

**Bryant C. Freeman, Ph.D.**

**Third-World Folk Beliefs  
and Practices:  
Haitian Medical  
Anthropology**



**Institute of Haitian Studies  
University of Kansas**

**La Presse Evangélique**

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and Practices:  
Haitian Medical Anthropology**

Dedicated to the memory of Haiti's great physician-missionary-archaeologist, Dr. William Hodges, and to its great physician-humanitarian, Dr. W. Larimer Mellon, Jr.

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*Medicine in Haiti III*

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**Cover: "Study of a Black" (possibly in preparation  
for an Adoration of the Magi), by Paolo Veronese  
(1528-1588).**

*"The greater want goes beyond medicine."*  
(Dr. W. Larimer Mellon, Jr.)

## FOREWORD

The present work was created principally for that group of human beings - the most admirable we have ever known - who devote a large, or small, portion of their lives to helping the Haitian people by practicing medicine in extremely isolated, difficult outposts of rural Haiti. Our principal aim is to acquaint those new to the rural Haitian scene with what many (but certainly not all) patients may believe, and to present a sampling of the cultural barriers to be confronted. We hope to be of use as well to those interested in the mindset of rural Haiti in particular, and in the Third World in general.

"Working within the system." The experience of many physicians has indicated that the best way to begin to achieve results in a peasant community is by working with rather than against many of the commonly-held folk health beliefs - as long as these are not definitely contraindicated. The age-old therapeutic beliefs and practices of the Haitian countryside continue to influence greatly today's patients. A combination of modern medical practice, with a bit of folk theory, may be at first the best way to achieve compliance on the part of the patient, and to ensure that there will be follow-up visits. Customs such as the five-day postpartum lying-in period, or the wearing of the infant umbilical band, will be continued whatever the Western-type doctor preaches - and strong, overt opposition to such practices will usually only undermine confidence in the physician.

Much of this material has been gleaned during the numerous consultations we were privileged to attend while

working in ten medical missions scattered throughout rural Haiti, as well as through general observations gained over a 30-year period. A great deal of this information, however, is thanks to the late Dr. William Hodges, of the Hôpital Le Bon Samaritain at Limbé. The privilege of sitting at his table, often until late into the night, was one of the most illuminating experiences we have had.

Of use to the foreign health-care provider in Haiti could be our *Haitian Creole-English English-Haitian Creole Medical Dictionary, with Glossary of Food and Drink* (Port-au-Prince: La Presse Evangélique, Revised Edition, 1997; pp. 198 - available in the United States from the University of Kansas Oread Bookstore). In addition to the dictionary, it also contains a pronunciation guide, and detailed charts - labeled in both Haitian and English - of the face, the front and rear of the body, arm and hand, leg and foot, baby teeth and adult teeth, and the eye. Also of use could be our *Haitian-English Medical Phraseology: For Doctors, Dentists, Nurses, and Paramedics, with accompanying tapes* (Port-au-Prince: La Presse Evangélique, 1997; pp. 166 - also available in the United States from the University of Kansas Oread Bookstore). Finally, we would like especially to recommend the very personal account of a young American M.D. who spent a year as a generalist working in a Port-au-Prince hospice for the sick and dying as well as in a foundling home: Joseph F. Bentivegna, M.D., *The Neglected and Abused: A Physician's Year in Haiti* (2275 Silas Deane Highway, Rocky Hill, Conn. 06067: Michelle Pub. Co., 1991; pp. viii-176). This is one of only two required texts in our basic course on Haiti at the University of Kansas - "he tells it like it is."

The Appendix contains one hundred Haitian proverbs related to health and sickness, in addition to those contained within the text. In Haiti, proverbs punctuate everyday conversation, and constitute a valuable insight into Haitian psychology.

We wish also to express our special debt to Professor Michel Laguerre of the University of California at Berkeley, to Professors Gerald F. Murray and Maria D. Alvarez of USAID/Haiti, to the late Alfred Métraux, to Dr. Ary Bordes and Andrea Couture of the Haitian Public Health Program, and to Colonel Jean-Claude Delbeau. For welcoming us into their medical world, sharing both wisdom and hospitality, we wish to thank the late Dr. W. Larimer Mellon Jr., Mrs. Gwen Mellon, Mr. William Dunn, Dr. Michel Jean-Baptiste, and the late Dr. Roger Larose, as well as the other members of the Hôpital Albert Schweitzer staff in Deschappelles; Dr. Brinson McGowan, Carol McGowan, and Dr. Louis Philippe of the Centre Médical Emmanuel in Cayes-Jacmel; the late Dr. Abel Gousse of Jacmel; Gail M. Boaz of La Vallée-Jacmel; Dr. Reynold Monsanto of the Hôpital pour les Yeux in Cayes; Reverend Wallace Turnbull and Eleanor Turnbull of the Hôpital de Fermathe; Dr. Salvatore Molica of the Centre Médical de Plaisance; Dr. Paul Kincaid of Lawrence, Kansas; as well as the staffs of the Centre Médical Cité Lumière in Cayes, the Hôpital de Bonne Fin, and the Hôpital Sainte-Croix in Léogane. For help in the preparation of the text, we are grateful to Jennifer Burtner, Pam LeRow, Lynn Porter, and Stephanie Freeman. Finally, let us express our special gratitude to Dr. Catherine C. McGowan, who collaborated with us at every stage of this work.

Lawrence, Kansas  
December 1997

Bryant C. Freeman

**N.B. Folk beliefs not otherwise stated are indicated by \*...\***



## ENTRIES

- |                     |                |                      |
|---------------------|----------------|----------------------|
| Foreword            | Bonesetters    | Dates                |
| Abandonment         | Breast-        | Dead (The)           |
| Abortion            | Feeding        | Death                |
| Abscesses           | Breasts        | Deforestation        |
| Accidents           | Bruises        | Demonstrations       |
| Achievements        | Burns          | Dentistry            |
| Addresses           | Buttocks       | Dependency           |
| Adoption            | Cannibalism    | Development          |
| Adultery            | Cemeteries     | Diabetes             |
| Age                 | Change         | Diarrhea             |
| AIDS                | Chayote        | Diaspora             |
| <i>Akamil</i>       | Squash         | Dignity              |
| Albinism            | Child Abuse    | Dilatation and       |
| Alcohol             | Childbirth     | Curettage            |
| Amulets             | Child Growth   | Dispensaries         |
| Anger               | Child          | Dissociation         |
| Animals             | Mortality      | Distance             |
| Animal              | Circumcision   | Divination/          |
| Sacrifice           | Cleft Palate   | Diagnosis            |
| Aphrodisiacs        | Colors         | Dreams               |
| Attitudes           | Common-Law     | Dress                |
| Autopsies           | Unions         | "Drop in the         |
| Bananas             | Conception     | Bucket"              |
| Baptism             | Condoms        | Earlobes             |
| Baths               | Confidence     | (Pierced)            |
| <i>Bawon Samdi</i>  | Conjunctivitis | Eclampsia            |
| Beggars             | Conservatism   | Economics            |
| Beliefs             | Consultations  | Edema                |
| Big Three           | Contagion      | Eggs                 |
| Birthmarks          | Contraception  | Elephantiasis        |
| <i>Biskèt Tonbe</i> | Cooperation    | Emotivity            |
| Blood               | Cost           | <i>Endispozisyon</i> |
| Blood               | Cupping -      | Environment          |
| Donations           | Glasses        | Envy                 |
| Body                | Cures          | Epilepsy             |
| Language            | Cures vs.      | <i>Espedisyon</i>    |
| <i>Bòkò</i>         | Relief         | Evil Eye             |

Expectations (Health Care Providers')	Girls	Intercourse
Expectations (Patients')	Godparents	IUD
Experience	Gonorrhea	Jaundice
Eye Charts	Government	Jealousy
Faith-and- Herb Healers	Gratitude	Kidney Stones
Falling	Greetings	<i>Kriz de nè</i>
Falling Star	Guardian Angels	Kwashiorkor
Family	Hair	Land Titles
Planning	Haiti	Language
Family Support	Handouts	Leeches
Fat	Handshakes	Left- Handedness
Fatalism	Health	<i>Lemò</i>
Fetus	Health Education	Lethargy
<i>Fibwòm</i>	Hemorrhaging	Limes
Fingernail	Hemorrhoids	Lip Lacerations
Fish	Herbs	<i>Lougawou</i>
Flexibility	History-Taking	Magic
Flogging	Homosexuality	<i>Maladi Bondye</i>
Folk Healers	Hospital	Malnutrition
Folk Medicine	Hot/Cold Imbalance	Mangoes
Fontanel	Houses	Marriage
Food	Human Sacrifice	Meals (Rural)
Foreign Aid	Hydrocele	Meat
<i>Fredi</i>	Hypochondria	Meconium
French	Hysteria	Medical Education (Western- Style)
Frogs	Illness	Medical Theory
Fruit	Impotence	Medication
Funeral	Incest	Medicinal Plants
Processions	Infanticide	Menarche
Funerals	Infant Mortality	Menopause
Garlic	Informality	Menstrual Cramps
Gas	Injectionists	
Geophagy	Injections	
Germs	Insanity	

Menstruation	Physical	Role Model
Metamorphoses	Violence	Salt
Midnight	Pictorial	Sanitation
Midwives	Illiteracy	<i>Sanpwèl</i>
Milk	Pilgrimages	Sapodilla
"Milk Sack"	Pill (The)	Scarification
Milk (Spoiled)	Pineapple	Sensitivity
Miscarriage	Placebos	Sex Education
Moon	Placenta	Sex of Child
Motion	Pleurisy	Sexual
Sickness	Pluralism	Fantasies
Mourning	Point!	Sexuality
Mud	Poisoning	<i>Sezisman</i>
Mumps	Politeness	Sin
Mutton	Political	Skin
Names	Problems	Slapping
Neonates	Population	Sneezing
Night	Posters	Sore Throat
Noon	Postpartum	Specialists
November	Beliefs and	Spell-Casting
Objects	Practices	Sperm
Okra	Poverty	Spinach
Oranges	Prayer Paper	Spitting
Orchiectomy	Pregnancy	Status
Ostentation	Prescriptions	Sterility
Outreach	Priapism	Sterilization of
Overpopulation	Prognosis	Equipment
Pain	Prostitution	Stethoscope
Paralysis	Protein	Still-Born
Paramedics	Psychology of	Stoicism
Paranoia	the Haitian	Sugar
Paternity	Puberty Rites	Suicide
Payment	Public Hospitals	Surgery
Peasants	Radio	Teeth
<i>Pedisyon</i>	Rain	Teething
Penis	Rashes	Tetanus
Permissiveness	Religion	Time
Pharmacies	Reproductive	<i>Timoun</i>
Photographs	Capacity	Tobacco

Tombs	Weaning
Towel	Western
Traditional Medicine	Medicine
Triage	Wheelchair
Truth	Whooping Cough
Tuberculosis	Wi
Twins	Womb
Ulcers	Worms
Umbilicus	Wounds
Umbilicus (Swollen)	Yawning
Underdevelop- ment	Yaws
Unmarried Woman	Zombis
Urine	<b>Appendix -</b>
Vaccination	<b>100 Haitian</b>
Vasectomy	<b>Proverbs on</b>
Virginity	<b>Health and</b>
Vision	<b>Sickness:</b>
Vitality	Aging
Vomiting	Birthing
Voodoo	Death
Voodoo and	Diet
Conversion to	Eyes
Protes- tantism	Forbearance
Voodoo and	Health
Western-Type	Health
Medicine	Precautions
Voodoo	Hunger
Consultations	Illness
Voodoo Cures	Medication
Voodoo Death	Pain
Voodoo	Pediatrics
Possession	Quackery
Wakes	Recuperation
Water	Self-Treatment
	Sexuality
	Survival
	Teeth

**ABANDONMENT** A common problem at many clinics, especially in the case of a small, undernourished or neglected child, with the family deliberately disappearing, believing death to be inevitable. Also overwhelming poverty, or deaths in the family, can be a cause. However this is quite contrary to Haitian thinking, as there is usually a grandmother, aunt or godmother, to take care of the child. Nevertheless babies are found "left over" in clinic waiting rooms at the end of a busy day. Since there are no regular agencies in Haiti for abandoned children, the task falls to churches and charitable hospitals. Thus there is the problem of becoming inadvertently an adoption agency - and for a Haitian family it is often easier to take in a poor child as an unpaid domestic servant, rather than a sickly foundling or abandoned child. (See ADOPTION and TIMOUN.)

**ABORTION** (*jete pitit, avòtman*) Severely condemned by both sexes: crime against God and State, whether mother single or not. "Done only by women from other places." Reasoning: if single, there will always be a female relative to raise the child. Apparently an attitude inspired by more than just Roman Catholic teachings.

Most commonly used methods: special herbal teas; self-induced *fredi* (q.v.); operation by a Western-type physician.

**ABSCESSSES** \*Caused by blood clots formed as the result of a fall.\*

**ACCIDENTS** Often suspected to be due to human malice, jealousy or greed, using the paid services of a *bòkò* (Voodoo sorcerer). Thus the victim's job or possessions can be taken by another. The failure of Western medicine to effect a cure often causes the accident to be seen as having definitely been caused by a Voodoo-inspired curse.

**ACHIEVEMENTS** Notable medical advances in recent times in Haiti: eradication of yaws, yellow fever, and smallpox. Haiti has also become, unfortunately for its own well-being, a major exporter of physicians as well as some nurses. (See **MEDICAL EDUCATION - WESTERN STYLE.**)

**ADDRESSES** Many, especially among the urban poor, really do not know their exact address, making follow-up home visits in pediatric and family planning programs difficult or impossible. Adjacent landmarks are often the only useful guide. Also, especially in the city, there is much transience, due to the inability to pay the rent. Added to this is the element of shame concerning the dwelling, or the sexual liaison.

**ADOPTION** Difficult. In the case of an abandoned child of unknown origin, there is often a lingering thought that the child might not be human, or of the real parents suddenly appearing to make demands. Or the child could introduce low-class, peasant manners into an elite home.

**ADULTERY** Severely chastized in a woman, accepted as more or less a normal fact of life for a man.

**AGE** Often quite difficult to estimate. Long-term malnutrition or undernourishment can bring about pitiful results in the development of the human frame. An 18-year-old can look 12, or the hardships of life can make a 40-year-old appear 60.

Often a patient will have only a very approximate idea of his/her age. In former times, a child's mother would date the birth by the president in office at the time. However with the Duvaliers in office from 1957-86, this method has broken down, to be replaced by the more disastrous of the tropical storms.

See APPENDIX: Aging.

AIDS (*SIDA*) When first appeared, typically diagnosed as one more blood disorder, tuberculosis, or an evil spell created by human malice or jealousy.

In 1978 occurred the first known AIDS-related death in Haiti. In 1988 it was found that 10.5% of seemingly healthy Port-au-Prince adults were HIV positive, and 42% of the prostitutes. In 1990 Haiti was declared one of the world's twenty most affected nations. In January 1991 it was reported that in Haiti the number of female AIDS victims was approximately the same as for males. More recently, over half of the children under 18 months of age in the capital's orphanages tested HIV positive. (See also *TIMOUN*.)

It has continued spreading inexorably along Haiti's major roads, and working its way into the interior. A June 1996 report of the Albert Schweitzer Hospital at Deschapelles lays forth the scope of the problem as concerns one relatively isolated, representative district:

- In 1992, 20% of its out-patients required to have blood drawn for any reason were HIV positive;
- Since 1994 it has identified 1,000 new HIV cases;
- One-quarter to one-third of its tuberculosis patients are HIV positive.

The so-called medical evidence placing Haitians among the four high-risk H's (heroin addicts, homosexuals, hemophiliacs, and Haitians), creating untold suffering for Haitians abroad, was finally declared false by the Center for Disease Control in Atlanta on April 8, 1985. Haitians were the only group to have been singled out "because of who they were rather than what they did" (Robert Lawless). The damage by the press was done, however, and its effects still remain.

## AIDS (*SIDA*) (con't)

The Red Cross ban on blood donations from Haitians or from foreigners having been to Haiti was finally lifted in December 1990. Ironically, now that proper screening is possible with donor blood, it appears that with Haiti's high incidence of disease and infant mortality, the blood of surviving Haitians is uncommonly rich in protective anti-bodies.

One of the most convincing arguments presented to support the view that AIDS was introduced into Haiti by foreign homosexuals is that its first Haitian victims were centered in the areas most frequented by tourists. Haiti's poverty forced many heterosexual males into homosexual prostitution. (See *HOMOSEXUALITY*.)

\*AIDS was a conspiracy invented by the CIA as a means to reduce the population of Haiti, thereby lessening the chances of a violent revolution. More efficient than using guns, and far more acceptable on the international scene.\*

\*There is no danger of AIDS if sexual intercourse is carried out while in the ocean.\*

A certain attitude has occasionally been noted: "I am HIV positive, so I want others to be also" - thus condoms with holes.

The perceived threat of AIDS infection has devastated the already weak tourist industry but, as has often been stated, it is what one does that counts, not where one goes.

*AKAMIL* Haiti's great weaning food: two parts cereal to one part bean, finely ground and cooked in water with



**AKAMIL** (con't)

seasonings. But often beyond the means of many peasant families because they cannot afford the beans.

**ALBINISM** \*The result of adultery.\*

**ALCOHOL** When there is no rubbing alcohol available as a disinfectant, *kleren* (raw rum) is usually used instead.

**AMULETS** Ubiquitous - and of all sizes and shapes. Can include anything from a *kolye maldjòk* (protective necklace against evil eye) to a *lepitem* (comb-like object worn in hair against headaches) to a *chemizèt twa paman* (undershirt usually made of red, black and white cloth) - all to ward off evil and/or sickness. (Cf. our rabbit's feet and various medallions!) Often slipped into the beds of patients even in a very Western-type hospital.

**ANGER** \*Especially if unexpressed, can seriously disturb body organs and fluids, causing sickness. Mother's milk above all is quite vulnerable.\* (See MILK.)

**ANIMALS** One of the most difficult aspects of the Haitian scene for the foreigner to accept is an apparent lack of sensitivity concerning the suffering of animals. Has so much human suffering stifled feeling for animal suffering?

**ANIMAL SACRIFICE** A frequent part of Voodoo ceremonies, consisting usually of a chicken or (black Haitian) pig, occasionally a goat, and on extremely rare occasions, an ox - depending on the magnitude of the favor requested of the Voodoo spirits. (Cf. the Old Testament in the Christian Bible.) The euphemism for human sacrifice is the "goat without horns."

**APHRODISIACS** \*Roasted peanuts and a bouillon made of starch will do wonders. *Bwa kochon* ("A gnarled root

## APHRODISIACS (con't)

shaped like an exhausted phallus" - Herbert Gold) soaked in raw rum (*kleren*) is also effective.\*

**ATTITUDES** The peasant's attitude is refreshing: all one needs for happiness is health, a little land, a small house, a woman or two, with enough food, drink and clothing - whereas he perceives the White man, with his endless possessions, as making life endlessly complicated, resulting in endless problems.

"White people have acquired cleverness and riches at the expense of sensuality and *joie de vivre*." (Peter Michelmore)

**AUTOPSIES** Permission usually easily obtained from family: many believe that any residual life force will thereby be destroyed, ensuring that the dead person cannot be made into a zombi (*q.v.*).

**BANANAS** \*Together with oranges, are too "cold" (see HOT/COLD IMBALANCE) for small children, and will activate any worms they might have, causing the abdomen to swell.\*

**BAPTISM** \*If a pregnant woman serves as godmother at a baptism, then either the baptized child or her child will die.\*

**BATHS** The baths referred to in Haitian folk remedies are normally ablutions with water in which leaves, ground roots or barks, as well as other substances such as raw rum, have been left to macerate.

During the Christmas season there are special Voodoo "baths" to ensure health for the coming year.

