in central, eastern and western Africa is called Soukous Ndombolo. Dany Engobo, Awilo Longomba are some of the artistes who are very famous in Congo. Some of these bands have modified the traditional Soukous style into a more upbeat and groovy version closer to rock and hip-hop. Other than these traditional musicians, there are a number of artistes of African origin who have tried to take African music to a more global stage, utilising popular culture. A person who must be mentioned in this regard is the Senegalese percussionist and singer Youssou'n dor⁹. He fuses the traditional Senegalese Mbalax with eclectic jazz and hip-hop. Youssou is held as one of the greatest African musician of all times. Another great African musician who is one of the top chart artiste in the world is the Senegalese singer, rapper Aliaune Badara Akaon Thiam, better known as Akon. Akon has already bagged a grammy award for his single "Smack That". He uses R&B and Hip-Hop to explore his African roots.

Youssou'n dor



Http://media-2.web.britannica.com/eb-media/30/94730-004-D5ED0481.jpg, accessed on 08.01.2010

Thus this new trend of heading away from traditional music in Africa and Latin America is a change that should be viewed positively. As in any culture, change is the only constant. That change, if it happens to enrich and enhance the traditional format, should always be embraced with an open mind. This coming of full cycle for these age old traditional musical forms is the sign of a revival in a new avatar.

- 1 [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buena_Vista_Social_Club_\(album\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Buena_Vista_Social_Club_(album)), accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ry_Cooder, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 3 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airto_Moreira, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 4 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Joe_Zawinul, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 5 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Miles_Davis, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 6 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sepultura>, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 7 <http://www.soundclick.com/bands/default.cfm?bandID=33027>, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 8 <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Soukous>, accessed on 5 November 2009.
- 9 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Youssou_N'Dour, accessed on 5 November 2009.

Brief Report on the 1959 Nyasaland (Malawi) State of Emergency Anniversary Conference

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Wapulumuka Oliver Mulwafu

The Department of History at Chancellor College, University of Malawi, in collaboration with Malawianist scholars at home and abroad, hosted an international conference to mark the fiftieth anniversary of the Nyasaland (Malawi) State of Emergency (3 March 1959). The conference took place at Chancellor College in Zomba, Malawi, from 27 to 28 July 2009. It was jointly funded by the Journal of

Southern African Studies (UK), the Smuts Research Fund at the University of Cambridge (UK), the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS, Netherlands) and the University of Malawi.



The theme of the conference was *The Political Significance of the 1959 Nyasaland State of Emergency to Modern Southern Africa* and topics discussed included:

- Analyses of both the colonial and African perceptions of the event;
- Impact on the nationalist/liberation movement in the southern African region;
- Influence on the post-colonial political and economic development of countries in the region.

The conference was officially opened by the Minister of Education, Science and Technology, Dr. George Chaponda, M. P., who urged the organisers to ensure that proceedings of the conference be published for the benefit of the whole nation. It brought together about sixty Malawianists from the SADC region, United Kingdom, Finland, Canada and the United States of America. A total of twenty two papers were presented over the two days. These were complemented by four eyewitness accounts as well as displays of books and photographs. This conference is an important event in the political history of Malawi, promoting a better understanding of the state of emergency among policymakers, academics, and ultimately all those who were involved in the struggle against colonialism.



Conclusions and Highlights of the Conference

Identity and Historical Context

The Nyasaland State of Emergency was not an isolated event and should be understood in a much wider context of other similar events that happened across Africa and Europe such as the Mau-Mau



Uprising in Kenya. The question of identity of nationalists in the Central African region is also an important consideration. There was only one kind of identity, the central Africanist one, as opposed to several identities within central Africa.

Different Understandings of Violence

Two forms of violence existed during the Emergency— Colonial and African violence. The colonial violence was demonstrated through employing the army to intimidate and kill rioters, harass nationalists, and effect collective punishment. Second, although Africans officially adopted non-violent forms of resistance, in practice, they used different forms of violence in the fight for independence such as arson and destruction of property.



Intelligence Gathering and Testimonies

Collecting information is one of the major themes arising from discussions of the Emergency and the entire colonial period. Our understanding of the event has been further enriched by oral testimonies given by political veterans during the conference.

Significance of Detentions and Imprisonment

Detention camps were much more than simply places where people were victimised. We should reflect on the impact that these camps had on detainees, who forged a new worldview, and which had an impact on later politics.

Future Plans

Recognising the significance of the conference, the organisers informed participants that proceedings would be published in a book, preferably by a local publisher so that majority of Malawians can afford to purchase it. Conference participants were also informed that the Department of History is planning another conference in five years to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of independence.

Recognition of Kings Phiri

The conference took the opportunity to pay special tribute to Kings Phiri who is retiring at the end of the year, after serving the university for thirty six years. In his remarks, John McCracken honoured Phiri for the significant role he played in the education of renowned Malawian historians, such as Elias Mandala, and Paul Tiyaambe Zeleza, and for his involvement in the development of the History Department generally. Finally, the department took the opportunity to thank all partners who had contributed to the success of the conference, particularly the Journal of Southern African Studies (UK), the Smuts Research Fund at the University of Cambridge (UK), and the South-South Exchange Programme for Research on the History of Development (SEPHIS, Netherlands).