## BATHS (con't)

The most famous sulphur springs in Haiti are probably Sources Puantes (Stinking Springs), not far north of Port-au-Prince on the main highway to Gonaïves and Cape Haitian; considered useful against arthritis, skin problems, etc.

\*River baths are quite dangerous if one has a fever or has recently given birth.\* Certain ones are deemed useful for conceiving boy babies, others for girl babies - or even for restoring lost virginity.

**BAWON SAMDI** (Baron Saturday) \*Death due to supernatural causes can occur only if he and his helpers (*Gede*) consent to it.\* He is commonly represented as wearing a formal black suit and top hat, with white gloves and black cane - not unlike the frequent attire of Dr. François Duvalier.

**BEGGARS** A perennial problem for the foreigner: what to do? Seasoned "Haiti hands" have usually arrived at the solution of giving only to those who have performed some service for them, however slight. Otherwise, there is the distinct possibility of being mobbed.

Several rolls of quarters (best obtained from a bank before leaving the U.S.) will be useful. Small change always appears to be a rare commodity in Haiti. When they run out, a few gourdes will do quite well.

Above all, do not make beggars of the Haitian people. Even small change given to children who have performed no task only makes them expect the same from all foreigners, making it so unpleasant that even fewer tourists come to Haiti.

**BELIEFS** "If you believe in 'these things' and still violate them, you will be harmed; if you don't believe in them, then they can't hurt you." (Wise old Haitian peasant)

"Our myths are ignorance, theirs are literature." (Derek Walcott, Caribbean poet)

**BIG THREE (THE)** *Dyare* (diarrhea), *lafyè* (fever), *vonmisan* (vomiting). Others cite "The Big Two": *doulè* (pain) and *feblès* (weakness; anemia).

**BIRTHMARKS** \*Result of a sudden, unsatisfied desire by the pregnant mother. The shape or color of the birthmark corresponds to the object desired: fruit, wine, a pig, a crab, etc.\*

**BISKÈT TONBE** One of the imprecise complaints which the Western practitioner encounters so frequently. Literally, "fallen breastbone or sternum," translated variously as "to have a sore chest; to be incapacitated (above waist); or, to suffer epigastric discomfort." Many Haitians interpret the problem as being caused by a section of cartilage at the end of the sternum displaced as the result of a blow, fall, or strain. It is most often treated by a faith-and-herb healer who massages the back and abdomen, occasionally tugging on the thumbs, while the patient remains seated with the legs extended. Herbal teas, together with appropriate prayers, are prescribed as well. (Cf. the complaints of *mis tonbe*, literally "fallen coccyx," generally translated as "to have lower-back pain"; *lanmè tonbe*, literally "fallen womb or uterus," translated "to have a prolapsed uterus"; and *lalwèt tonbe*, literally "fallen uvula," translated as "acute respiratory distress, or tonsillitis.")

**BLOOD (*san*)** Considered the most crucial single element in natural illnesses. \*Condition determined by quality, quantity, temperature, color, and place of concentration of

## BLOOD (*san*) (con't)

the blood. Problems are caused especially by strong emotions such as anger, fear, and shock.\* More than a dozen specific pathological conditions are defined:

- move san* (bad blood) - result of anger, fright or shock; causes skin eruptions; major cause of spoiled breast milk (*lèt gate*).
- san boulvèse* (agitated blood) - causes profuse or irregular menses.
- san cho* (hot blood) - causes high fever, nervousness.
- san epè* (thick blood) - result of anger, fright, shock, or hypertension.
- san fèb* (weak blood) - causes physical or mental weakness.
- san frèt* (cold blood) - result of malaria.
- san gate* (spoiled blood) - result of venereal disease; also result of anger, fright or shock.
- san jòn* (yellow blood) - result of bile mixed in the blood.
- san klè* (thin blood) - causes pallor.
- san koupe* (cut off blood) - causes girl never to reach menarche, to become anemic and die.
- san nwa* (black blood) - indicates one is about to die of an incurable disease.
- san pati* (departed blood) - causes woman to miss a menstrual period.
- san pike* (spicy blood) - causes itching.
- san sal* (dirty blood) - result of venereal disease.

## BLOOD (*san*) (con't)

\*Blood can mix with other substances and cause illness; or it can turn into water - particularly from drinking too much alcohol, causing pleurisy or tuberculosis. Other problems can result from insufficient volume and from irregularities of circulation. And the physical characteristics of whichever parent who has more *san fô* (strong blood) at the time of conception will be dominant in the child.\* (Cf. Michel S. Laguerre, in *Ethnicity and Medical Care*, ed. Alan Harwood. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1981.)

\*Women are more subject to emotional crises than men because their blood is "weaker" than men's.\*

Too many blood tests can make some patients suspect that they may become weak, or that the blood is being sold or used for Voodoo purposes. Explain why the test is necessary.

**BLOOD DONATIONS** Many remember only too well the shameful period, especially in the early 1970's, when Haitian blood became a lucrative and major export item for a few profiteers.

'Blood is blood.' It has happened that when family members have been found to be too anemic to donate blood, they have instead brought a horse as donor.

**BODY LANGUAGE** Essential to understanding, especially in a setting where the physician may well not be comprehending all that is said, or may be missing certain unstated cultural references. The patient's non-verbal message can well be more meaningful than the verbal: slapping the back of one hand against the opposite palm, (signifying resignation), shrugs, folded arms, raised shoulders, widening of the eyes, glances. "Pacing" has

## BODY LANGUAGE (con't)

also been suggested, where the physician adjusts his/her body movements, such as leaning forward or crossing the arms, to make the patient feel unconsciously less ill-at-ease.

A marked scratching of the head or face of a patient often reveals an attempt at dissimulation. And the patient's body language upon leaving can be eloquent testimony of his/her satisfaction.

**BÒKÒ** A Voodoo priest (never a priestess) who "works with the left hand," as well as with the right, i.e., who deals in evil magic as well as in good magic, who deals in sorcery as well as in medicine.

Sometimes accused of being paid to create a sickness, and then being paid by the victim to alleviate the very same sickness for which he himself was responsible - not unlike the drugstore operator who sells both cigarettes, and medicines to combat lung cancer.

It is in his self-interest to emphasize animosities rather than to allay fears or avoid conflicts.

**BONESETTERS (*Doktè Zo*)** Realign bones using wooden braces, and flour-based plaster casts which are replaced every week or so to prevent infection. Also treat luxations and sprains, and manipulate damaged blood vessels. Generally enjoy an excellent reputation, and even members of the upper class turn to them. Only when their care has been rather disastrously unsuccessful is the Western practitioner called in to repair the damage.

A part-time profession. Their art is considered a spiritual gift, and they usually do not charge their patients.

**BREAST-FEEDING** Traditionally, all babies were breast-fed in Haiti for at least the first six months. Weaning occurred at varying times between a minimum of six months and a maximum of two years. Recent findings (see Philip L. Graitcer et al., "Current Breast-Feeding and Weaning Practices in Haiti," *Journal of Tropical Pediatrics*, vol. 30, Feb. 1984, pp. 10-16) have revealed a pattern defined essentially by rural vs. urban location, and by socio-economic status. At present, it appears that the median age at which children in the rural areas are weaned is 18 months, whereas in Port-au-Prince the median age is 12 months. Secondly, the higher the socio-economic status, the shorter the period of breast-feeding and the greater the amount of bottle-feeding. Similarly, bottle-feeding is more common in urban areas than in rural ones. Women over 25 tend to breast-feed longer and bottle-feed less than younger women, while the more children a woman has, the longer she tends to breast-feed. Unlike the situation in certain other countries, male infants are breast-fed no longer than are female ones.

"In Haiti, the leading cause of death for children under the age of five is diarrhea. Babies that are exclusively breast-fed for the first six months of life do not often suffer from diarrhea. When contaminated food or water sources are introduced into the infant's system, the problem of diarrhea occurs. Exclusively breast-fed babies suffer fewer illnesses and gain more weight... However, babies are typically given rice, rice water, and bean sauce. The nursing staff is reeducating mothers to the benefits of exclusive breast-feeding." (Albert Schweitzer Hospital, April 1997)

\*During pregnancy, mother's milk builds up, distributed throughout the entire body, in the same way as is her blood. The nipples later serve as focalizing conduits. Care must be taken to prevent the milk from mixing with any *move san* (bad blood) which would be harmful to the



## BREAST-FEEDING (con't)

child, or from making its way up into the woman's head, which could cause permanent mental illness.\*

\**Lèt gate* or *move lèt* (spoiled mother's milk) can be caused by an emotional trauma, or even by just one violent argument. The milk then becomes a poisonous substance, and the baby must be weaned immediately.\* (A societal invention to protect the mother?) \*Also can be caused by an interruption of 24 hours or more in breast-feeding.\*

\*Mother's milk can cause worms in a child. When breast feeding ends, the worms go away.\* (See WORMS.)

Breast-feeding is resisted by many mothers because: 1) they are too malnourished to maintain their own bodies adequately, much less to produce milk; 2) artificial milk preparations are a status symbol which the international corporations are only too happy to give away at first - and then charge for later. (See WATER.) However there is the proverb: "*Lèt tete pi bon pase tout lòt lèt.*" (Milk from the breast is better than any other milk.)

Supplements to mother's milk commonly begin at about the second or third month after birth.

Today there are increasingly shortened periods of breast-feeding due to ever greater economic pressure. Often the mother must return to the traveling-and-trading pattern of the typical market woman. And this further increases the birth-rate, since breast-feeding reduces (but does not eliminate) the chances of conception.

BREASTS \*Size can be increased by rubbing on a special mixture prepared with crushed butterflies.\*

## BREASTS (con't)

\*The left breast is more sensitive and gives more milk than the right.\*

**BRUISES** \*Can be healed by cutting in order to draw out the bad blood.\*

**BURNS** Often explained away as the result of having fallen into a fire, and it is, of course, true that children and epileptics do indeed sometimes fall into fires used for cooking. Another good possibility, however, is that the burns are the result of Voodoo "cures" (*q.v.*) or possession trances. Exorcism, or catharsis, is supposedly achieved by passing the patient's body over a fire, and is accompanied by much ritual chanting and by offerings of animals and food.

Passing a baby through flames is considered an additional protection against *lougawou* (*q.v.*).

Circular burns may well have been caused by the rims of heated glasses used by a folk healer to extract evil spirits. (See also SCARIFICATION.)

Burns are commonly treated by rubbing on gel of aloe. \*The burn victim should avoid eating spices and pimentos, but onions and leeks are recommended.\*

**BUTTOCKS** Traditionally considered by Haitian males as a woman's greatest sexual asset, even more so than face or breasts.

**CANNIBALISM** \*Some *lougawou* (*q.v.*) disinter the bodies of their victims and eat their flesh.\*

**CEMETERIES** \*Are essentially polluted: no plants which grow in their immediate vicinity may be used for medicinal purposes.\*

## CEMETERIES (con't)

\*Any lesion on the leg will heal very slowly, or not at all, if one visits a cemetery.\*

\*One should never visit a sick person just after visiting a cemetery, or the sick person will become even sicker.\*

**CHANGE** Very difficult to bring about in the highly conservative peasant community. For example, most mothers still insist on administering a potentially harmful strong laxative to neonates to expel the meconium; others still cannot be induced to use the highly nutritious and easily prepared *akamil* (q.v.); while others have yet to master *sewòm oral* (ORT). (Same resistance applies especially to agriculture - see CONSERVATISM.)

**CHAYOTE SQUASH** (*militon*) \*Must not be eaten by a man, or he will become partially impotent.\*

**CHILD ABUSE** Malnutrition and neglect are more frequent than outright abuse.

**CHILDBIRTH** Traditionally handled by midwives. However more and more first deliveries are performed in a hospital if possible, with subsequent deliveries at home. The feeling is that better medical treatment is provided at the hospital, but closer personal attention and more proper traditional care for both mother and child are obtained at home. Thus Caesarean sections are especially avoided because of the strong possibility of unattended future deliveries.

However births do of course occur unexpectedly, in the field, along the path to a water source, on the way to or at the local outdoor market, etc. - and thus often unassisted.

## CHILDBIRTH (con't)

Normally done in a half-sitting or squatting position, with a round wooden support (*choukèt*) placed under the hips to aid in delivery. It usually takes place in the front room of the two-room dirt-floored, thatched-roof peasant hut, with windows and doors closed. Screaming by the mother-to-be is considered quite helpful to the birthing process. Some women drink herbal teas during delivery. Certain Westerners believe that one special tea given during labor to enhance contractions could be a significant cause of severe postpartum bleeding, leading to death.

\*A wooden spoon placed in the mother's mouth during the birthing process will ensure proper air for the baby.\*

If the neonate does not show immediate signs of life, there is loud drumming on plates to awaken him/her, in addition to the traditional spanking practiced in Western-type medicine.

In rural Haiti, if the first baby is a breech presentation, it nearly always dies or is stillborn.

Kits containing razor blade, powder etc. given (or better: sold for a very small amount - see HANDOUTS) directly to pregnant women have proven very useful in reducing neonatal deaths. Also ensures more will come for prenatal check-ups. However, \*supplies must be carefully protected against evil magic.\*

\*The placenta must be disposed of in such a way that it cannot be found and sold to an evil sorcerer. If this should happen, a woman either is unable to bear additional children, or any fetus she might conceive will be at the mercy of whoever possesses her placenta.\* (See also PLACENTA.)

## CHILDBIRTH (con't)

\*A baby born in the seventh month can survive, but never one born in the eighth month.\* Conclusion: a baby born in the eighth month who survives was doubtlessly fathered by another man a month before the mother told the supposed father she was pregnant. Result: trouble! (See also UMBILICUS.)

**CHILD GROWTH** When a baby cries, it is assumed (s)he wants to nurse. But crying is also seen as a beneficial activity since \*it serves to open up the body and help the baby grow.\*

\*Playing naked in the mud is also a growth-inducing factor.\*

\*Little boys grow on Mondays and Saturdays, and little girls only on Fridays\* - thus the discrepancy in size.

**CHILD MORTALITY** Principally from tetanus, diarrhea, malnutrition and respiratory diseases. In peasant parlance, a child is spoken of as having "escaped" (*chape*) past the high-risk period if (s)he has survived to the age of five years.

**CIRCUMCISION** Not normally performed on males. Clitoral circumcision is unheard of for females.

**CLEFT PALATE** \*Caused by goat crossing the pregnant mother's path while at the market.\*

**COLORS** Strong perception of red, black, and white. (Interestingly, many African languages recognize only three colors, corresponding to red, black, and white.) Perception of other colors is sometimes imprecise, with notable confusion between blue and green. Few distinguish between *wouj* (red) and *woz* (pink), and *pipi*

## COLORS (con't)

*wouj* (red urine) is often not red at all but simply yellow.  
"It's all in the eye of the beholder."

- COMMON-LAW UNIONS (*plasa*) Usually agreed upon with the formal consent of both sets of parents, and are both recognized and respected among the peasant population.

Polygamy is by no means uncommon, and can add considerably to male prestige. But more importantly, it can be of quite practical value in the frequent case of ownership of rather widely separated landholdings: a woman on each plot can serve as a resident caretaker.

- Basic reasons: 1) economic practicality; 2) male vanity; 3) male pleasure, given the tendency among many peasant women (because of their hard life) to age prematurely and lose their physical desirability; 4) availability of a woman when one or more others are menstruating or nursing.
- Polygamy is encountered among Voodoo priests as well, who need several reliable female assistants to be always available. Organized polyandry, on the other hand, is unknown.

CONCEPTION The will of God - though not possible without intercourse.

\*The waters at Saut d'Eau, Limonade, and Acul Samedi have a fecundating effect on a woman who has been unable to conceive.\*

CONDOMS Decidedly unpopular - and neither being sold very cheaply nor given away free seems to have increased their use - although certainly more valued if not given away free.

## CONDOMS (con't)

Apparently their main use in Haiti: as balloons or inflatable balls for children; as part of a slingshot by boys; with one end cut off, as bracelets by girls.

Men: "Real men don't use condoms!" Women: "What if it should come off and get lost inside me?"

The men say the women don't like them; the women say the men don't like them.

In at least one very rural setting was heard: "Oh, I understand about condoms. Every time I have sex with my wife, I am to swallow one." Careful explanation may be necessary.

**CONFIDENCE** Do not for a moment harbor the illusion that just because a patient consults a Western-type physician that (s)he is totally convinced of the efficacy of Western-type medicine or medical theory. The folk theories and remedies have been deeply ingrained in the peasant population for centuries, when there was nothing else, and they are not easily forgotten.

**CONJUNCTIVITIS** \*Can be caught from someone thus afflicted talking to you or looking you straight in the eye.\*

\*Can be caused by blood rushing to the head and "cooking" the eyes. Alleviated by cupping-glasses applied to the neck, incisions in the skin, and washing the eyes with raw rum (*kleren*).\*

**CONSERVATISM** An important factor impeding advances in Haitian medical - and other - practices. Diversely termed superstition, or inherited wisdom, depending upon one's point of view.

## CONSERVATISM (con't)

Adoption of new ideas and habits is always a slow process, and is even more pronounced in agriculture than in medicine. A treatment can always be abandoned, but should a new method of agriculture fail - however unproductive in reality the time-tested way of one's forefathers - there is normally no one to whom to turn. The result could be starvation for oneself and one's family. An understandable, yet self-defeating attitude that so directly affects the nutritional output of Haiti. (See also CHANGE.)

**CONSULTATIONS** Medical visits can be overpowering for many a peasant from very humble rural surroundings. Don't underestimate the psychological trauma which can be brought on by this new experience. Strange White faces, a strangely quiet and structured atmosphere, potentially make for an emotionally charged encounter, constituting both a physical and psychological exposure to a degree unmatched by their other experiences. Expect mumbling, almost whispering, and staring at the floor.

Inarticulateness can be a problem - just not knowing how to express what's wrong. But if the physician starts helping a person to state the problem, the doctor will always be right. And the answers will fall into the *Wi, dòk* pattern. (See *WI*.)

Distance from the medical center, embarrassment concerning physical appearance or clothes - all can cause medical attention to be postponed. What is often difficult for the Western patient is all the more so for the rural Haitian. Great sensitivity is required to put the patient at ease (see *SENSITIVITY*). A touch, a look, a few words of Creole, can be of great use. (See also *DISTANCE*.)



## CONSULTATIONS (con't)

Patients may well be more accustomed to the diagnostic techniques of the faith-and-herb healers, where history-taking plays only a limited role. (See FAITH-AND-HERB HEALERS.) Thus it might well be more effective at least to appear to emphasize the physical exam rather than history-taking. (See also VOODOO CONSULTATIONS.)

Some patients come convinced that they already know what is wrong, and simply seek a cure. Thus they tend to exaggerate the supposed symptoms of their alleged malady.

Localization of pain often tends to be very imprecise for many Haitians. When one is ill, the entire body is perceived as being ill, and the specific pain experienced is usually seen as the result of the disease either moving from one part to another, or expanding. It appears of no particular importance where a pain began, or where it is at the present moment. The problem is seen as more general.

Many a Haitian peasant has learned that any open, honest discussion concerning what (s)he perceives as the true cause of a health problem will most likely elicit open disbelief or disguised scorn from the Western-type physician. Hence there is an instinctive tendency to express what the physician supposedly wants to hear or at least will accept, rather than any intimately held belief. Thus open communication in this cultural setting is rare.

Some women - and especially their mates - do not like having a physical examination conducted by a male. They wonder what he is looking for!

See also HISTORY-TAKING.

**CONTAGION** "Magic, not contagion." The fact that patients often do not believe in such a thing as contagion makes it difficult to explain the danger presented to others concerning, for example, AIDS or syphilis. Try a comparison with tuberculosis, where victims are commonly isolated from others.

**CONTRACEPTION** Among the many beliefs one hears on this subject: \*Before intercourse, a woman should drink salted coconut milk; a man should place a grain of rock salt on his tongue during intercourse.\*

\*After intercourse, a woman should lie face down on a coin. A man should knot seven different kinds of herbs on a red string and attach it to a fruit tree on the night of a new moon.\*

\*The woman should sneeze when her partner ejaculates.\*

\*Licorice tea taken in the morning will calm the amorous desires of a young woman.\*

**COOPERATION** (*tèt ansanm*) The inability to work together effectively is another curse frequently met in Haiti - though hardly limited to Haiti. Even when not divided by rival factions, people seem unable or unwilling to agree on and carry out a concerted course of action. And this appears to hold true even in the relatively rare circumstances when sufficient financial means are available. Talk, not action. Bickering, or lethargy, are often the greatest enemies. Some observers even speak of an innate, ingrained hostility toward progress. On the other hand, there are indeed cooperative work teams which do function quite well together (e.g., *konbit*). Often lack of effective leadership is the underlying problem. Due in large part to the massive "brain drain," especially during the regime of "Papa Doc" (1957-71), to the U.S., Canada, and other countries?

**COST** An all-important factor of medical treatment in one of the world's neediest countries. Often proper medical care is delayed, abandoned, or never begun, for want of even the modest sum required. And why consult a physician if one cannot afford the medication prescribed? "Consult now, pay later" has often been an effective solution.

Self-respect is extremely important for Haitian peasants: they must be made to feel they are bearing the "cost" of their treatment.

On the other hand, Western-type medical treatment (a most useful type of foreign aid) is sometimes preferred for purely practical, pragmatic reasons: ritual Voodoo healing is often far more expensive. (See PAYMENT.)

There is the true story of the little boy who, upon being asked why he had come to the Western-style hospital, blurted out that it was "because his mother didn't have enough money to take him to a Voodoo priest!"

Generic products are a must (unless donated!).

**CUPPING-GLASSES** (*vantouz*) Often consist of small, perforated calabashes stopped up with wax.

Used for 'spoiled blood' (*san gate*), for pain from a fall or bite, or to reduce swelling. To be even more effective, occasionally the skin is cut at the spot where the cupping glass was applied in order to make a scar.

\*More effective if applied when the moon is on the wane.\*

**CURES** Four paths open, quite often followed in this order, with frequent overlapping: 1) home remedy; 2) faith-and-herb healer; 3) Voodoo priest(ess); 4) Western-type physician. Though some (mainly Protestants) would "rather die" than consult a Voodoo priest(ess). (See VOODOO CURES.)

**CURES vs. RELIEF** It is difficult to explain that a sickness cannot be cured and that medication affords symptomatic relief only, for conditions such as arthritis, seizures, and heart disease.

**DATES** Avoid numbers: "the last Friday of February" (*dènye vandredi fevrye*) is better than "February 27," for example.

**DEAD (THE)** (*lemò*) Often obligations to the dead outweigh those to the living. Often more money will be put aside for funeral expenses than for medical expenses. Often more will be spent on the tomb than on the home. (See TOMBS.)

**DEATH** High birth rate, high death rate. "The three principal causes of child mortality: diarrhea, pneumonia, immunizable diseases (measles, tetanus, polio). The two leading causes of adult morbidity and mortality: malaria and tuberculosis. Additional major problem for adult women: too frequent childbirth." (Haitian Department of Public Health and Population, 1983.) Obviously AIDS could be a subsequent addition to this list. (See also CHILD MORTALITY, MALNUTRITION, PARANOIA, and VOODOO DEATH.)

The immediate reaction to expect from the relatives is loud screaming from the women, sullenness or belligerence from the men.

So common an occurrence that it is sometimes accepted as an inevitable result of sickness, without any real effort at attempting a cure. A Haitian physician, Dr. Ari Bordes, reports accidentally coming upon a sick person at whose bedside funeral plans were already being made, when, thanks to his fortuitous intervention, the patient was easily saved. How often is death seen simply as a natural consequence?

## DEATH (con't)

The body is washed, and the mouth of the deceased is closed (*mare*) with a strip of cloth (*bann machwè*) tied around the face. Care must be taken to liberate (*desounen*) the soul. To prevent a virgin from being violated by the spirits of death (*gede*), the hymen must be broken before burial.

The dead are greatly feared, and precautions are taken at both home and funeral to ensure that the deceased will not return and take vengeance. (See WAKES.)

Three drops of saliva (*twadegout*) from a dead person's mouth are considered the most deadly of poisons.

A fetus, stillborn, or unbaptized infant, is held "unknown to God," and is buried in an unmarked grave in the bushes wrapped only in a cloth. Same is true for cases of execution or suicide.

See APPENDIX: Death.

**DEFORESTATION** Deforestation → Drought → Famine → Disease. D → D → F → D: an implacable formula. But if trees take up too much land, where will the crops grow? And trees require much water, which is usually in short supply. The solution?

**DEMONSTRATIONS** One demonstration (for example of ORT - Oral Rehydration Therapy) is worth a thousand words - even Creole words!

**DENTISTRY** In a country where sheer survival is of such basic concern, routine dental care receives low priority. The basic assumption one finds in the rural areas is that a dentist (if available) is to be consulted only when one is in great pain. Thus dentistry usually means essentially

## DENTISTRY (con't)

extraction. Faced with great numbers and rudimentary conditions, most dentists are obliged to line up approximately seven patients at a time, inject one after the other, and then, with the Novacain taking effect, begin the extractions at the start of the line.

Various methods used to try to dull the pain of a toothache are: applying creosote (which may result in burnt parts of the mouth); raw rum breathed up the nose while stopping up the ear with the little finger on the side opposite the ache; clove oil (eugenol); pulverized thyme; dry celery; crushed parsley and salt wrapped in cotton and inserted in the ear; crushed garlic applied to the arm opposite the aching tooth. And naturally, alcohol drunk in appreciable quantity.

Patients tend not to tense up before an injection - and even ask for additional work on other parts of the mouth.

Often a patient will drape a towel over his/her head when in pain.

The pulp of the tooth is taken for a worm, which is believed to be the main cause of toothache. Some see these worms - and thus the pain - as spreading from one tooth to another. The other main cause of toothache is seen as being a hex brought about by: 1) someone using negative Voodoo magic, or 2) the enmity of a Voodoo spirit.

Attitudes toward brushing vary greatly, and only a small minority seem to be even faintly aware that it is connected to the reduction of dental decay. Instead of commercially-made toothbrushes and Colgate toothpaste [the generic term in Haitian Creole for toothpaste is *kòlgat*], some use a brushstick (*bwadan*) made usually

## DENTISTRY (con't)

from a twig from the lamandier bush, which softens and produces a soapy foam thought to be effective in cleaning the teeth. Leaves are used for cleaning children's teeth. (See especially Paul Rundberg and Wesley O. Young, "Dental Health Knowledge and Attitudes in Haiti," *Journal of Public Health Dentistry*, vol. 32, N<sup>o</sup> 3 (1972), pp. 149-157.)

Lack of running water obviously affects proper oral hygiene, and combined with malnutrition and high sugar consumption, results in a high rate of periodontal disease and dental caries.

Many are convinced that if the father of an unborn baby has a tooth extracted, the mother will abort - which of course is quite possible if she believes this firmly enough. Thus a father-to-be, no matter how painful the toothache, may violently resist any attempt at extraction, insisting only on a bandage.

Similarly, some believe that during pregnancy and nursing, a mother cannot have a tooth extracted, or her milk will go to her head and drown her.

After an extraction, many wish to have cotton in the ear, in order to prevent an evil spirit - or wind (see GAS) - from entering through the empty tooth socket.

Some men insist on taking an extracted tooth with them in order to pulverize it - supposedly as an aphrodisiac, or to prevent its being used in evil magic against them.

\*Cold temperatures should be avoided at all cost after a tooth extraction.\* (See also TEETH, and TEETHING.)

**DEPENDENCY** Many observers feel that certain places in Haiti have been reduced to a state of dependency by sporadic, ill-conceived foreign aid, accustoming the people to relying on handouts rather than developing any spirit of self-reliance or local initiative. Too often the so-called "Fish Principle" has been forgotten ("If you truly love a man, you do not give him a fish - you teach him how to fish").

In the short run, it is easier to do than to teach to do, but in the long run, it is the nationals of any country who must take the responsibility for the development of their own nation. Foreigners come and, eventually, go. The nationals stay. Find the nationals who can and will learn, and teach them to do: the lasting solution, not the short-term one.

Remember the proverb: "*Se Ayisyen ki pou fè Ayiti.*" (It is Haitians who must make Haiti.)

**DEVELOPMENT** The ideal of course is integrated development: better health makes possible better education, which makes possible better agriculture, which in turn makes possible even better health, etc., etc.

A very slow process.

**DIABETES** Folk medicine tests by: 1) tasting the urine, or 2) seeing if the urine attracts ants. (Cf. the expression *gen founi nan potchanm* - to have ants in one's chamber pot, i.e., to be diabetic.)

**DIARRHEA** \*Breast-feeding should be discontinued if a child develops diarrhea\* - one of Haiti's most life-threatening beliefs.

Many Haitian mothers are firmly convinced that teething causes an excess of saliva, resulting in a natural, non-



## DIARRHEA (con't)

threatening form of diarrhea. Thus, only when the problem becomes acute is medical advice sought.

\*A red-hot nail placed in boiling milk will prevent diarrhea.\*

\*To stop diarrhea, tie a string around your big toe.\*

**DIASPORA** Haitians moving back to Haiti from abroad (especially from New York City) are often considered to exhibit a high degree of criminality (e.g., violence, drugs, smuggling) - as well as a certain superiority complex.

**DIGNITY** However poor, however downtrodden the humble Haitian peasant may appear to be, he nonetheless has a deep-rooted sense of his own dignity, of having beaten Europe's best, of being a member of the first nation in the world to free itself of foreign slavery. And to help him medically or otherwise, one must never for an instant forget this dignity, or all efforts are not only useless but insulting.

If the Haitian has to choose between his dignity and his welfare, he will almost invariably choose his dignity.

**DILATATION AND CURETTAGE** (*kitaj*) \*Will make a woman permanently sterile.\*

**DISPENSARIES** A great scandal of the Haitian medical scene is the number of all too often closed government dispensaries spread throughout the country. "Staffed" by an absentee doctor and a medical auxiliary, they are usually devoid of even the most basic medical supplies. Worse perhaps are the dispensaries built by well-meaning foreign-aid groups who arrive in a burst of enthusiasm, set about the construction of what could be a

## DISPENSARIES (con't)

fine dispensary, and then blithely fly away with the firm expectation that the Haitian government "will take care of equipping and staffing," i.e., the hard part. The result is a countryside of conspicuously labeled but useless *Dispensaires*. (Similar remarks could be made concerning many a rural school.)

**DISSOCIATION** Described as a relatively frequent phenomenon among Haitians, occurring in situations as diverse as Voodoo ceremonies and during significant stress such as an accident, surgery, or threat of death. The Voodoo possession trance (*q.v.*) is termed *posesyon*, hysteria (*q.v.*) is called *kriz*, a fainting spell is referred to as *endispozisyon* (*q.v.*), and a mild fainting spell is designated as *dekonpozisyon*.

**DISTANCE** Keep in mind that many patients have traveled from even before dawn along narrow, steep, rocky, treacherous paths from their mountainous homes. Those too ill to walk are carried on makeshift stretchers (a door, a blanket) to the bumpy, uncomfortable trucks which serve as buses.

A much higher proportion of patients comes from towns on "main" roads simply because of the greater accessibility. There is also the cost of lodging for out-patients from far away who must present themselves regularly, e.g., in tuberculosis treatment.

However, the physical journey to a strange new environment is often still less stressful than the psychological one. (See CONSULTATIONS.)

**DIVINATION / DIAGNOSIS** The two most common methods used by Voodoo practitioners involve the use of ordinary playing cards, or of supposedly ancient occult texts. The

## DIVINATION / DIAGNOSIS (con't)

cards are laid out seemingly at random, and the seer interprets according to methods known only to him/her. Similarly, a book of magic spells is opened at random, and its text interpreted. (Thus, when a Western-type practitioner consults his/her medical reference book, many a peasant recognizes a familiar diagnostic technique!)

A Voodoo divination can recommend a Voodoo-inspired treatment, a faith-and-herb healer, or even a Western-type practitioner.

**DREAMS** Often taken quite seriously as a means of transmitting important messages from dead relatives, or from Voodoo spirits, in order to communicate with the living. Dreams are sometimes seen as an extension of everyday reality, as something that actually took place. (See PEASANTS.)

**DRESS** One's "Sunday best" is almost always worn when coming to consult at a clinic. Coming often from great distances and on foot, patients strive nonetheless to arrive well before opening time - and as clean as possible.

One hears of cases where a peasant in dire need of medical attention nevertheless refuses to appear at a medical center due to shame about clothing.

Many wear sandals only when in church or in town, thus increasing the risk of intestinal parasites.

**"DROP IN THE BUCKET"** This may well seem to be all you can contribute toward alleviating some of the suffering of Haiti - but for those individuals whom you do succeed in helping, it is no mere "drop in the bucket."

**EARLOBES (PIERCED)** And even earrings, on a boy. His mother will often do this if she has lost several sons already, in hopes that the evil spirits will mistake him for a girl and thus spare him.

Girls usually have their earlobes pierced soon after birth, with small pieces of wood or straw inserted, or sometimes just thread or string. This piercing does not, however, appear to be a significant cause of tetanus infection.

**ECLAMPسيا** \*Caused by a fit of anger, resulting in a surge of blood to the head.\* Associated with the commonly-known symptoms of *kriz* (hysteria, convulsions), *endispozisyon* (delirium, fainting), and *kriz de nè* (emotional crisis).

**ECONOMICS** An integral part of medicine which takes on an entirely new dimension when viewed within the context of one of the world's neediest nations.

The greatest stumbling block to effective medical care in Haiti. More often than simply not *knowing* about proper nutrition and hygiene is the problem of not being able to *afford* what the medical community recommends. (See also **COST** and **PAYMENT**.)

As for Haiti in general, one thing is certain: it is not going to sink into the sea. A country - unlike a company - does not go into bankruptcy and disappear.

**EDEMA** \*Normally a sign of supernatural illness.\*

**EGGS** \*Cause children's teeth to rot, up to age ten or twelve. Also cause convulsions.\*

**ELEPHANTIASIS** (*gwo pye*) \*Caused by a particularly virulent magic powder placed in one's path.\*

**ELEPHANTIASIS** (*gwo pye*) (con't)

\*Caused by knocking over with one's foot, either inadvertently or on purpose, a receptacle placed at a crossroads in honor of the Voodoo spirit Papa Legba.\*

\*Caused by eating too much salt.\*

**EMOTIVITY** Inordinately high, as reported by a leading Haitian physician (Dr. Ary Bordes, *Un Médecin Raconte*). For example, in cases such as extreme infant dehydration, expect an uncontrolled panic on the part of parents and relatives. Super-activity is expected from the attending physician.

**ENDISPOZISYON** Various translated as "fainting spell," "delirium," or "shock." A frequently discussed Haitian phenomenon, a dissociative state believed to fall between psychic and somatic ailments, caused both by too rich blood surging into the head, and by magic; lasting from fifteen minutes to an hour. Occurs chiefly during moments of extreme emotional tension, such as great unexpressed anger, frustration, grief, or shock. It is considered neither a form of hysteria nor of epilepsy, though somewhat resembling both. The person falls, but there is only limited agitation of any part of the body. Described by patients as a sensation of emptiness in the thoracic region, dizziness, and extreme weakness. It affects females much more often than males, and only teenagers, young adults, and the elderly - but neither children nor the middle-aged. Puberty, menses, sexual frustration, and menopause are given as frequent causes. Considered incurable by the remedies of Western medicine. Not to be confused with *dekonpozisyon* (mild fainting spell; seizure) where one experiences an extreme bodily weakness but neither falls nor really faints, nor with hysteria *q.v.* (*kriz*).

**ENVIRONMENT** A patient can be nourished properly, cured of infections, parasites, etc., but then must be returned to the same environment which produced this malnutrition and these sicknesses in the first place. A problem largely beyond the powers of the medical profession.

**ENVY** To be avoided at all cost by a peasant. Above all, one should never brag. If one should appear too prosperous, a jealous relative or neighbor could well be tempted to cause harm through evil magic. Or a person with political power and influence could seize one's land if it appears too productive. (See LAND TITLES.) Thus, even an appearance of material well-being can be risky. A self-defeating attitude on both personal and national levels, tending essentially to perpetuate a static, non-progressive society. Lack of apparent progress often equates with lack of real progress.

**EPILEPSY** Considered especially shameful, resulting in much hesitation before consulting a physician.

**ESPEDISYON** A frequently-heard term, defined in the Freeman-Laguerre Haitian-English Dictionary as the "sending of evil spirits or evil magical substances against an enemy (Voodoo); evil substances or spell (Voodoo)." Seen as a leading cause of supernatural illness (see ILLNESS).

**EVIL EYE** (*move je, maldjòk*) \*Inflicts sickness (e.g., whooping cough) mainly upon a child, usually quite unintentionally. Can be caused by a parent, relative, friend or neighbor, totally unaware of his/her evil power, who overly admires or compliments a child. Any evil effect can be averted, however, by spitting immediately after the compliment in order to avoid swallowing one's saliva, or by touching wood. Certain amulets worn by a child can serve as protection, as can special clothing and baths. The worst effects from the evil eye, however, are caused

## EVIL EYE (con't)

by persons who are in reality *lougawou* (q.v.) seeking to mask the effects of their murderous nocturnal blood-sucking.\*

**EXPECTATIONS (HEALTH CARE PROVIDERS')** Beware of having overly high expectations - they can lead to early burn-out. Haiti has been here for a long time. Deeply-rooted attitudes do not change overnight, nor in just one year or two.

"Do expect to encounter hunger and malnutrition, ignorance and superstition, fear of malevolent spirits, disease, pain, suffering and extreme poverty; overpopulation, unemployment, soil erosion, lack of sanitation, few schools, few hospitals. Do expect to see elephantiasis, scrofula, severe sickle-cell crises, typhoid fever, malaria, advanced tuberculosis of every organ system, and other conditions which you may have thought to exist only in textbooks. In children expect to see marasmus and kwashiorkor. And the most common causes of death on the Haitian scene are tuberculosis, malaria, typhoid fever, filariasis, intestinal parasites, meningitis, venereal disease, AIDS, diarrhea, along with death in childbirth." (Dr. William Hodges)

No matter how much good you may be doing for Haiti, maybe Haiti is doing even more good for you. A feeling of being exceptionally useful. Self-fulfillment. How can this be measured? (But see also PERCEPTION.)

**EXPECTATIONS (PATIENTS')** 1) A stethoscope is to be used (otherwise patients feel they have not had a proper examination, or that the physician is downright incompetent); 2) a prescription - and unfortunately many believe that an expensive one will be more effective than an inexpensive one.

**EXPERIENCE** It has often been noted that a physician learns far more in one month in Haiti than in two years in the United States, or that cases only read about in textbooks at home are seen almost daily here.

**EYE CHARTS** In a largely illiterate country, must consist of "forks" or "bushes" heading left or right, up or down.

See APPENDIX: Eyes

**FAITH-AND-HERB HEALERS** (*doktè fey*) Numerically the most important class of folk healers. May be either male or female; women (who often double as midwives) are at least as numerous as men. Deal primarily with "natural" illnesses. (See ILLNESS.) Normally only a part-time profession. Training is usually received from a family member, with shared knowledge from colleagues, plus personal experience.

While the Voodoo priest(ess) operates chiefly on the supernatural level, the *doktè fey* functions on both the spiritual and pragmatic levels. Prayers and revelations from dreams are combined with an often encyclopedic knowledge of local plant, herb, bark and root remedies, used both internally and externally. Magic and/or religion are essential, however: no cure is possible without divine or supernatural assistance. Even while gathering the plant items to be used as remedies, many offer special prayers either to God or to Voodoo spirits. As an offering of thanks, seeds are placed in the ground from which the plant is taken. Invocations to certain saints are considered especially effective for curing certain illnesses.