African Politics at Crossroads

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Percyslage Chigora

Reviews

Patrick Chabal

***Africa:
The Politics of Suffering and Smiling***
Zed Books, London and New York,
2009, pp. 212,
ISBN 978-1-84277-909-5.



Volume 6 No. 1 January 2010

Understanding African politics has preoccupied African political scientists for quite some time now. A number of theories have been employed in the attempt to comprehend it. The African situation is arguably more complex than that presented by some theorists and commentators. This book by Chabal offers a radical shift in theorising about African politics. It provides a unique approach that touches on the issues that are both pertinent and quotidian and that continue to characterise politics in African society. In doing so, it attempts to offer and proffer an alternative way of approaching, appreciating and comprehending the subject.

The book contains a review of theories that have shaped the understanding of African politics. He offers a justification of the necessity of new approaches in the study of the subject and this is well-reflected in the introduction and the conclusion.

This justification is put into perspective in terms of “there (being) a need to provide an analytical framework that does justice to the process of social change actually taking place in Africa today” (p. 11). The author recommends “what is needed now is a new approach to the same questions: to cast a different light on contemporary Africa that will provide insights rather than certainties” (p. 185).

Chabal’s theoretical reflections on African politics also take into consideration the perspectives that shape political behaviour. On issues of existence, the author has critically interrogated issues of origin, identity and locality and how they shape political behaviour. The author has also focussed on new issues that are pertinent concerning the politics of being. He stresses that “because most political theories of Africa rehearse the same arguments about the primacy of certain forms of identification, especially ethnicity. They overlook other, arguably more important, questions concerning meanings of the individual, the import of origin, the significance of age and the nature of authority” (p. 42). The author also shows the importance of kin, reciprocity and who is regarded a stranger in African politics in seeking to understand how people relate to each other. For the author “what makes African social relations what they are is the fact that individuals conceive of themselves in terms of the multiple and multifaceted relations which link them with others within ever-expanding and overlapping concentric spheres of identity” (p. 43). Chabal analyses the issues of morality, rationality and agency, and how they shape belief systems, in turn informing any understanding of African politics.

While dealing with political participation, the author weaves together issues of subject, client and citizen, analysing how they contribute to the comprehension of African politics. He surmises “Africans are unhappy with the form of political participation they are offered in post colony” (p. 105). He exposed the predicament for the Africans thus: “(F)or them, therefore, political partaking is often the least bad combination of subject, client and citizen they contrive in the circumstances” (p. 105). He goes on to argue that “ordinary Africans live in an economic world that is severely constrained. What we observe today is a situation in which historical, socio-cultural and political factors conspire to offer politicians excessive opportunities and deny the populace the means to thrive” (p. 126). In this context, Chabal explains the survival of Africans within the frameworks of informalisation, networking and migration. At the same time, the process that shape survival has an impact as “it makes it more difficult to achieve reforms that would contribute to greater political institutionalisation and more promising economic development prospects in Africa” (p. 149).

In what the author termed the politics of suffering, Chabal grapples with issues of conflict, violence, and illness. He offers an insightful analysis of the causes of the phenomenon. These three problems in Africa, for the author, “undermine the belief in the effectiveness of the state; they contribute to the breakdown of social order; and they boost a process of ‘retraditionalisation’ that is not favorable to development” (pp. 170-171).

The book is recommended for anyone, including academics, seeking knowledge on the workings of African politics.

Another Unmasking of a Prime Minister

Jerome Teelucksingh is a lecturer in the Department of History at the University of West Indies, Trinidad. He has recently published *Caribbean-Flavoured Presbyterianism: Education as a Prescription for Socio-Political Development, 1868-2008*.

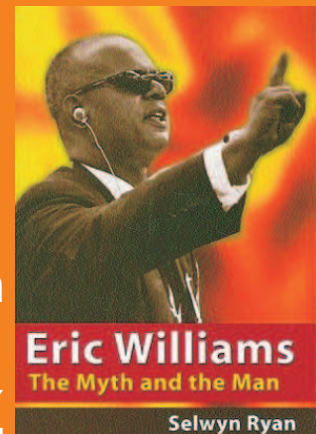


Jerome Teelucksingh

Reviews

Selwyn Ryan

Eric Williams: The Myth and the Man,
UWI Press, Mona, Jamaica, 2009, pp. 842.



Some would have thought that another biography on Eric Williams was not possible, especially when one considers the impressive historiography existing on Williams. Others might have asked is it possible to present new findings and interpretations on a topic which seems exhausted? Selwyn Ryan has sought to prove them wrong. However, the book remains similar to other biographies which place Williams within the historical framework of Trinidad and Tobago.

Three reviewers, Louis Regis, Lloyd King and Bridget Brereton, have commended and endorsed this biography. Interestingly, these reviews were published in the *Trinidad and Tobago Review*, a publication founded by Lloyd Best, one of the strongest critics of Eric Williams. Nonetheless, the public should be ever mindful that the merit of a book is not determined by its size. Thus Ryan's lengthy compilation should not be too eagerly embraced as an outstanding book.