Traditionally use three diagnostic techniques, with very limited history-taking: 1) visible signs (condition of skin; minute indications contained within the fingernails or behind the ears; condition of blood as evidenced by yellow or red in whites of eyes); 2) palpation (*manyen*); 3) diet.



## FAITH-AND-HERB HEALERS (*doktè fèy*) (cont)

Illnesses which are their special domain are worms (*vè*), chills (*fredi*), evil eye (*maldjòk*), and spoiled (mother's) milk (*lèt gate*). Also *biskèt tonbe* (*q.v.*), as well as *lalwèt tonbe* (acute respiratory distress; or tonsillitis) - attributed to the obstruction of the trachea by the uvula.

Empirical methods of treatment consist of: 1) dietary recommendations (herbal teas or infusions [*tizann*], or correcting hot/cold imbalance [*q.v.*]); 2) massage (*rakè* - usually with burnt alcohol or hot oil) for a displaced bone or an internal organ that must be returned to its proper place; 3) compresses, poultices and baths (*beny*) for sores and inflammation; 4) laxatives (*lòk*) and enemas (*lavman*), especially for "dirty blood." Medication consists of herbal mixtures and powders of leaves, bark and roots from Haiti's amazing flora.

Often there is an exorbitant charge for the supposedly rare plants etc. necessary, in addition to their fee.

Collaboration with others of the healing profession is not rare. For example, cases of *pèdisyon* (*q.v.*), gas, and impotence are sometimes treated jointly with a Voodoo priest(ess). Other cases such as typhoid fever, tuberculosis, anemia, and abscesses, are referred to Western-type physicians.

However, contrary to the productive collaboration established in China and elsewhere, in Haiti there does not appear, as yet, to have been any concerted effort to upgrade the skills of these folk healers. One notable exception was carried out experimentally c. 1979 at Petit-Goâve under the general direction of Dr. Ari Bordes, whereby 30 faith-and-herb healers received Western-type medical instruction over a four-month period. The results reportedly were excellent: improvement of techniques,

## FAITH-AND-HERB HEALERS (*doktè fèy*) (con't)

and more patients referred to modern medical facilities. And of course these local practitioners appreciated the greater prestige. The subsequent problem appears to have been hostility on the part of some of the Haitian medical establishment. It would appear that while the majority of Haitian physicians have no desire to practice medicine in rural areas, some object to improving the skills of the 'semi-professionals' who do. (Cf. Ari Bordes, *Un Médecin Raconte*, pp. 233-234.) (A similar three-hour workshop on AIDS prevention was held in 1996 by the Albert Schweitzer Hospital. Why are cooperative efforts of this sort so rare?)

Their prestige, however, has always been lower than that of the Voodoo priest(ess), though of course some combine both professions.

"We must remember that they have borne the burden of medical care since French colonial days. Sure, they mistreat patients, but so do all doctors sometimes. They do know how to treat malaria and average cuts and pains. And they understand the psychiatric problems here better than do we. I've seen a broken leg perfectly set by one. They recommend bed rest for tubercular patients, and this is okay." (Dr. W. Larimer Mellon, Jr.)

**FALLING** Often given as a good neutral explanation for a variety of ills secretly believed to have been caused in reality by evil magic.

**FALLING STAR** \*Someone in the immediate vicinity will soon die.\*

**FAMILY PLANNING** "All of Haiti's potentials appear submarginal, save the child-bearing capacity of its women." (John Augelli) A woman's role is seen as

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

producing children, and her social status is judged accordingly. To be barren is one of the worst curses that can befall a woman.

The concept of family is radically different from that prevalent in Western society, and family planning is met with deep-seated resistance.

"The average woman in Haiti produces six children, leading to growth of the population twice the world rate. Only an estimated 7% of the women in child-bearing years use birth control techniques." (Haiti's Hôpital Albert Schweitzer, 1986)

The 1988 World Population Data Sheet reports that Haiti has the highest crude birthrate, the highest population increase rate, the highest infant mortality rate, and the shortest population "doubling time" (25 years) of any nation in the Caribbean. The population of Haiti is believed to increase 2.2% annually, compared to a 0.7% increase in the United States. This figure is relatively low for a Third-World country, however, because of two factors: 1) high death rate; 2) high emigration rate.

Poverty and urbanization appear to play an enormous role in Haiti as elsewhere. There seems to be an unwritten law that the richer the country, the lower the birthrate; the poorer the country, the higher the birthrate. And urban promiscuity, combined with poverty, further exacerbates this trend. Haiti is desperately poor, and its second largest community today is Cité Soleil, a vast shantytown adjoining Port-au-Prince.

Overly frequent pregnancies by undernourished or malnourished mothers lead to an increasingly weakened

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

female population, and to babies ill-adapted to surviving, flourishing, and eventually contributing to a prosperous nation. Completing this picture are endemic diseases often affecting the mother, as well as often disastrous birthing practices.

With unemployment rife and amusements rare, boredom is a powerful factor leading to very frequent intercourse. "What else is there to do?" (Cf. the sudden rise of the birthrate in New York City nine months after a power failure - and the ensuing television truce.) "The poor man's only delight."

In former times a high birthrate was offset by a high deathrate. Infant mortality was the chief means of population control. Modern medicine has altered the deathrate, with disastrous results for present-day Haiti, causing it to outstrip its resources, especially in food and fuel. Human needs overwhelm the life-support systems.

Many feel, therefore, that the only responsible corollary to improved medical care is family planning.

Infant and child mortality remains high, nevertheless, and family planning information continues to go unheeded. Goal: decrease the births, decrease the deaths, and increase the quality of life.

Yet nothing is more revealing of the attitudes deeply ingrained in the peasant community than the proverbial sayings one so frequently hears. A sampling:

*Pitit se richès pòv malere.* - Children are the poor man's riches.

*Timoun se kado Bondye fè pòv malere.* - Children are God's gift to the poor.

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

*Se Bondye ki bay pitit.* - It's God who gives children.

*Pitit se baton vyeyès granmoun.* - Children are the old person's walking cane.

*Lakou san timoun, se yon lakou san lajwa.* - A home without children is a home without joy.

*Manman poul ki gen yon sèl pitit pa gen pitit.* - The mother hen with only one chick has no chick.

*Lè ou pa gen pitit, ou se chen.* - When you don't have children, you're nothing but a dog.

*Bourik fè pitit pou do l ka poze.* - The donkey has little ones in order to rest his back.

*Viv san gen rapò ak fanm, se nwizans pou gason.* - Lack of sexual contact with a woman is harmful to a man's health.

*Gason gen yon bous pou yo devide chak lè.* - Man has a purse which must be emptied constantly. (See also SPERM.)

*Se pou m fè sa m kapab fè.* - I must produce what I'm able to produce [woman's saying].

WHY HAVE SO MANY CHILDREN? Answers one hears:

- 1) High infant and child mortality rates.
- 2) Family needs - help in the home and in the field - and beginning at a very young age.
- 3) Deep-rooted insecurity - trust no one but your immediate family.

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

- 4) Woman's security - a man does not take a union seriously until offspring have been produced by and for him.
- 5) Machismo - male prestige in being able to beget many children.
- 6) Status symbol - for lack of impressive profession, house or car.
- 7) Investment - land (seldom with a clear title) can be seized; house, crops and livestock can be destroyed by storms, with no hope of compensation; but maybe some will make it to the U.S. or elsewhere and send money home.
- 8) Assistance in times of adversity - to make up for the fact that many of the adult children (especially male) will move far away.
- 9) Old-age insurance - the peasant has no other social security.
- 10) Burial insurance - to assure a big funeral, a major symbol of a successful life.

Finally: It's God's will which determines the number of children, and since only God can make a child, is not family "planning" encroaching upon His will? And: when there's enough for two or three, there's enough for four or five or more.

Then there is the family planning example of the Voodoo priest from Gonaives who had 56 children - he *planned* to have 56 children! His reasoning: he could support them, and they added to his prestige.

WHY IS FAMILY PLANNING BAD? Answers one hears:

- 1) Unsafe to health of the woman (principal answer heard).
- 2) Causes pain.

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

- 3) Prevents woman from ever having children again.
- 4) Aims at preventing people from having *any* children.
- 5) Relative newness of the idea.
- 6) Whites are fearful of one of Blacks' greatest assets: fertility.
- 7) Male fear that a mate's tubal ligation will cause him to be impotent (sic).
- 8) Against teachings of Roman Catholic church (not a major factor in peasant reasoning).

Never underestimate the importance of male authority in Haiti: many claim it is much more the men than the women who have to be convinced. Another factor is male insecurity: the fear that contraceptive methods would give the woman too much sexual freedom, without risk. (See also CONDOMS; IUD; PILL.)

IN FAVOR OF FAMILY PLANNING. The "two-child concept" falls on deaf ears, but informal surveys seem to indicate that most women really would like to "rest" or "stop" after three or four children. The women most receptive to the idea are mostly aged 25-35. Thus, the principal role for the family planner would appear not to convince, but rather to allay fear that the method chosen will cause sickness or even death to the woman. Safety even more than desirability should be the principal message.

### IMPORTANT POINTS TO BE STRESSED:

- 1) Safety of methods.
- 2) Improved quality of life: proper care and education for one's existing children.

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

- 3) Today's high cost of living in Haiti: food, clothing, medical care, education. The family cooking-pot is only so big.
- 4) "Stop for a while" or "rest" concept, child *spacing* rather than child *limiting*.
- 5) Each birth prevents mother from engaging in commerce until weaning.
- 6) Inheritance: even less land for each heir.

(Peasant saying: *Rat anpil, twou pa fon.* - Many rats, and the hole is not deep. There is only so much room in the nest.)

If God or the Voodoo spirits will a pregnancy, modern science is powerless to prevent it - but there is no harm in trying!

A "hard-sell" approach that has worked: "Food and medicine cost. Do you want to care for your children, or do you want to bury your children? Death is not a family-planning device."

Radio and community meetings have had only limited success, but home visits by field workers and talks given in the dispensary and maternity ward have proven more useful. The five to seven-minute chat seems to be the most effective; any more than that appears to be a waste of time. A 10% success rate is considered very good. The most effective medium by far however is word-of-mouth, woman-to-woman.

The 'Western' methods favored by Haitian women appear to be, in this order: the contraceptive pill, the rhythm method, tubal ligation, contraceptive foam, and the diaphragm. These last two are rarely if ever used, and the IUD has finally met with wide resistance. Often



## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

contraceptive measures must be taken by the woman without the man's knowledge (reportedly 90% of cases). Rarely does the mate appear. Yet for a tubal ligation in the case of a wife or common-law wife, the man's written permission must be obtained. The traditional methods (coitus interruptus, douche, periodic abstention) still seem to be the preferred ones by far. As for men, see CONDOMS and VASECTOMY.

A normal menstrual flow is considered an important health factor. Thus the IUD which sometimes increases the flow, or the pill which sometimes decreases the flow, can be seen as unhealthy. (See MENSTRUATION and PILL). A recent problem is a high dropout rate: more new users than repeaters.

A problem with White foreigners trying to encourage birth control is that it can be perceived as a subtle means employed by the White race to control the proliferation, and eventual take-over, of the Black race. Also there is the accusation that after the Whites have stripped a country of its economic resources, these same Whites then kindly point out that its population will have to decrease as well.

Many observers feel, however, that it is immoral to upset the age-old, delicate balance between high birthrates and high deathrates, if this is not countered by intelligent family planning. Haiti's birthrate has outstripped its ability to feed itself. More and more agricultural products have to be imported into this agricultural economy. There is too little arable land for too many people, offset neither by natural resources nor by a highly educated population. There is intolerable pressure on food, health, education, and jobs. Yet effective family planning in Haiti

## FAMILY PLANNING (con't)

is even more difficult to achieve than is effective medical care. **But saving lives is not enough if the end result is greater national misery.**

**FAMILY SUPPORT** Families will usually "camp out" on or near the hospital grounds, and it is normally they who both feed and bathe the patient.

"Family support has revealed itself to be of immense psychological and moral importance for the welfare and survival of the Haitian patient. Before the age of antibiotics it was noticed, for example, that the outcome in typhoid fever would be determined by whether the patient was adequately nursed and nurtured. It has often been observed that patients without family support are in grave danger of dying, even from quite curable diseases." (Dr. William Hodges)

It was often noted that Dr. Albert Schweitzer's hospital in Lambaréné, Gabon, where an almost native village atmosphere reigned with family support groups camping out, was packed, whereas a nearby French hospital with an overly sterile atmosphere, was little used.

**FAT** \*Symbol of both health and happiness.\* (Fact: it is normally only the wealthy few who have the means to become overweight.)

**FATALISM** Basic concept of self: passive recipient of all forces of the universe. Man is not master of his own fate. This acceptance of fate (*Bondye bon* - "Whatever God wills is good") translates sometimes into an apparent lack of interest in vaccinations, sanitation, and preventive medicine in general.

"A safety valve for mental health, but a hindrance to development." (Andrea Couture)

FETUS \*The fetus is nourished, by menstrual blood, through the cranium rather than through the umbilicus - thus the fontanel at birth.\*

\*The fetus develops principally while the mother is asleep\* - thus ample sleep is believed necessary during pregnancy. Conversely, \*if the mother sleeps too much, the child will be lazy.\*

\*If the pregnant mother is violently startled from sleep, that part of the fetus being "sewn" at the moment may be born deformed or missing.\*

\*Birth defects can also result from the wrath of another human who has enlisted the help of a Voodoo spirit (*lwa*).\*

Birth defects and fetal cravings: \*the fetus has an independent personality which interacts with the mother, affecting her personality and behavior - and vice versa. Cravings for special food by the mother are, in reality, the fetus demanding those special foods necessary for its development. If the fetus does not receive them, it will be permanently damaged.\*

\*Energetic kicking by the fetus is usually an expression of hunger.\*

A strong taboo exists against burying a deceased pregnant woman with the dead fetus still inside, for fear that her soul will harm any other pregnant woman or new-born of the family. Even among members of the elite, the fetus is usually extracted - normally by a Western-type physician. Among the peasant population the extraction is performed by special practitioners accompanied by a Voodoo rite.

**FIBWÒM** Both a folk concept and a specific medical term. For some, it is conceptualized as a hard mass of spoiled blood within the womb, caused by a fetus in *pèdisyon* (*q.v.*) which, instead of eventually growing to maturity, has assumed a pathological state threatening the life of the mother. The solution is surgical removal by a Western-type physician. For others, it simply means a fibroma or fibrous tumor.

**FINGERNAIL** An extremely long fingernail on either a man's left or right hand, or both, is an ostentatious show of the fact that he does no manual labor.

(See also "Conceal or Reveal" under HISTORY-TAKING.)

**FISH** The accelerated rate of soil erosion has, especially in recent times, deposited so much silt in the immediate off-shore waters of Haiti that the algae etc., on which the fish feed, have been smothered. Consequently, fishermen must venture much further from the shore to ensure good catches - something which they are unprepared to do either materially (flimsy craft) or psychologically (fear of water, inability to swim).

But fish are probably the most neglected protein potential in Haiti. One answer: creation of small ponds stocked with sturdy, resistant fish. A most worthy project for continued Peace Corps efforts and for other aid groups, but there is one recurring problem with the newly-created pond: ownership title to the suddenly valuable property.

**LEXIBILITY** Perhaps the most important single characteristic necessary. If the foreigner requires all the amenities and efficiency of a technologically developed country, best stay there.

Another absolute necessity in order to carry out successful work in Haiti is the ability to appreciate and adapt, to a certain degree, to a rather radically different culture.

**FLOGGING** Sometimes used in Voodoo cures to expel an evil spirit. (Cf. BURNS.)

**FOLK HEALERS** Five general categories: 1) Voodoo priests (*oungan*) and priestesses (*manbo*); 2) faith-and-herb healers (*doktè fèy*); 3) midwives (*fanmsay*) and government-trained midwives (*matwòn*); 4) bone-setters (*doktè zo*); and 5) injectionists (*pikiris*). To these categories must be added the sorcerers (*bòkò*), who are male Voodoo priests dealing in both positive and negative effects.

**FOLK MEDICINE** Syncretism is an important characteristic of the rural Haitian: just as there is often no firm delineation in his mind between Voodoo and Roman Catholicism, there is often no conceptual conflict between folk medicine and Western-type medicine. Few if any reject outright either the modern or the traditional approaches to medicine. The Haitian peasant will consult the folk healer, the Voodoo healer, and the Western healer - often simultaneously - until the illness is overcome. He is above all a pragmatist.

Occasionally heard is the attitude held by many, even if rarely expressed, that no one is going to let oneself or one's child die, whatever the local Protestant minister or Roman Catholic priest may proclaim against Voodoo. "*Se de dwèt ki manje kalalou*" ("It takes two fingers to eat okra"), i.e., both folk and Western medicine will be tried when the going gets tough.

If it were not for the practitioners of folk medicine, to whom would many, many rural Haitians turn? There simply are not enough government and foreign doctors available.

## FOLK MEDICINE (con't)

Quite conceivably there was a time, say during the colonial period, when folk medicine, being more empirical in its approach, was more effective than so-called Western-type medicine.

Furthermore, when there is no other medical advice available, folk medicine at least gives the patient the feeling of not passively awaiting his/her fate, but of actively trying to seek a cure - and in the case of psychosomatic complaints, may very well find one. One can feel in a state of grace with one's Voodoo divinity, a feeling of euphoria not to be underestimated.

"The village healers have been there for centuries, and present a far stronger brand of competition than do say chiropractors in the U.S. On the psychosomatic level they are perhaps unsurpassed, and even on the physical level they often have an age-old knowledge of local plants for certain local maladies which Western science has yet fully to explore." (Dr. William Hodges)

Although Haitian folk medicine is still very much centered in magic and superstition, there are indeed certain effective herbal cures which we have personally witnessed where the Western practitioner had been powerless. A Canadian woman of our acquaintance had developed a strange skin rash which the Western-type doctors of Port-au-Prince were unable to cure. One application, however, of an herbal compound by a village *doktè fey* brought about an immediate cure. This was no doubt a local cure for a local malady, but it nevertheless serves as a reminder that Western medicine still needs to evaluate - and learn from - many a "folk cure."

Not unlike Western medicine, folk medicine is constantly evolving, albeit more slowly. Its practitioners are open to

## FOLK MEDICINE (con't)

new remedies based on their own observations and those of others with whom they have direct contact. In an illiterate society however, transmission of knowledge is obviously quite limited. Nevertheless, this openness to new ideas could prove a fertile field for the upgrading of some local skills by an adroit Western-type practitioner. Medical training disguised as collaboration?

Many feel that the worst harm done by the *oungan*, *manbo*, or *doktè fey* is that proper medical treatment is thereby delayed until it is often too late.

**FONTANEL** Often protected by powdered nutmeg and oil in a piece of cotton, held in place by a sock or bonnet.

\*When noticeably indented (as in the case of dehydration), the solution is simply to hold the baby on its head.\* Only later (and often too late) is medical aid sought.

\*Rain falling on the fontanel will cause crooked teeth.\*

**FOOD** Three basic food groups are recognized by the peasant population: *vyann* (high-protein foods such as meat, chicken, fish, eggs, milk); *viv* (starches and carbohydrates such as cornmeal, millet, rice, plantain, sweet potato, yam, manioc); and *legim* (vegetables such as eggplant, tomato, okra, pumpkin, onion, chayote squash). A healthy diet must include each group.

However beliefs about certain foods can well deprive a person of important nutrients. See BANANAS, CHAYOTE SQUASH, EGGS, FRUIT, MEAT, MILK, MUTTON, OKRA, ORANGES, PINEAPPLE, SPINACH; and especially HOT/COLD IMBALANCE, MEALS, and POSTPARTUM BELIEFS AND PRACTICES.

## FOOD (con't)

Pregnant women are supposed to "eat for two," especially red fruits and vegetables such as beets, to build up the baby's blood. They are to avoid spices.

Haitians do not like to try new foods. A hospital setting is not the place to try to introduce the unfamiliar in nutrition.

Haiti has been described as a mecca of vegetarianism - not because Haitians are convinced of the virtues of eating only fruits, vegetables, and grains, but because most are too poor to do otherwise. The result however, thanks also to a harsh life-style involving much walking and climbing, is a relatively low rate of coronary sclerosis.

"There are three types of Haitians: the first eats three times a day; the second eats one meal a day; the third doesn't know when he'll eat next."

**FOREIGN AID** The great majority of foreign donors prefer to channel their contributions through non-governmental organizations. There is the well-known proverb: "*Chodyè monte sou non timoun, li desann sou non granmoun.*" (The cooking-pot set up in the name of the child is taken down in the name of the adult. - Aid given to help the people ends up in the pockets of the powerful.)

**FREDI** (chill) \*An external substance always harmful when it enters the human body; affects women more than men, especially in the head and stomach. A woman is most susceptible to *fredi* immediately after delivery, but it can also harm the fetus and even prevent further conception.\*

\*The basic cause of tetanus.\*

**FRENCH** A wondrous societal device for keeping the rich rich, and the poor poor.



## FRENCH (con't)

**\*Every Haitian speaks French.\*** The greater the outside social pressure, the more this ridiculous statement is likely to be heard. In reality, only some 3% of Haitians are fully fluent in French, with another 12% who have varying commands of French. Thus approximately 85% of Haitians speak *only* Creole. All Haitians however (except a few raised abroad), speak Haitian Creole - and Article 5 of the latest Haitian Constitution (1987) proclaims Haitian Creole and French as the two official languages of the country.

**FROGS** \*Fearsome creatures to be avoided at all costs. They will urinate up into one's eyes, causing blindness.\*

**FRUIT** \*Acidic fruit can spoil the blood of adolescents of either sex, causing acne.\*

\*Eating fruits classified as "cold" (see HOT/COLD IMBALANCE) when the body is overheated from exertion, is a certain cause of diarrhea.\*

**FUNERAL PROCESSIONS** Normally take place at 4 p.m., are often slow, and always on foot. Another constant of the Haitian scene - even to the point that when driving in Port-au-Prince at this hour, one has to allow extra time because of the inevitable funeral processions encountered. "A land of high birthrates, and high deathrates."

There is even a well-known proverb concerning fate and inevitability: "*Wè pa wè, lan tèman pou katrè*" (Whether we see it or not, the funeral is for four o'clock.)

**FUNERALS** Services both in church and at grave site are often the scenes of extreme emotional outbursts (*kriz de nè, q.v.*) which sometimes render the continuation of the ceremony all but impossible.

**GARLIC** \*A garlic necklace prevents worms from working their way up to the lungs and throat, where they could cause suffocation.\* A new twist on the Dracula legend?

\*The aroma of garlic, when deeply inhaled, is effective in killing worms.\*

**GAS** (*gaz*) More a concept than a substance. Pockets of gas are perceived as the immediate cause of pain occurring *anywhere* in the body: in the head (entering through the ears), in the stomach (entering through the mouth), in the neck, shoulders, back, appendix, or legs (traveling from the stomach) - and especially in a muscle. As gas moves from one part of the body to another, it produces pain. For example in passing from the stomach to the legs, it is held responsible for producing arthritis or rheumatism. Hernias as well are explained by gas. Gas is also given as the cause of acute hunger pain, and the accumulation of this gas results in *anfleman* (swelling), i.e., kwashiorkor. In the head, it is referred to as "wind": *van nan tèt* (wind in head) or *van nan zòrèy* (wind in ears, buzzing in ears) - both causing headaches.

It is believed that women are especially susceptible to gas after childbirth, and should wear a tight belt or strip of cloth about the waist. But it is of little use to ask a Haitian woman if she has been passing gas; she will rarely, if ever, give an affirmative answer.

\*A cord tied tightly around any body area will prevent *gaz*, and therefore pain, from spreading. A headache can be localized by a tight string around the neck; a stomach-ache can be confined by tight cords around the chest and upper abdomen.\*

**GEOPHAGY** The habit of earth-eating, especially clay, indeed exists in Haiti, but is apparently not as widespread a problem today as in colonial times. Brought

## GEOPHAGY (con't)

about supposedly by: 1) extreme hunger; 2) an unconscious need to remedy certain mineral deficiencies; 3) simply a fondness for the taste of certain earths. It sometimes occurs with pregnant women, and is interpreted as a need for increased iron. *Manjèdtè* (earth-eaters) are reportedly found most frequently in the country's most destitute region, the Department of the North-West.

**GERMS** A concept quite foreign to the average Haitian peasant. However, much illness is seen as being caused by elements originating outside the human body, such as inappropriate foods (see HOT/COLD IMBALANCE), *fredi* (*q.v.*), gas (*q.v.*), as well as, of course, Voodoo-induced ailments.

Blaming sickness and disease on such commonplace elements as bad water or lack of latrines strikes many a Voodooist as a White man's simple-minded explanation for a complex Voodoo curse.

Is not the wrath of one of the three m's (*mistè* - another name for the Voodoo spirits or *lwa*; *mò* - the dead, the ancestors; and *marasa* - twins) a far more reasonable explanation than tiny, invisible particles floating around in the water, in the air, or in mosquitoes and flies?

**GIRLS** \*If a girl climbs a fruit tree, the fruit will become sour.\*

\*If a girl eats the testicles of a pig, she will become sexually aroused.\*

\*If a girl wears too many rings, she will have trouble finding a husband.\*

**GODPARENTS** One's godmother especially is considered in almost the same light as one's mother. And there exists a strong taboo against marrying someone with whom one shares the same godparent.

**GONORRHEA** (*grantchalè*) \*Caused by sitting on wet grass or on a wet stone when fatigued.\*

**GOVERNMENT** Did you really expect government red tape to be organized, orderly? Is it really that way anywhere? And if Haiti were really "the way it should be," you wouldn't be needed here. (See **POLITICAL PROBLEMS**.)

**GRATITUDE** Don't expect it. Some claim that it is there, though not often exteriorized. But did you really come to Haiti seeking blind adoration or undying thanks? Or rather because you thought this is where you were most needed, because this is where you thought you could help most, because this is where you wanted to be? Your reward has to come from within, not from without.

Many patients simply perceive that they are receiving services in return for fees paid (however small). Perhaps this is best for their self-respect.

"There is no reward for the work except the privilege of doing it." (Dr. Albert Schweitzer)

**GREETINGS** The mobile person is expected to greet a stationary person first. Similarly, a newcomer in a community is expected to take the first steps in getting to know the already established members of that community.

**GUARDIAN ANGELS** Voodooists believe there is a *gwo bonnanj* (literally: "big good angel") which animates our thought processes, memory, and feelings, and which leaves us during our sleep - and whose adventures during

## HEALTH (con't)

Yet there is a saying that "*Mikwòb pou pete fyèl yon Ayisyen poko fet*" (The germs that would do a Haitian in have not yet been created). Despite the unconscious irony of this statement, it is nevertheless evident that Haiti presents a striking example of the law concerning the survival of the fittest. Only the strongest survived the slave pens and the slave ships, the harsh treatment of the slave plantations, as well as the generally insalubrious living conditions that have characterized so much of the Haitian environment since the Revolution.

It has often been observed that even more important than more and better health facilities, and more medical personnel, are simply more and better food, more potable water, and more latrines.

**HEALTH EDUCATION** Health care without accompanying health education: a variation of the "Fish Principle." (See DEPENDENCY.)

**HEMORRHAGING** \*Can be caused by red foods.\*

\*Best treated with herbs.\*

**HEMORRHOIDS** \*Can be caused by someone burning your excrement.\*

**HERBS** Plants are of the greatest importance for the peasant, forming not only his nourishment and the basis for his handmade crafts, but also his medicine and his magic.

Even rather young children have an amazing knowledge of herbs and the reputed medicinal qualities of each.

## HERBS (con't)

Herbs are used in good magic (medicine) as well as in evil magic (sorcery). \*Certain ones are useful only to counteract a supernatural illness.\*

Herbal teas are the basic feature of home remedies.

An intriguing peasant philosophy has it that each herb is good for some medicinal purpose, though we may not yet know that purpose. Conversely stated, for every sickness there is a curative herb. The problem is simply to match one with the other.

Proverb: "*Nanpwen maladi ki pa gen remèd.*" - There's no sickness that doesn't have a remedy.

HISTORY-TAKING [*All but the last paragraph in this section are either inspired by, or are a direct quote from, Dr. William Hodges, rich (in wisdom and experience!) from over thirty years' practice in Haiti.*]

"Many peasants are used to going to a Voodoo priest(ess), who operates through divination alone. Thus they are not psychologically prepared for the question-and-answer cause-and-effect dialogue of Western medicine. And they may well see in any medical practitioner the same 'magic aura' and may be trying to test you. You are supposed already to 'know' what their problem is."

"There is a most revealing proverb: '*Abitan pa janm konnen*' (Peasants never know), i.e., peasants *pretend* never to know anything. Deeply instilled is the principle never to volunteer information, either personal or concerning those near to them. Any information divulged may give someone a degree of power over them. Another proverb goes '*Tou sa ou pa konnen pi gran pase ou*' (Everything you don't know is greater than you), i.e.,

## HISTORY-TAKING (con't)

'Lack of knowledge can hurt you,' or conversely stated, 'Knowledge is power.' Thus withholding information is an effective way of protecting oneself and even of having power over others."

"CONCEAL OR REVEAL: the patient's option, and unfortunately, the Haitian peasant's cultural orientation inclines toward circumlocution and obfuscation. Sometimes this tendency even leads to using a different name on each visit. Answers tend to be vague, evasive, or even to reflect what the patient believes the physician wants to hear. The causes of this mindset have been ascribed to slavery, colonialism, oppression, poverty - even to Voodoo which tends to conceal. Whatever the reasons, here are some ploys which have evolved from thirty years' experience in Haiti:

Exaggeration: 'I'll bet this fellow has been sick since last Christmas!' - 'Oh no, doc, it hasn't been over 3-4 months!'

Praise: 'It's good you have taken care of him so long! How long has it been?'

Threat: Throw the dossier down on the table and refuse to continue unless the person tells you when and how the illness began.

Fingernails: Look at their length. Frequently the peasant will let his nails grow in disease. If they are a quarter of an inch or more, the illness is over a month.

Keep on asking: often first answers can be misleading. For example, you can be told 'I fell,' 'I have a sore stomach,' or 'My eyes hurt' - and the

## HISTORY-TAKING (con't)

eventual diagnosis can be tuberculosis. But what often appears to be a lie is actually more a problem of differing concepts.

'Why are you here?' Maybe simply because they were told to return, but when asked the question, they sometimes tend almost to invent symptoms. Rely more on what you see than on what you hear. Body language and non-verbal communication are all the more essential when dealing with often inarticulate patients. Yes, you are sometimes reduced to practicing 'veterinary medicine!'"

"As the desperation level rises, histories can become more and more contrived, and more and more misleading. And some exaggerations are in hopes of getting more and better medicines."

"Very rarely will a patient admit to feeling completely well, even if cured. The viewpoint is: Don't tempt fate!"

"Psychosomatic complaints are common, especially for those mourning a dead relative - possibly out of fear of retribution. Psychotic depression is very difficult to diagnose in a foreign culture." (See INSANITY.)

"One learns not to interpret the history too literally, but according to the patient's willingness to communicate. Histories are 'basically discountable,' unless volunteered."

Confidentiality can be seen as a problem, especially for women patients, when in the presence of an interpreter - who could well spread gossip around the community.

See also CONSULTATIONS.



**HOMOSEXUALITY** No more or less prevalent in Haiti than elsewhere. However, a male is considered homosexual (*masisi*) by the local community only if his general demeanor is overtly effeminate.

Most Haitian males consider themselves neither homosexual nor bisexual as long as they are the insertive partner during the sexual act, regardless of the sex of their partner - and thus in their minds at no risk in acquiring AIDS.

Others will in no way admit to homosexuality, since they engage in it only as a way to support themselves in a country where unemployment and poverty are rampant.

**HOSPITAL** The *peristil* (a covered area open at the sides) of the Voodoo temple complex (*ounfo*) where the ritual dancing and public ceremonies are centered, is often used also as an informal lying-in hospital where the priest(ess) can follow a patient's progress more closely. More generally, it has been described as: "sanctuary, clubhouse, dance-hall, hospital, theater, chemist's shop, music-hall, court, and council chamber in one." (J. Jahn)

Question: Why would a Voodoo priest come for treatment in a Christian hospital? Answer: To have a disease sent by God treated in a hospital of God!

See also PUBLIC HOSPITALS.

**HOT/COLD IMBALANCE** Foods, body conditions, illnesses, and medications, are defined as either "hot" (*cho*) or "cold" (*frèt*) - designating not the temperature, but rather their symbolic "essential quality" generating heat or cold within the body. Good health depends upon achieving a state of equilibrium between the two. For example, the postpartum period is considered to be the hottest state of the mother's body, and thus "hot" foods must be avoided -

## HOT/COLD IMBALANCE (con't)

but foods too "cold" can induce hemorrhaging. Someone with a cold is considered "hot," and must take a "cold" medicine. Measles and migraines are "hot," and must be countered with "cold" medicines, herbs, or foods. Someone with cold blood (*san frèt*) must take medication to increase body warmth, and vice versa. Malaria is "cold," while other fevers are "hot," and hot and cold temperatures experienced in rapid succession can bring on *chofrèt* - fever and chills.

According to some observers, dark grainy foodstuffs tend to be classified as "hot" since they more closely resemble the texture of the dark, nourishing earth with its life-giving forces. Conversely, lighter smoother foods are commonly classified as "cold." The example is given that unrefined honey, being darker and heavier, is "hot," while refined honey is "cold." Similarly, dark meats are more life-giving and therefore "hot," fish and poultry "cold." However, upon examination many classifications appear to be quite arbitrary, and some foods change category depending upon the user: milk, being white, is usually considered "cold," yet "hot" for a neonate, since it is essential for sustaining life. (Leslie Desmangles)

Examples of "hot" foods are cinnamon tea, coffee, corn, eggs, manioc, nutmeg, peanuts, rum, sesame seeds, shaddock juice, sweet potatoes, taro, and yams. Examples of "cold" foods are avocados, bananas, cashews, chayote squash, coconuts, granadilla, green beans, limes, mangoes, okra, oranges, pineapples, shaddock, soursop, star apples, tomatoes, and watermelons. There is a large third "neutral" category which includes beef, beets, bread, breadfruit, cabbage, carrots, cassava, conch, cornmeal, eggplant, goat, kidney beans, lima beans, plantains, pork, pumpkins, rice, and sugar cane. As for medication, cough medicines are "hot," while laxatives are "cold."

## HOT/COLD IMBALANCE (con't)

This theory appears to be somewhat less prevalent in Haiti than in the rest of Latin America - but Haiti does, after all, share the same island with an Hispanic culture.

Obviously, a Western physician could well coax a recalcitrant patient into taking indicated medicine or foods by referring to this well-entrenched belief.

**HOUSES** Used for sleeping, and for sex. Cooking is done in a detached lean-to. Living takes place outdoors.

Small, crowded, tightly closed up at night against the evil spirits that roam about - thus maximizing chances of contagion.

**HUMAN SACRIFICE** Unsubstantiated since the infamous Bizoton Affair of 1863, when Congo and Jeanne Pellé were tried and executed for ritual murder and cannibalism. Nevertheless, the fear is still present among some of the peasant population that they, or their children, could be used as Voodoo "goats without horns" - human beings taking the place of a sacrificial goat.

**HYDROCELE** (*maklouklou, madougoun*) \*Caused by river water having entered through a small lesion and bringing about enormous enlargement. Or by air pressure from, for example, playing the trumpet, or even from just breathing too hard, which punctures body tissue and leads to enormous swelling.\*

\*Caused by an excessive effort such as carrying heavy objects.\*

Considered shameful - consequently there is usually much delay before a physician is finally consulted.

**HYPOCHONDRIA** Even less rare in Haiti than elsewhere, due in part to rather widespread paranoia that "others" not only desire to do one harm, but - thanks to evil Voodoo spells - are quite able to do so. (See PARANOIA.) Obviously a situation to the financial advantage of certain folk healers.

**HYSTERIA** (*kriz*), or "PANIC ATTACK" "A constant of the Haitian scene. In most cases the victim is a girl between 15 and 25, who screams at the top of her lungs and throws her arms, legs and head about in wild abandon. The pulse races, as the chest heaves in and out. Sometimes there is a lull, followed by a repetition. The eyes always seem to flutter, and some have even come to call it 'the fluttering-eye disease.' There is usually some consciousness, as shown by the old test for conscious states whereby the lifted arm will not fall back upon the face. The usual Haitian explanation is either a Voodoo possession, where a Voodoo spirit has temporarily taken possession of a believer, or a pressing need for sexual activity. Afterward, the victim returns to a normal state, though exhausted. The routine for many Western doctors is to check for serious disorders such as meningitis or cerebral malaria, and then prescribe a tranquilizer. For habitual seizures of this kind, Haitian folklore medicine simply prescribes marriage!" (Dr. William Hodges) (Cf. *ENDISPOZISYON*.)

Supposedly affects 50% of neurotic young girls of both poor and middle-class backgrounds at one time or another.

**ILLNESS** \*Exists only when there is intense pain, or when one can no longer function normally.\* Result: much delay in treatment.

Certain ones are considered especially shameful: tuberculosis, epilepsy, insanity, AIDS.

## ILLNESS (con't)

Divided into two categories: 1) of natural origin, and 2) of supernatural origin - although the distinctions between the two can be quite subjective. Illness is treated on its own terms in Western society, but for many in rural (and urban) Haiti, it is a combination of religion, magic, and empirical science - the sacred vs. the secular treatment of illness.

**NATURAL ILLNESS** (*maladi Bondye, maladi peyi, maladi doktè*) Well-known, common sicknesses, of short duration. Not thought to be the result of a Voodoo-inspired poison or of negative magic.

Examples: headaches, colds, sore throat, cramps, mild fevers, blisters, conjunctivitis, sore chest, lower-back pain, and hot/cold imbalance (*q.v.*). Also cuts, burns, sprains, common poison. A few others, such as ulcers, abscesses, and spoiled blood (*san gate*), fall in an intermediate category, perhaps calling for the help of a Voodoo priest(ess) as well.

Six major causes: 1) blood problems (volume, condition, temperature, color, and circulation - see BLOOD); 2) gas, *q.v.*; 3) (mother's) milk (condition and location - see MILK, SPOILED); 4) hot/cold imbalance, *q.v.*; 5) broken or dislocated bone; 6) movement of disease from one part of the body to another.

Treatment: 1) home remedies; 2) faith-and-herb healer; 3) Western-type physician - usually in that order. Any so-called natural illness, however, which fails to respond to treatment, can be suspected of being of supernatural origin, and is then referred to a Voodoo practitioner. Recourse to the rare, understaffed and expensive government hospitals is usually seen as an act of final desperation.

## ILLNESS (con't)

**SUPERNATURAL ILLNESS** (*maladi lwa, maladi majik*), "the evil that comes from another." Unusual sicknesses. Clearest indication: appears suddenly, with no preliminary signs, and, if nothing is done, progresses slowly through the body.

Examples: sudden sickness in young children, sudden but persistent internal complaints, edema, seizures, strokes, coma, paralysis, insanity. Also, a child born with a physical deformity. However, any illness or injury, such as an accident on the road, falling from a tree, or being struck by lightning, can be seen as punishment by the Voodoo spirits, or conversely, by God for having made some sort of Voodoo pact.