The road to political stardom for Williams had a few potholes. Ryan provides

an illuminating account of the adroit manner in which Williams was also to rebound after being rejected by the Anglo-American Caribbean Commission. C. L. R. James is correct in believing that the experience at the Commission was a crucial foundation in training Williams for a leadership role. Furthermore the public lectures and membership in local groups as the Bachacs, which Ryan highlighted, was also a component in the grooming of a future prime minister.

One noteworthy aspect of the study is that it emphasises the difficulty of assessing the political legacy of Eric Williams. An illustration is the reaction of Williams to Black Power in 1970 and the mutiny. Ryan in Chapter 26 provides opinions from Williams's detractors but unfortunately questions still remain unanswered- was A. N. R. Robinson, a former minister of the People's National Movement (PNM), accurate in claiming that Williams sought help from five foreign governments in 1970? Should readers accept Bernard Primus's argument that Williams was afraid of Black Power radicals and trade unions? Ryan mentioned that the mutineers were "completely outmanoeuvred by Williams" (p. 390). Ryan should have considered the element of luck and the fact that the mutineers were not willing to senselessly kill innocent persons, as factors which favoured a relatively peaceful end of the mutiny.

The unfortunate inclusion of questionable sources certainly undermines the scholarly endeavour. An illustration is the conversation between Dodderidge Alleyne, former permanent secretary to Williams and head of the public service, and his wife in which he forgives Williams a few hours before the prime minister's death (p. 554). The author's use of anonymous sources would certainly raise doubts in the minds of readers as to the veracity of statements and conclusions. For instance, the esteemed professor emeritus casually used words as "Another practitioner", "several commentators" and 'another view' (p. 772). Additionally, the statement, "Some of the men around Williams were aware of his mood swings in a general way" (p. 777) is vague and suggests that a leader was not expected to have mood changes.



Eric Williams

<http://www.mainlib.uwi.tt/divisions/wi/collsp/summaries/images/exlgEWilliams.jpg>, accessed on 08.01.2010

Ryan presents testimonies which strongly suggest that the prime minister was bipolar and committed to 'constructive suicide'. However, these are dubious claims since Williams never underwent a psychiatric evaluation. And, unless Williams was on strong medication, it is difficult to establish such a motive. The display of suspicious, distrustful and paranoid attitudes by Williams cannot be easily dismissed, especially when one considers the era when the CIA had removed Cheddi Jagan and were intent on ridding Cuba of Fidel Castro.

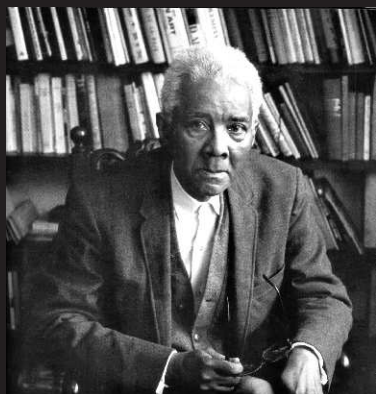
Ryan painstakingly attempted to deconstruct the enigma of Williams in Chapter 45, "The Myth of Eric Williams", but sometimes contributed to reinforcing this myth. For instance, Ryan contended, "Indeed, Williams often wanted to hurry history along, so impatient was he to ensure that he accomplished his assigned tasks" (p. 761). Such a statement suggests superhuman qualities in attempting to "hurry history along".

In addition to the rehash of historical facts, there are some structural weaknesses which could have been avoided. For instance, in chapters 37 and 40 there is some overlapping since both dealt

with important aspects of culture- carnival and calypso. Likewise, both Chapter 26 “The Roaring Seventies” and Chapter 30 “Bloody Tuesday and the “Unmixing of Oil and Sugar”” dealt with the same era and should have been merged. Ideology and the direction of the economy are inter-related, thus it seems odd that Ryan’s emphasis on Cuba and the Soviet Union in Chapter 38 was not incorporated in Chapter 32 “The Move to the ‘Left’: Industrial Policy in the Post-1970 Era.”

One lesson emanating from the book is that in the post-Williams era, party politics and governance remain virtually unchanged in Trinidad and Tobago. These include dictatorial tendencies of the prime minister, continued corruption of public officials, wastage of taxpayers’ money on trivial projects, racial and religious discrimination, occasional discussion of constitutional reform, attempts at political union and the pathetic fragmentation among opposition parties.

The author must, however, be commended for utilising a diverse range of primary and secondary sources, but should have also included viewpoints propounded in the annual Eric Williams Memorial Lectures delivered in Port-of-Spain (Trinidad and Tobago) and Miami (Florida). Despite the shortcomings, the book will be a welcome addition for scholars and admirers of the PNM and Eric Williams. It delves into the personal and public challenges of a colourful personality who had a love-hate relationship with the citizenry. Such a study will allow readers to trace the evolution of a young, independent nation.



C. L. R. James

http://www.meppublishers.com/online/crb/16/images/cb16-1-6_prev.jpg,
accessed on 08.01.2010.



ANR Robinson

<http://www.caribbeanperspective.com/leaders/images/debate.jpg>,
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