Two major causes: 1) ill-will of a Voodoo spirit (*lwa*) whom one has offended, usually through neglect; 2) ill-will of a human being who has employed negative magic (*voye mò, maladi majik, maladi moun, maladi satan*). Other causes are the evil eye (*move je, maldjòk*) and vampire-like witches (*lougawou*), both attacking mainly children; plus dead relatives (*lemò*) and various other evil spirits (*djab, move nanm, baka, sanpwèl*).

Treatment: supernatural means for a supernatural illness, namely positive countermagic by a Voodoo priest(ess). Some illnesses of supernatural origin will, however, require subsequent therapy by a faith-and-herb healer or Western-type physician to repair the damage remaining (or resulting), once the supernatural cause has been alleviated. Often complications occur because of the time-lag involved.

If Western-type medicine has been tried first and been found to be unsuccessful, \*this is a clear indication of supernatural illness, and the services of a Voodoo

## ILLNESS (con't)

priest(ess) are definitely in order. Thus any possible reasons why a given person might have wanted to wreak vengeance on the afflicted person are to be carefully examined.\*

It is not difficult to understand why phenomena such as sudden infant death syndrome ("crib death") would be attributed to supernatural causes, often seen as the result of the ill-will of a neighbor or the evil powers of a half-demented old woman (*lougawou*) - and the ensuing and enduring hatreds that would result.

And naturally, the cessation of many an illness which has run its course is attributed to the powers of the folk healer - or Western-type physician.

"In Haiti especially, one is tempted to examine the relation between the mental and the physical. To what extent do the terror and stress caused by belief in a Voodoo curse weaken the entire immune system? And do certain side effects of Western drugs used as treatment only augment the psychosis and thereby worsen the physical response? The proverb "*Tout maladi pa maladi doktè*" (Every sickness is not the kind to be treated by a doctor) can well be applied. But it could well be that here especially the old 'bedside manner' so often said to be lacking in modern medicine, is needed to soothe the mind of the patient, support any efforts of relatives, and bring about an objective mustering of all healing forces for the welfare of the patient." (Dr. William Hodges)

See APPENDIX: Illness.

**IMPOTENCE** \*Caused by the mother having carelessly let several drops of her milk fall upon the baby's genitals.\*

## IMPOTENCE (con't)

An abiding fear among many a groom is that negative magic is cast against him during the wedding ceremony which will cause him to become impotent, at least temporarily.

\*Can be overcome by participation in a group sex session following a Voodoo ceremony.\*

\*A woman can render her mate impotent for any other woman by collecting some of his sperm in a cloth which is then placed in a cold spot, preferably under a large water jar. When she wishes his favors for herself, all she has to do is to remove the cloth temporarily.\* Of course a "well-meaning friend" will have informed him of this action. (Such magic could doubtlessly bring international fame and fortune to any Voodoo practitioner who could guarantee results!)

**INCEST** Occurs, but meets with stern social disapproval.

**INFANTICIDE** Supposedly non-existent. However, in cases of handicapped infants, there is often disguised infanticide largely by withholding nourishment.

**INFANT MORTALITY** The three major causes: umbilical tetanus, diarrhea, and malnutrition.

Very high - exactly how high is unknowable, in spite of frequently published 'precise' statistics. For example, a widespread practice is the burying of deceased infants without registration or funerals. Haitian statistics are at best educated guesses. Some reasons: mountainous terrain with few roads, a highly dispersed population, and an attitude toward anything governmental which causes people to hide out when the census-taker passes.



**INFORMALITY** And relaxed friendliness, with much joking and chatting - the dominant tone of rural Haitian life. The more you can fit in with this approach, the more effective you can probably be.

**INJECTIONISTS** (*pikiris*) Usually a former employee at a dispensary who has acquired some experience in giving shots. Goes from village to village administering this form of medication most favored by Haitians. Main clientele consists of patients living far from health services and/or unable to travel.

Reportedly use the same hypodermic needles, their biggest expense, some twenty times or more. Their medicines, more often than not, consist of drugs well past their expiration dates, and dumped at low cost on the Third-World market. And obviously any injections requiring refrigeration are worse than useless.

Such is the blind faith in the hypodermic that some have been discovered going from house to house injecting - for a healthy fee - substances such as condensed milk, with decidedly unhealthy results.

Could well be instrumental in the spread of AIDS. With a minimum of equipment, their needles are rarely sterilized, and a large percentage of their clients have tuberculosis - in Haiti often one of the first symptoms of AIDS.

**INJECTIONS** Often perceived as the great cure-all, whatever the malady.

\*If they don't hurt, and you don't get a highly noticeable reaction, then you're not getting your money's worth!\*

\*If administered at the time of a full moon, can result in a welt forming on the spot of the injection.\*

**INSANITY** Thought to be caused by an intruding evil spirit (demoniacal possession). The Voodoo priest(ess) attempts to drive out this spirit by a number of methods, including shock treatment ceremony, rubbing on a foul-smelling concoction while cutting the patient's arm, flagellation in a cemetery at midnight. (See also VOODOO CURES.)

\*Can also be caused by *san feb* (weak blood), by mother's milk mixing with her blood and going to her head, or by a foreign object such as a bug having entered through the ears or nose.\*

"Voodoo provides a reasonable theory and treatment method for the psychiatrically ill. Examination reveals certain striking similarities between the therapeutic framework of Voodoo and that of Western psychiatry." (Ari Kiev, M.D., Johns Hopkins Psychiatric Clinic, in "Folk Psychiatry in Haiti," *Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease*, March 1961, p. 264.)

Psychiatric evaluation should be subject to much caution. Because of a firm belief in Voodoo, what might easily be diagnosed as delusion and hallucination by a psychiatrist coming from another culture, can instead, in a Haitian context, well be simply an expression of a strongly entrenched traditional belief system, and not necessarily a form of psychotic behavior. There is not the same delineation between the real and the unreal. (Cf. DREAMS.) Thus commonly used indicators of paranoid schizophrenia will not necessarily apply. (See PARANOIA.)

**INTERCOURSE** \*Beneficial during pregnancy: keeps uterine canal open, and above all, gives strength (*manm*) to the unborn child.\*

Not supposed to occur until two to three months after delivery, or \*the new-born child will be puny - its

## INTERCOURSE (con't)

nourishment being absorbed by any child conceived during this period.\* Such abstinence is rarely the case, however.

IUD (INTRAUTERINE DEVICE) \*1) Can travel up inside a woman, injuring the stomach, lungs, and heart; 2) harmful to the male during intercourse; 3) will "break a woman's nature."\*

Some foreign observers have long questioned whether it is proper to insert IUD's when the recipients often have little access to proper medical care in case of complications.

JAUNDICE \*Can better be treated with herbal teas by a folk healer than by a Western-type physician.\*

\*A person with jaundice must not cross a river.\*

JEALOUSY In a country as poor as Haiti, jealousy concerning even small material advantages of others is unfortunately a fact of life - and can create business for any unscrupulous *bòkò* (q.v.).

KIDNEY STONES Without an indoor flush toilet, many patients have no way of knowing they are passing kidney stones.

KRIZ DE NÈ "Emotional crisis." Expression used especially to describe violent convulsions of women at a funeral or grave site, or the male reaction of collapsing and lying tense and motionless on the ground. \*Caused by blood rushing to one's head as the result of violent emotion.\*

KWASHIORKOR (*maladi kò anfle*) The swollen belly, matchstick arms, reddish-tinged hair, and huge, staring

## KWASHIORKOR (*maladi kò anfle*) (con't)

eyes, find "natural" explanations. The swollen stomach is explained as the result of intestinal parasites, an excess of salt, or by the mother continuing to breast-feed after having once again become pregnant. Slightly golden or reddish hair color is explained as the result of walking in the sun. In addition, there are, of course, the usual hypotheses based on supernatural causes, such as a curse, the evil eye, or a *lougawou* (q.v.) sucking out the blood and replacing it with water.

Traces of kwashiorkor will often be seen in children who have just recently been weaned because of the birth of another little brother or sister.

**LAND TITLES** Lack of proper deeds is the curse of a largely illiterate society. Should one's land appear too desirable, a political bigwig may well suddenly materialize with a bogus or long-forgotten deed, evicting one from land inhabited and farmed by one's family for generations. A fact of life disastrous not only for one's mental well-being, but also for general rural prosperity.

**LANGUAGE** Haitian Creole is declared by the Constitution of 1987 (Article 5) as the first of Haiti's two official languages (along with French). It is the only language spoken by 100% of Haitians, while some French is spoken by at most 15% of Haitians. (See FRENCH.)

There is often in Haitian both a learned ("French-fried") as well as a more descriptive popular term for the same illness. Thus, malnutrition is *malnitrisyon* - or *malmanje* (literally: bad eating); kwashiorkor is *kwachyòkò* - or *maladi kò anfle* (swollen-body sickness); marasmus is *maras* - or *maladi kò chèch* (dried-up-body sickness); diabetes is *dyabèt* - or *maladi sik* (sugar sickness); anemia is *anemi* - or *feblès* (weakness) or *manke san* (to

## LANGUAGE (con't)

lack blood); goiter is *gwat* - or *gwo kou* (fat neck). If you wish to make yourself understood by all, avoid "French-fried" Creole like the plague.

Do not assume, however, that there are necessarily good, strictly Haitian equivalents for many technical or technological terms, such as "retina," "laser beam," or "contact lens." Every language must at times make use of cognates. Also note a frequent impreciseness among many speakers, even when there exists a well-known specific Haitian term. For example, *tibèt* (bug) is often used instead of *ravèt* (cockroach), and *bagay* (thing) is used to refer to almost any tangible object. In medicine the general word *kriz* is used to designate problems as varied as epilepsy, eclampsia, and hysteria.

Haitians tend to express themselves in a symbolic or metaphoric mode sometimes difficult for a foreigner to understand. Also, proverbs play an extremely important role, serving to make a decisive point or draw a logical conclusion. (See APPENDIX.)

**LEECHES** (*sansi*) Together with blood-letting, seem to reflect European medical practices from the colonial period.

Raised by certain peasants, who for a small sum will "make house visits" to apply them to a patient.

\*More effective if applied when the moon is on the wane.\*

**LEFT-HANDEDNESS** \*All children are born with a tendency to be left-handed. This must be gently corrected from the first moment they begin reaching for objects.\* (Reminder: evil is associated with the left hand, good with the right.)

**LEMÒ** (The Dead) \*Failure to remember deceased relatives both by word and by deed (e.g., by maintaining their tomb; by spilling a few drops on the ground before drinking), can result in sickness sent as punishment.\*

**LETHARGY** Should be seen as largely the result of a number of factors: climate, improper diet during early formative years, general undernourishment, malnutrition, internal parasites, overall poor health. To these should be added the psychological factor of poor role models. A vicious cycle.

**LIMES** \*Will prevent normal menstruation if eaten in excess.\*

\*Lime juice pressed against the eyelids - or into the eyes - of a baby, will provide exceptionally good eyesight.\*

**LIP LACERATIONS** Inflicted by one woman on another are seen not infrequently - often the result of jealousy over a man. The intention is to make the other woman permanently unattractive.

**LOUGAWOU** Central concept in rural Haiti to explain infant morbidity and mortality. Translated as a "creature human by day and vampire by night, witch or (very rarely) warlock." Supposedly enters dwellings at night through any available crack in the hut, and sucks the blood of infants little by little, slowly bringing about anemia and often death. It can also use a long tube for this purpose. It can attack even the fetus, causing it to abort. Most often identified as an old woman who may be only vaguely aware of her nocturnal metamorphoses.

\*Herbal brews for the expectant mother, followed by similar treatment for the neonate, are an excellent preventive. Best of all, however, is to make the blood of the infant "bitter," using several drops of turtle blood, or

LOUGAWOU (con't)

through special leaf baths. Passing the baby over flames is an additional protection. Another is to place next to the sleeping baby a large doll which, it is hoped, will be attacked instead.\*

Some Haitian Protestants believe that the powers of the *lougawou* have diminished in recent years thanks to the increased number of those of their faith.

Not surprisingly, the bad reputations of many supposed *lougawou* seem to diminish considerably with the successes of a nearby clinic or dispensary.

With the average Haitian there seems to be an innate need to believe in magic and in its effectiveness. So different from the rest of mankind?

*The following is our translation of an article which appeared in the Haitian-language monthly Bon Nouvèl in January 1996 (N° 313, page 4):*

"In December 1995, a *lougawou* killed a two-year old child. Flovenid Cherestal had been suffering for a week with a fever and constant vomiting. One evening the child's mother noticed an ugly cat meowing near the bed, while another answered in kind from outside the house. The mother dived after the cat which was near the bed, but it scampered away. When she went into the house where the cat had gone, she found two healthy young women as naked as the day they were born. Only three people lived in the house: Tanya, Marie, and Madame Emile. Meanwhile Flovenid had died. The mother brought the little one to them so they would bring her back to life, but the women pretended not to understand. Madame Emile appeared to agree, but not Tanya, who said: 'If we bring her back to life, we'll die; if we don't bring her back to life, we'll die.' Outraged neighbors

*LOUGAWOU* (con't)

burned Tanya and Madame Emile to death, while relatives were able to save Marie. Tanya was 23, Madame Emile 69, and Marie 20. This occurred on rue de l'Enterrement, Saint-Anne block, Port-au-Prince, on Thursday, December 7, 1995."

Obviously the fact that a highly respectable and respected monthly would relate this incident indicates an attempt to put an end to such shameful practices, but unfortunately it is eloquent evidence that such beliefs, and such crimes against the innocent, do occur even in the capital. And what of the rural areas?

**MAGIC** For the Haitian traditionalist, the world is constituted by a physical continuum between the Visibles and the Invisibles, and where the Visibles are usually considered the less important. The Invisibles are magic, omnipresent beings who can help or harm. This is especially true concerning health. More often than not sickness is brought on by their ill-will or wrath.

Western doctors successful in their cures can be seen as possessed of a powerful magic. And if a dosage book is consulted, it is there that occult formulas are obtained. (An unreasonable belief?) Science is simply one more manifestation of the spiritual forces which the Voodooist believes surround us. Reality and the forces of the hidden spirits blend into one. Death is all too often attributed to magic. It is not surprising that a people with very limited physical resources, and largely isolated from the modern world, would have clung to beliefs which only recently this modern world used to share as well. Disease, understood as the result of natural causes, is a comparatively recent phenomenon. (See also **PARANOIA** and **SPELL-CASTING**.)



## MAGIC (con't)

"Rational, scientific cause and effect is essentially a concept foreign to the Haitian peasant." (Jowel Laguerre, Haitian scholar)

**MALADI BONDYE** Literally, "sickness of God." This is the most commonly-used term to refer to natural illnesses (see **ILLNESS**), but does not necessarily imply that God is held responsible for the particular illness.

**MALNUTRITION** Pervasive. Per capita calorie consumption estimated at 86% of that required to maintain even moderate physical activity. Lowest in the Western hemisphere, among the lowest in the world. Mean national protein consumption: 68% of minimum daily requirement. (In many rural areas these rates are even lower.) Estimated that approximately one-fourth of Haitian children between the ages of 3 months and 5 years are stunted as a result. Brain damage and retardation are not so easily estimated.

Proverb: "*Lavi malere se mistè.*" (The life of the destitute is a mystery. - We will never be able to understand how the desperately poor survive.)

Causes most frequently cited:

- 1) Too many people on too little arable land.
- 2) Deforestation and resulting soil erosion.
- 3) Less rain due to deforestation.
- 4) Recent hurricanes taking away rich topsoil and leaving salt deposits.
- 5) Silt from soil erosion washing into the sea causing there to be less fish off Haitian shores.
- 6) Peasant conservatism results in an unwillingness to adopt more efficient farming techniques. (See **CONSERVATISM**.)

## MALNUTRITION (con't)

- 7) Overworking the soil.
- 8) Parasitic infestation.
- 9) Lower death rate due to modern medicine.
- 10) Exploitation by those in power.
- 11) Rapid inflation, deteriorating rural economy.
- 12) Ignorance concerning proper nutrition (this last reason put very much into doubt by findings of Murray and Alvarez: "poverty rather than ignorance").

"If you want to know about the basic nutritional situation of any country, just look at the animals" - one of the most sobering observations to be made about Haiti.

Its symptoms have often led newly-arrived physicians mistakenly to seek far more esoteric diagnoses.

Recent studies have shown that a very high proportion of the food - especially meat - available in a Haitian household is often consumed by the man, in some cases as much as five-sevenths. The reasons given are: 1) as principal wage-earner he must conserve his strength in order to function properly; 2) in order simply to 'hang on' to him. The consequences for the woman and children are obvious.

**MANGOES** Haiti's most abundant food. (The Freeman-Laguette *Haitian-English Dictionary* lists 152 varieties of mango.) Main sustenance of large part of the country during the four to five-month season. Average peasant consumption estimated at 6-10 mangoes per day. Good for vitamins, but no protein.

Haitian military folklore has it that mango season was when the generals used to organize their revolts: at mealtime, just camp the army under some mango trees!

**MARRIAGE** The exception rather than the rule among the great mass of the peasant population, save for the smaller, more closely-knit Protestant groups. Discouraged during the period of slavery, the pattern continued after Independence. For many, it is simply not that important a factor. In addition to a deeply rooted mistrust of legal, "outside" entanglements, there is the very considerable problem of cost. A marriage celebration calls for a major display, with the couple paying the bill for much rum and food. Failure to provide one's guests with proper food and drink is a far greater social disgrace than any failure to marry in the first place. (See also COMMON-LAW UNIONS.)

A civil service not accompanied by a religious one is very much looked down upon.

There is also the mystic Voodoo marriage, whereby one is "married" to a particular Voodoo spirit for whom one must reserve one or two nights a week, foregoing intercourse with one's earthly partner. An ingenious method for ensuring sexual respite, and/or perhaps an unconscious form of the most effective birth-control method yet devised: abstinence.

**MEALS (RURAL)** With certain individual and seasonal variations, typical meals include: breakfast which consists of coffee, bread and peanut butter, or a sweet potato, or a semi-liquid cornmeal preparation (*akasan*) - or nothing. There is normally only one cooked meal per day, consumed at midday if work in the fields so permits; it consists of either millet or rice, corn, with red-bean sauce - plus vegetables in season. Meat is consumed at most once a week. Cooking is done under a lean-to near the house, and eating normally takes place outside, using metal dishes and bowls, and large spoons. Children often share a plate with other children, or with an elderly relative.

## MEALS (RURAL) (con't)

Proverb: *Grangou se mizè, vant plen se traka.* (Hunger is misery, a full belly is trouble.)

## MEAT \*Meat causes worms.\*

Some people will not touch red meat, for fear that it is really human flesh.

**MECONIUM** A strong purgative (*lòk* - composed of ingredients such as crude castor oil, pork fat, nutmeg, garlic, cinnamon, and various leaf brews) is given the neonate very soon after birth to expel the meconium. Some observers believe the *lòk* so harmful that it is a disguised elimination of weaker children. This is often followed by *labouyi lanmidon* (literally: starch porridge), made with laundry starch, sugar and cinnamon, mixed in water - believed to be a further purgative as well as nutritious.

**MEDICAL EDUCATION (WESTERN-STYLE)** On the whole, quite good, but: often textbooks from France and U.S. do not adequately cover certain sicknesses prevalent in Haiti; students are steeped in French medical terms and appear to have trouble communicating with their Creole-speaking clientele.

The School of Medicine of the State University of Haiti, in Port-au-Prince, used to graduate as many as 100 M.D.'s each year, but in recent times this number has been reduced by some 40%. Paradoxically, in a country which has one of the least enviable ratios of physicians to patients, there had been created an oversupply of doctors. The elite few who could afford proper medical care were already receiving it. Thus the Haitian government was supporting expensive training which in too many cases,

## MEDICAL EDUCATION (WESTERN-STYLE) (con't)

instead of benefiting the country, only added to the brain drain. It is often claimed that there are more Haitian physicians in Montreal alone than in all of Haiti.

Reportedly, Port-au-Prince contains some 80% of the country's M.D.'s, 50% of the dentists, and 55% of the graduate nurses. The remaining 20% of physicians are located principally in the 10 main provincial towns.

In addition, the State University of Haiti in Port-au-Prince graduates each year some 10-20 dentists and 10-25 pharmacists. For nursing, there are schools in the capital and in Cape Haitian graduating from 30 to 60 each year.

There is supposedly an obligatory two-year period of service in rural Haiti after medical school graduation, but this is all too often served in theory only, with a high rate of absenteeism. And those who do attempt to fulfill this obligation are greatly hampered by a lack of necessary medical material. (See DISPENSARIES.)

To serve the rural masses, the Haitian physician does not find an infrastructure within which to work: adequately equipped hospitals and clinics, reliable electrical supply for refrigeration of medicine or for operating equipment, even running water or telephones - or most importantly, a clientele which can afford to support these expenses. In addition, there is the question of simply being able to support oneself and family adequately, as well as the lack of a pleasant social environment. On the other hand, the two main complaints from the rural population concerning Haitian physicians are: 1) unavailability, and 2) lack of understanding of the peasant milieu.

## **MEDICAL EDUCATION (WESTERN-STYLE) (con't)**

It appears that until the basic economy of Haiti improves greatly, medical care for the rural majority will be in the hands of foreign medical missionaries (religious and/or humanitarian), and the traditional folk healers. And many, many young Haitian physicians will continue to find their careers abroad. Thus one has a clearer conception of the importance, through default if nothing else, of the role of folk medicine in the rural areas.

**MEDICAL THEORY** An amazing mixture of age-old African beliefs, of 18th-century French-colonial practices, of herbal knowledge acquired in the Haitian milieu, and of relatively modern Western medicine. For example, humors or the state of one's blood, leeches, cupping, and frequent enemas, can be seen as remnants of 18th-century European beliefs and practices. The whole makes for a far more confusing and certainly more heterogeneous medical climate than that to which the foreign medical practitioner is accustomed. Magic, tradition, and science all co-exist, and not always peacefully.

The average Haitian patient views the Western-type medical practitioner as dealing on an entirely physical level, and thus unable to cure the large category of supernatural illnesses.

As is necessarily the case with all human beings, the unknown is interpreted in terms of the known. Thus the rural Haitian views Western-type medicine in relation to age-old folk medicine. Could it be otherwise?

**MEDICATION** Most frequently used by far are home remedies (i.e., herb, leaf, bark, root): cheap, and available. Efforts should be made to identify and disseminate those that are truly effective.

## MEDICATION (con't)

Haitians often have definite prejudices concerning the different forms of medication. Judged most efficacious are, in this order: 1) injections; 2) solutions; 3) tablets; 4) capsules.

It is often not enough for a physician merely to ask questions about medication already prescribed by another Western-type physician. Folk or herbal medication is an important practice, and many of its remedies may well be contraindicated. However, if the question is not brought up, patients may well believe they can continue with them. A strategy found useful is to suggest that since the previous remedy has evidently not been successful, another one might now be tried.

Specificity is often not fully understood: a Western drug is frequently considered effective against any complaint. Penicillin is considered a cure-all, even for eye treatment - just rub it in. Immunization such as DPT shots are believed adequate protection, for example, against anthrax. Thus much oral medication is used not only by the patient, but is dispersed to a wide range of family and friends for an even wider range of disorders. Inquire if the patient has taken medication prescribed for another. Also, in the case of potentially dangerous medication, it is essential to warn the patient not to let others use it without medical approval.

Two useful proverbs are: "*Sa ki bon pou youn, pa bon pou lòt.*" (That which is good for one, is not good for another.) "*Mwen pa ka pran te pou lafyè li.*" (I can't take tea for someone else's fever.)

\*If one pill is good, two or three must be better. And if you begin to feel well, don't take any.\*

## MEDICATION (con't)

Many a peasant has absolutely no idea concerning the proper administration of medication. For example, it has been found that for a wound, pills - instead of being swallowed - were placed under a bandage, with water applied to the bandage to dissolve them. Having instructions repeated back is an excellent precaution.

A common problem is that patients will sell medication given to them rather than use it - a simple question of food vs. medicine. One physician's solution: tell them either to take the medicine, or they can forget about sex. His success rate increased tremendously.

In a largely illiterate environment, a major problem is for the patient to be able to follow instructions. They must be clearly stated and reiterated. (Proverb: "*Koute se renmèd kò.*" - Listening is medicine for the body.) One solution is to place XX on the medication to be used twice daily, XXX for three times daily etc.

Patients often feel cheated if they have to go away without being given medication.

At least two cultural anthropologists (Murray and Alvarez) have reported a certain attitude which scorns subsidized medicines in favor of more costly ones.

See APPENDIX: Medication.

**MEDICINAL PLANTS** An immense, still largely unexplored field. The basic reference work on the subject is Arsène V. Pierre-Noël, *Les Plantes et les Légumes d'Haïti qui Guérissent: Mille et une Recettes pratiques*. Tome I. Deuxième édition revue, corrigée et augmentée. Port-au-Prince: Le Natal, 1989. Pp. 479. Timoléon C. Brutus et Arsène V. Pierre-Noël, *Ibid.* Tome II. Port-au-Prince:



## MEDICINAL PLANTS (con't)

Imprimerie de l'Etat, 1960. Pp. 417. Timoléon C. Brutus et Arsène V. Pierre-Noël, Ibid. Tome III. Port-au-Prince: Presses Nationales d'Haïti, 1966. Pp. 389.

Also: Rulx Léon, *Phytothérapie haïtienne: Nos Simples*. Port-au-Prince: Imprimerie Henri Deschamps, 1980. Pp. 79.

**MENARCHE** Reached without surprise, shame, or secrecy, but rather with joy and relief.

\*If a girl nearing puberty eats anything sour, she will not reach menarche.\*

\*A girl who has still not reached menarche by the end of her fifteenth year is in dire danger of being suffocated by her own blood.\*

**MENOPAUSE** Sometimes mistaken for pregnancy. "Been pregnant for 3 years and baby still in there!" (See also *PÉDISYON*.)

**MENSTRUAL CRAMPS** \*May be caused by improper disposal of rags used during menstruation.\*

\*Can be caused by any sour foods, or by pineapple, during menstruation.\*

**MENSTRUATION** Considered both healthy and necessary: a process by which the "body," "womb," and/or "veins" are kept open; a sign that one is a woman, has sexual feelings and needs, and is able to reproduce.

\*Brought about by the moon.\* Woman is seen as a living calendar, and her menstrual blood as an object both of reverence and of revulsion.

## MENSTRUATION (con't)

\*Cleanses the body of impurities, or of an excess of bad blood. In the male, this process is achieved through perspiration. Otherwise these processes can be carried out only through skin eruptions.\*

An insufficient blood flow is interpreted variously as a sign of nervousness, depression, or increased blood pressure. The body is not ridding itself of the bad or unnecessary blood. Too much blood flow is seen as depleting the body's supply of blood, and as a possible cause of loss of appetite, bad temper, and insomnia.

\*A young girl's menstrual blood is too lively, and her presence when menstruating can harm certain foods difficult to prepare. She can make milk curdle, and cause bacon and pork to rot.\*

\*A menstruating woman should not wash clothes in the river, for fear that the cold water will harm her blood.\*

\*Sexual intercourse during this time can result in inflammation of the testicles.\*

**METAMORPHOSES** A persistent belief among much of the peasant population is that, thanks to Voodoo, certain humans can change at will into an animal such as a dog, cat, or donkey, or even become invisible - but no true animal can change into a human. \*A few clairvoyants have the ability to detect those animals which are in reality humans.\* A variation of this belief is that humans can be changed into animals against their will, with the result that there are occasionally loud public disturbances when it is thought that an animal being led off to slaughter is in reality a human being pleading for his/her life. (Cf. Brahmanism in India.)

**MIDNIGHT** \*The time when labor pains are most likely to occur, with the baby being born around 4 A.M. It is also the time when *lougawou* (q.v.) set forth to do their evil deeds.\*

**MIDWIVES** Government-trained midwives are usually called *matwòn* or *fanmsaj diplome*, while *fanmsaj* (or *fanm chay*) are the empirically trained midwives (who generally charge some 40% less).

Traditionally a woman in her 60's, considered absolutely essential to the birthing process. Fulfills several functions: presides at the actual delivery, treats the uterus, performs the necessary Voodoo rites, administers herbal remedies to the neonate, buries the placenta in a corner of the house or nearby, and rules over the traditional period of postpartum confinement. She gives the three customary medicinal baths to the mother, massages her, and escorts mother and child out of confinement. Illness prevention is also within her domain, through the use of protective charms. Only very occasionally gives prenatal care and attempts to correct improper fetal position. Proper massage technique is considered an important part of her art, as is knowledge of herbs and teas. Even should delivery take place before her arrival, it is nevertheless she who normally cuts the umbilical cord and bathes the neonate. And even in the case of women who have delivered in a hospital, it is customary upon returning home to call in a midwife who will oversee the traditional herbal baths and advise dietary restrictions.

Deliver at least 85% of all births in Haiti, and a far higher percentage if one considers only the rural areas. The vast majority are women, but one does occasionally meet a man who exercises this profession. Almost always illiterate. Almost always a part-time profession,

## MIDWIVES (con't)

performing at most two deliveries per month. Seldom Protestant, since it is believed that Voodoo spirits (*lwa*) are essential to the work.

Have usually received initial training thanks to their mother or godmother. Sometimes have been called to the profession by a revelation during sleep.

There is traditionally little formal contact between the midwife and the expectant mother, and above all the midwife should not enter the yard where the mother cooks. Any malformed baby or difficult delivery could be blamed on her.

The midwife must be trusted implicitly not only concerning her skills, but also not to sell any part of the placenta - which could be used in evil magic against the mother and child.

Are quite often open to new and better techniques. Many postpartum and infant problems are averted by training of and close cooperation with the local midwives. For example, the training program for midwives in the area served by the Albert Schweitzer Hospital at Deschapelles has produced a remarkable and sustained reduction in the number of infant deaths, thanks to monthly meetings which constantly stress cleanliness and proper technique. The midwives receive fresh sterile supplies, while discussing their recent cases with Western medical personnel. On the whole they are only too happy to participate, since their local prestige is thus enhanced.

Also, in general, these training programs for midwives have resulted in a much higher rate of visits by expectant mothers to regional health-care centers.

**MILK** \*In the case of a nursing mother, violent emotions (*sezisman*) - brought on by a domestic quarrel, for example - can cause her milk to mix with her blood (*lèt ak san*) and go to her head. The result can be temporary insanity. A frequent and dangerous occurrence, causing the mother's milk supply to cease (*lèt pase*).\* The folk treatment consists of various cold compresses applied to the head, plus herbal teas; some also recommend having the mother drink a little of her own milk.

Colostrum (*lèt jòn*) is regarded with great suspicion; to be expressed and disposed of. \*Only mother's milk which is white is good for a baby. To produce good white milk, the mother should eat white-colored foods.\*

\*If a mother becomes pregnant again while still nursing, her milk from then on must be reserved for the fetus. Should the child which was being nursed then try to "steal" any of her milk, this child will become sick.\*

\*Cows' milk is too rich for neonates.\*

\*Goats' milk is an excellent aphrodisiac, but certainly too rich for children of any age.\* Usually reserved for tuberculosis victims.

Lactose intolerance appears sometime after weaning and increases with age, affecting an estimated 70-80% of the adult population. Milk produces for this group the classic symptoms of abdominal cramps, bloating, and diarrhea.

(The US milk industry appears to be blithely unaware of this fact, continuing to urge export to Third-World countries where it is used, if at all, as a laxative or as an inferior substitute for white-wash.)

"MILK SACK" (*sak lèt, pòch lèt*) It is believed that there is a sack or pocket in babies which receives the mother's milk.

"MILK SACK" (*sak lèt, pòch lèt*) (con't)

When the child is weaned, this sack is supposed to disappear and the child will normally not take milk again. If the child becomes ill after weaning (as is frequently the case), naturally there is much speculation concerning the milk sack. Sometimes it is thought necessary to give a purgative so that the child will expel the milk sack; the stools are then carefully watched for its presence.

*Vòlè tete* (stealing the breast) - if, for example, during the night a child should return to the breast after having been weaned, it is considered disastrous, since (s)he will no longer have a "milk sack" to receive it.

MILK (SPOILED) (*lèt gate*) \*Mother's milk is dangerous to both mother and child if it is either too thick or too thin. The former can cause impetigo (*bouton*). The latter - caused especially by fright to the mother - can move to the head, occasioning anything from acute headache to postpartum depression in the mother and diarrhea in the baby.\* Closely associated with *move san* (bad blood).

\*Sexual intercourse should not take place during the nursing period, because sperm poisons the mother's milk, and thus the baby.\* (Rarely, however, is this belief honored.)

MISCARRIAGE Believed to be the result of natural causes: *fredi* (q.v.); carrying a load on the head of more than 50-60 lbs.; stumbling while crossing a stream; emotional trauma. (Two proverbs: "*Ze toumante pa kale*" - The disturbed egg does not hatch; "*Poul ki bat kò l kraze ze l*" - The chicken which thrashes about crushes its egg.) Or can be seen as the result of supernatural causes: God; ill-will of a Voodoo spirit; a *lougawou* (q.v.); evil magic caused by a jealous woman.

## MISCARRIAGE (cont)

\*The intensive anti-malaria campaign was the cause of many miscarriages.\*

\*Can be avoided by wearing an underskirt of seven colors; by placing a small polished magic stone in the hem of one's dress; by fumigating one's body and house with asafetida each Friday to ward off evil spirits; by riding a donkey (believed to be immune to evil magic) rather than a horse or mule; and by special baths. Spicy foods and especially salt are to be avoided. Mourning clothes can be dangerous, as can attending funeral rites - especially those of a still-born child.\*

**MOON** \*Determines not only women's menstrual cycles, but its various phases are important concerning the effectiveness of certain remedies.\*

\*Menstruation is far more likely to begin during a waxing moon than during a waning moon.\*

\*Hemorrhaging is far more likely to occur during a waxing moon than during a waning moon - thus surgery and even extraction of teeth should be avoided during this period. The worst possible time is under a full moon.\*

\*A full moon exerts a disturbing influence, especially upon mental patients.\*

\*Babies are much more likely to be born just after a full moon, and much less likely with a new moon. More babies are born during a waning moon than during a waxing moon.\* (See SEX OF CHILD.)

**MOTION SICKNESS** \*To prevent, women should roll their hair in a ball containing two match sticks and a penny.\*

**MOURNING** Many widows and widowers do not follow the funeral procession of their spouse, for fear that the soul of the deceased will prevent any future remarriage, or cause the untimely death of any future mate. Similarly, \*following the funeral procession of a young son can cause the death of any other young children in the family.\*

\*Wearing a piece of red clothing under the mourning garb, such as red underpants or panties, can ward off future deaths in the family.\*

**MUD** \*Highly useful for avoiding infection and healing a wound.\*

**MUMPS** Called *malmouton* (literally, "sheep sickness"), can be cured by bleating like a sheep over a large mortar turned upside down, with one's jaws covered with palm-oil and bandaged with sheep's wool.\*

**MUTTON** \*Not to be eaten: causes rashes and boils.\*

**NAMES** There is no continuity of family names among the majority of the peasant population. Children simply take the father's first name as their own last name. Taking the paternal grandfather's last name is seen simply as naming the child for the grandfather rather than (more logically) for the father. (However if the father is unknown, the mother's last name is used instead.)

Often a nickname is so universally used that even the individual concerned in effect forgets the "official" name on the birth certificate (which [s]he may well be unable to read in any case).

A wife (common-law or formal) is usually addressed by the first name of her husband. Thus the wife of a *Jak Anri* would be known as *madan Jak*.



## NAMES (con't)

Voodooists have a special secret name, and many believe they can be harmed only if this secret name is known.

**NEONATES** Infant mortality is one of the highest in the world, with a deathrate supposedly of 130-150 per thousand live births. An especially high risk period is right after being weaned.

Proverb: "*Ti poul pa mande plim, li mande lavi.*" (The little chick doesn't ask for fancy feathers, he just asks for life.)

In some places neonates are given a calabash-leaf bath, in addition to the usual strong purgative. (See **MECONIUM**.) A small sack containing a crushed cricket soaked in mother's milk is placed nearby - considered helpful for proper urination.

They are dressed in a rather tight nightgown, with a special band to protect the navel. Narrow nostrils are considered important esthetically, and thus the nostrils are pinched several times daily soon after birth. The mother or midwife attempts to "round out" the skull, as well as to create dimples, considered not only a mark of beauty but a protection against sickness.

Neonates are believed to be particularly vulnerable not only to sickness and cold, but especially to negative magic such as the evil eye (*q.v.*), spells etc. Thus visits are a delicate matter, and only those closest and most trusted are normally admitted.

\*If a pregnant or menstruating woman enters the room of confinement during the postpartum period, the infant will act as though he has to defecate but cannot (called *pouse* -

## NEONATES (con't)

"pushes"), with grunting and partial prolapse of the rectum.\* The folk remedy is a string of three large beans and three grains of corn tied around the child's waist.

\*Hair and fingernails should not be cut before one year of age - or children may become deaf and dumb, or lose their souls.\*

**NIGHT** Considered a time of terror. Mysterious, evil beings (evil spirits - *movèzespri*; witches - *lougawou*; the secret societies, organized bands of evil-doers - *sanpwèl*) are about. One does not go out, and every crack and crevice of one's dwelling is tightly shut (making for stuffy, crowded sleeping areas where contagious diseases such as tuberculosis are easily spread). Only in the urban slums are people out at night - there is simply not enough room inside, and sleeping must be done in shifts.

Few places so black at night as Haiti? Due to comparative rarity of electricity? Does this make the Haitians' proverbial fear of night a bit easier to understand?

\*Between two and three A.M. is the most dangerous time for those who are sick or dying.\*

**NOON** \*Best time for intercourse if one wishes to conceive.\*

**NOVEMBER** Beginning with All Saints' Day (Nov. 1) and All Souls' Day (Nov. 2), is a time of dread for many. Most will not marry during this month. Evil spirits appear in greater abundance, people are more hesitant than ever to venture forth after dark, and patients are especially loathe to undergo surgery.

## NOVEMBER (con't)

However, November is the time during which there is traditionally the greatest number of births - some nine months after the free-wheeling activities of Mardi Gras.

NUTRITION See FOODS; MALNUTRITION; PERMISSIVENESS.

OBJECTS Even such a seemingly innocent object as a handkerchief (supposedly hexed - *monte* or *ranje*) whose sudden appearance or disappearance one cannot explain, can be viewed as negative magic potentially dangerous to one's well-being - and such can, of course, be the case if thus interpreted.

OKRA \*Can cause a young man to become impotent.\*

\*Essential however in the nourishment of a pregnant woman, because its slippery texture will aid in the actual birthing process.\*

ORANGES \*Harden children's gums too much and prevent teeth from forming properly.\*

\*Delay onset of puberty.\*

ORCHIECTOMY Rarely if ever permitted by a patient, even at age 90.

OSTENTATION Marriages and burials in Haiti both reveal a taste for ostentation. Both are occasions for spending quite disproportionate to the resources of those involved, and all too often simply constitute an additional poverty factor. The multi-million-dollar marriage of Jean-Claude Duvalier and Michèle Bennett (May 1980) was nothing more than the exaggeration of a well-established custom.

**OUTREACH** As Dr. Larry Mellon and so many others have discovered, in Haiti especially, to cure someone of, for instance, diarrhea or amoebas is not enough, unless basic causes such as contaminated water and lack of latrines are attacked as well.

**OVERPOPULATION** Has as its corollary malnutrition - two of Haiti's most basic problems. (See **FAMILY PLANNING**.)

**PAIN** \*A rope tied around an arm or leg can reduce pain in the limb.\*

See **APPENDIX: Pain**.

**PARALYSIS** Especially if sudden, seen as caused by a Voodoo spell, probably paid for by someone desiring the afflicted person's job and/or possessions, or by simple jealousy.

Hysterical paralysis is not uncommon among peasant population. Caused by Voodoo fears?

**PARAMEDICS** More paramedics would provide an enormous service to Haiti. At present, but in insufficient number, are the community health workers (in Haitian: *ajan lasante*; in French: *agents de santé*), recruited from their own villages and trained for three months. They establish contact with the people of their district, identify those needing medical attention, and attempt to induce them to come to the local dispensaries - especially pregnant women, and mothers with infants and young children. Auxiliary nurses (*oksilyè*) receive eight-month medical training in an urban hospital. David Werner's excellent *Where There is no Doctor* has been translated into Haitian: *Kote ki pa gen Doktè*, Port-au-Prince, 1991; pp. xxxii + 464. (Usually on sale at La Presse Evangélique, on Boulevard Harry Truman, in Port-au-Prince.)

**PARANOIA** The Voodoo mindset instructs that some element - either human or supernatural - is responsible for every mishap or misfortune that occurs. The results of this attitude are: 1) much animosity between humans, often resulting in business for the Voodoo clergy (see SPELL-CASTING); 2) appeasement directed at the Voodoo spirit deemed responsible, always resulting in business for the Voodoo clergy.

"When asked how his child became ill, a father will often solemnly shake his head, produce a sucking sound through his teeth, and whisper: '*Rayisman*' (hatred, persecution). This means that his 'friends' or neighbors have caused the child's illness through malice or jealousy. The effects of superstition upon personal peace of mind and upon interpersonal relationships are incalculable." (Dr. William Hodges)

"The anecdote is told of a foreign health-aid specialist visiting a small town in Haiti. He inquired of the assembled town elders the leading causes of death. When informed that deaths from pulmonary disease, coughs or tuberculosis were indeed rare, as well as from diarrhea and vomiting, worms or other parasites, and fevers, he finally asked in exasperation: 'Well, what *do* people die of around here?' After some hesitation, the answer came forth: 'Murder!' It has been suggested that in a country which has one of the lowest rates of homicide in the world, the deep feeling was being expressed that most deaths are due to outside forces of evil. But it could well be that this deep fear of being destroyed by spirits or by enemies, this widespread distrust and suspicion, is actually the reason why Haiti, poor and crowded as it is, is so relatively free of violent crime. Fear itself might well be the social cement which holds the country together." (Dr. William Hodges)

## PARANOIA (con't)

And because of this general cultural tendency toward paranoia, pathological problems of this kind are generally not detected until quite severe. (See INSANITY.)

**PATERNITY** When a mother-to-be wishes to influence the paternity of her child, in case of doubt, she stares for some time each day at a photograph of the desired father, repeating that she wishes the child to look like him.

Paternity tests are conducted by a village elder who assembles the mother, child, and supposed father. Certain Voodoo spirits are invoked, and the mother is summoned to swear on the head of her child. Then the elder informs her that the baby will taste blood from the finger of the supposed father. If he is indeed the father, there will be no effect on the baby; if he is not, the baby will die. The reaction of the mother is considered sufficient proof, or disproof, of paternity. A clever folk device for ensuring both paternal support and family cohesiveness?

**PAYMENT** The average rural dweller depends solely on a subsistence economy. Rarely can enough be grown to adequately feed a numerous family, yet in order to secure cash, some of the crop and/or domestic animals have to be sold. This is how patients make their payments.

An habitual problem is that externally-funded health-care programs are almost always intended eventually to become self-supporting in part or in whole. Meanwhile, the recipients of these programs become unrealistically accustomed to free or virtually free medical services. As the donors withdraw financial support, there is often intense resentment and even boycotting by the local community, which failed to understand the initial premise. Thus for a program to be effective in the long

## PAYMENT (con't)

run, this withdrawal of support must be very gradual and the concept of outside help for a limited time only must be made very clear to the people involved, especially the local community leaders (the *notab*). Often the basic problem with foreign aid programs is that no one has taken the trouble to explain to the peasant population just what is really going on and why - and in a language they can understand, i.e., Haitian, and not elitist French.

Another point that should be made concerning foreign health-care programs is that health care by Voodoo practitioners is still considerably more expensive.

It is customary for Voodoo priest(esse)s to demand full and immediate payment, usually a considerable amount. Stories are intentionally spread of cured patients still in arrears who suddenly drop dead.

In the case of faith-and-herb healers, payments are normally made on an installment plan, beginning with the first day of treatment. In case of non-payment, the herbal potions are, if possible, confiscated by the healer with the threat either of placing them in a termite nest (thereby supposedly reducing the patient to his/her former sickness), or of burning them (thereby supposedly causing the patient to die). On the other hand, some healers ask for no payment at all until the patient is cured; if the patient dies, no payment is requested. (See COST.)

**PEASANTS** One of the most fundamental realizations that the foreigner must achieve in trying to comprehend the Haitian peasant mind is that there is no firm dividing line between reality and dream. Often the peasant's life is so poverty-stricken and monotonous that over the centuries an elaborate dream-world has been created

## PEASANTS (con't)

which effectively shields him/her from a drab, harsh reality. Complex beliefs, superstitions, taboos - and Voodoo - constitute a psychological defense mechanism which in effect make life possible. Unreasonable perhaps, but not necessarily unwise. And this has perforce been the case since the earliest slave days, when a whole population was suddenly and forever uprooted from all it had ever known. The Westerner does not perceive this inner dream-world, and constantly encroaches upon it unknowingly. And how different is this peasant mental universe from the drug-ridden fantasy world into which so many contemporary Westerners have withdrawn? Both are a retreat from reality, and the peasant's is perhaps indeed a far healthier one. (See DREAMS.)

An ever-present danger for some medical workers is the temptation eventually to see the Haitian peasantry simply as a poor, down-trodden, faceless, one-dimensional mass, instead of as individuals each with his/her own distinctive identity, problems, fears, hopes, and aspirations.

"[The peasants are] a funny lot. You think they're simple..., you think you know everything that's going on in their heads, and then you find out that you don't know a damned thing about them." (Faustin Wirkus, as told to William Seabrook, in *The Magic Island*, p. 188.)

**PÈDISYON** Many definitions: menorrhagia; false pregnancy; (non-apparent) miscarriage; unusual menstrual periods and/or general pelvic discomfort.

Also a condition in which a fetus is believed to remain entrapped in the uterus for years, unable to develop properly since it is not receiving the blood which would



## PÈDISYON (con't)

enable it to grow. Considered the result of natural causes such as insufficient diet, a fall, a blow that has displaced certain internal organs, *fredi* (q.v.), strain or an emotional shock; or of supernatural causes such as a Voodoo spell cast upon the family or a *lougawou* (q.v.) sucking the blood of the fetus. The fetus is conceptualized as consisting of little more than a tiny speck, and after what can be many years, it sometimes grows to maturity - none the worse for its long-dormant stage. (See also *FIBWÒM*.) This concept has been suggested as serving at least two purposes: 1) to reduce the stigma of sterility; 2) to secure the conjugal union in that the man has an obligation to the unborn child. On the other hand, a child can be considered the result of another union long since terminated.

**PENIS** \*Two ways to increase the length: 1) massage regularly with cocoa-butter; 2) mark the length when in erection on a banana or bamboo shoot, and the penis will grow along with the shoot - but if the shoot is not cut in time, the length will grow out of all proportion and become a cause of embarrassment rather than of pride.\* (See also *UMBILICUS*, "A small bit of the cord...")

**PERMISSIVENESS** "Or Cultural Perceptions and Child Nutrition. The permissive attitude toward children is a major problem. What the Westerner considers proper care (correct diet, feeding schedule, toilet training) is often seen by the Haitian as heartlessness and cruelty. The old 'Eat-your-spinach-because-it's-good-for-you' attitude appears to be virtually non-existent. A child's lack of appetite is simply accepted as a fact of life. Thus a mother had literally to be forced to stop giving cola to her little boy who nearly died of kwashiorkor. When he cried, it was for the soft drink. When one discusses proper nutrition with a mother, a frequent response is: 'He won't eat

## PERMISSIVENESS (con't)

those things.' Thus no amount of protein-based food furnished the family will cure a child of kwashiorkor. And why should proteins be the cure if the real causes are *lougawou* (witches) and evil spells? And it may well be that the foods containing protein are more difficult to impose on the child - and thus, if permissiveness is an overwhelming cultural attitude, more kwashiorkor will result, even when protein sources are available. Cultural perceptions can indeed destroy children." (Dr. William Hodges)

Proverb: "*Makak karese pitit li jouk li touye l.*" (The monkey caresses its little one until it kills it.)

**PHARMACIES** Often carry, along with standard Western-type drugs, Voodoo-inspired substances such as *kanpelwen* (a foul-smelling liquid used as a spell to keep away people or evil spirits), or *espedye* (a powder to turn a supernatural illness back on its originator).

**PHOTOGRAPHS** For medical study are acceptable to most peasant patients, but shocking to most upper-class patients.

**PHYSICAL VIOLENCE** Comparatively rare. Hostility is more likely to be expressed by having an evil spell cast upon one's enemy.

**PICTORIAL ILLITERACY** The inability to interpret line drawings seems to be widespread among the peasant population. Photographs rather than drawings have proven far more effective, though even they can be problems. A recent photograph depicting only the torso of a woman elicited a uniform reaction of sadness from its peasant viewers: they believed she had no legs.

## PICTORIAL ILLITERACY (con't)

Thus it is exceedingly difficult to conceptualize the response of the average illiterate person to pictures, and tests have shown that there is little difference between the illiterate and the semi-literate. To interpret line drawings or even color photographs accurately, i.e., two-dimensional representations of three-dimensional reality, is not necessarily self-evident to someone who has never been fully exposed to the concept that marks on paper can represent spoken words, and thus ideas. The fact that pictorial illiteracy is a frequent concomitant to general illiteracy is a fact that does not often occur to the world's literate minority. Thorough pre-testing is a necessity for choosing health pictures, and even then, do not expect an appreciable percentage of patients to comprehend. Songs, stories and small plays - in Haitian - accompanied by some explanation, have been suggested as effective alternatives. (See also POSTERS.)

**PILGRIMAGES** Many believe that miraculous cures can be achieved by going to Sodo (in French: Saut d'Eau, near Ville-Bonheur), especially on the 16th of July, and represent special hope for women unable to conceive. There is also an annual medicinal mud bath on July 25 in the small town of Plenndinò (Plaine du Nord, near Cape Haitian), followed by another pilgrimage to Limonade the next day. (See also CONCEPTION.)

**PILL (THE)** Much self-discipline and consistency are necessary for effective use of the contraceptive pill - a major drawback to its use by much of the peasant population. (See FAMILY PLANNING.)

"I don't understand why I got pregnant! The very day you gave them to me, I swallowed half the supply and my husband the other half!"

**PINEAPPLE** \*Particularly dangerous for children between ages of 10 and 15: can stunt growth, and inhibit onset of menstruation.\*

\*Will make a woman sterile.\*

**PLACEBOS** A great majority of patients are far happier when given an injection or medication.

The herbal cures of both Voodoo priest(esse)s and folk healers have often been explained as quite effective placebos.

**PLACENTA** If slow in being expelled, traditionally: 1) the abdomen is swept over with a broom; 2) the midwife blows on the end of the umbilical cord; or 3) a dog is made to sit outside the door of the hut.

\*Burying the placenta face down will prevent future pregnancies.\* (See also MIDWIVES.)

**PLEURISY** \*Caused especially by eating cold food when one is overheated, or by simply being exposed to cold.\*

**PLURALISM** Medical pluralism is as much a fact of Haitian life as is often over-lapping religious pluralism (French-inspired Catholicism, African-inspired Voodoo, American-inspired Protestantism). (See RELIGION.) Rarely will patients have recourse to only one form of medical treatment, especially if seriously ill.

Proverb: "*Ti moso Bondye, ti moso sòlòkòtò.*" (A little bit of God, a little bit of a sorcerer.)

**POINT!** Don't say "left" or "right" alone. Many either do not know the difference, or will not know if you mean your left or their left.

**POISONING** A very real (if almost always unfounded) fear in the rural scene. Hygiene is bad, doctors are few - and many deaths are attributed to neighbors' hatred. (See PARANOIA.)

**POLITENESS** And a touch of humanity are extremely important when dealing with Haitian patients (as well as with those of other nationalities!). Try using *tanpri* and *souple* (both mean "please"). Commands such as *chita* (sit) and *kanpe* (stand) can be turned into requests by adding *wi* (yes) or *non* (no) at the end: "*Chita, wi*" - "*Kanpe, non.*" And a gentle *ti cheri* (literally, "little dear") for women and children, and *(ti) frè* - "(little) brother," can go far in putting the patient at ease. (See also SENSITIVITY.)

**POLITICAL PROBLEMS** Health care workers, Haitian or foreign, can be viewed by the peasant population as government spies serving to gather information that could be used in exerting control. Conversely, they can be viewed by the Haitian authorities as a threat because of their social status, their acute awareness of the underlying causes of illness and disease, and their potential as agents for social/political unrest. Caution! A focus on mission, and a careful apolitical stance, have long proven invaluable both in times of peace and of trouble.

It has happened that valuable medical programs have been delayed indefinitely or even cancelled outright, because of petty jealousy or a quarrel between local politicians.

It is of course only natural for any government to expect to have a degree of control over foreign assistance programs on its own soil. What, for example, if some foreign medical group wanted to carry out dubious medical

## POLITICAL PROBLEMS (con't)

experimentation in Haiti which they would not or could not carry out in their own country? (A not infrequent suspicion among many in Haiti.)

**POPULATION** Haitian population figures are notoriously inaccurate. The total number is estimated variously from five million to eight million - with the latter figure probably by far the more realistic. As for population growth, the Albert Schweitzer Hospital at Deschapelles gives us a good indication: the 610 square mile district it serves had some 70,000 people when it opened in 1956, whereas forty years later in 1996, it had more than three times that number, with some 218,000.

**POSTERS** Do not underestimate the potential value of medical posters - not so much the text (how many can read?), as the pictures. Photographs of a healthy Black baby, contrasting with ones showing the characteristic signs of kwashiorkor and marasmus, can serve as an eloquent back-up to instructions concerning proper nutrition.

However, the only images most of the rural population ever see are the painted buses, an occasional magazine picture attached to a hut partition, and sometimes a political poster. Thus there can very definitely be problems of interpretation. Simplicity is essential. (See PICTORIAL ILLITERACY.)

A large colored billboard recently displayed in various localities in Haiti shows a man and a woman with several children. The caption is totally irrelevant, since the great majority of viewers cannot read. The message it attempts to convey is that marital fidelity is the best defense against AIDS. One would be tempted to award a genius rating to any illiterate person who could interpret

## POSTERS (con't)

accurately the idea this picture aims to present. Another poster concerning nutrition depicts apples and imported breakfast cereals, instead of cheap, locally produced foods. Pre-testing with a cross-section of the target group is an absolute necessity.

Distribution is another problem. For example, we found several dozen copies of a striking poster - a photograph in color - on oral rehydration, carefully stored away for the ages to come, in the cupboard of a rural dispensary. Some have even said that posters contribute to a community's hygiene only through their usefulness at the latrine or field! Posters probably are of use mainly as a back-up to what a health worker is attempting to explain.

**POSTPARTUM BELIEFS AND PRACTICES** It is believed the mother's body is altered in four major ways: 1) body opens up, becomes slack; 2) hollow, empty stomach; 3) wandering womb (see WOMB); 4) bad blood. Remedied respectively by: 1) hot medicinal leaf baths; 2) massage; 3) abundant and solid food; 4) special herbal teas.

Traditionally, there is a strict five-day confinement period for the mother, usually in the back room of the typical two-room peasant hut. Since the mother's body is considered to be unusually empty and thus highly vulnerable to cold and drafts, all doors and windows must be kept tightly shut, with wadding inserted between any cracks - resulting in a dark stuffiness in the confinement chamber. She must be warmly dressed, with her head covered, long socks on her feet, and even cotton in her ears. In addition, she should keep her legs together since the vagina is the most sensitive spot to be protected against cold and air. A large band is tied around the mother's stomach for two or three months to protect her

## POSTPARTUM BELIEFS AND PRACTICES (con't)

against the cold and to flatten her stomach. Cold water, either for drinking or bathing, must be avoided. Many neonatal problems, including tetanus, are ascribed to the mother's perceived carelessness concerning her own body, and which are then transmitted to the infant through her milk. Thus hot baths are an important element for both mother and child, especially during the confinement period. Should she take a cold bath less than a month or so after delivery, she may be unable to have more children or might experience difficulty in conceiving. Since it is believed that menstruation continues during pregnancy, with the blood flowing directly into the womb for the development of the fetus, the resulting build-up of "bad blood" must be alleviated through special herbal teas after delivery. Thus postpartum vaginal bleeding is seen as a healthy process and is to be encouraged.

Sometimes the period of confinement for the mother is much longer, up to a month. Thus if the baby has to be brought to a hospital, it will be by a relative or close family friend.

Traditional dietary restrictions placed upon the lactating mother constitute an additional cause of malnutrition. (See H. Jean C. Wiese, "Maternal Nutrition and Traditional Food Behavior in Haiti," *Human Organization*, vol. 35, No 2 [Summer 1976], 193-200.)

**POVERTY** Some Christians attribute the extreme poverty of Haiti to the wrath of God brought on by a widespread belief in Voodoo; some Voodooists attribute the extreme poverty of Haiti to the wrath of God brought on by a widespread forsaking of the Voodoo spirits.



**PRAYER PAPER** Bits of paper supposedly from the Bible (but in reality usually discarded printer's waste) sold in the markets and which, when swallowed, will have a curative effect.

**PREGNANCY** In peasant community, usually precedes marriage (common-law or formal). The man wants to be certain the woman is fertile before spending money on house and furniture.

\*Can cause the father to be sick as well.\*

**PRESCRIPTIONS** Not required to buy medicine in Haiti.

**PRIAPISM** A male patient arriving at the hospital clothed in a dress instead of pants, will in most cases have this problem. Pants are simply too tight.

**PROGNOSIS** Sometimes it is almost as though the patient were too frightened to respond to treatment, a victim of the fear and horror of a Voodoo curse.

**PROSTITUTION** Most have no other possibility for support, either for themselves or for the children born as a result, since rarely is any form of contraception used.

The cards certifying that prostitutes are free from disease are obtained by paying a fee, not by undergoing a medical exam.

**PROTEIN** It has often been observed that Haiti is a great center of vegetarianism, not by choice but by necessity. But the fact that one can benefit more, for example, from growing and eating beans than corn does not seem to be generally known.

**PSYCHOLOGY OF THE HAITIAN: OBSERVATIONS BY FOREIGNERS LONG FAMILIAR WITH THE HAITIAN SCENE.** Probably partly true, partly false:

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE HAITIAN (con't)

Intense interest in individuals as an all-consuming motivation (vs. greater degree of detachment and objectiveness of the Westerner).

Foremost concern about oneself, one's family and friends - less of a sense of social responsibility, making social cooperation difficult. Less abstract concept of the common good, and thus a greatly weakened ability to organize hospitals, dispensaries, schools, or an efficient civil service.

Innate opposition to institutionalization: distrust, apathy, fatalism - which perhaps helps explain in part why so many foreign aid programs do not work after the foreigners leave.

Vestiges of slave mentality (or coping in one of the world's neediest nations): survival by any means, thus an essentially gentle people can at times take on a necessarily ruthless outlook concerning its fellow man.

Secretiveness: *Pa kite moun konnen afè ou* (Don't let people know your business). An attitude so deeply ingrained that it can even carry over into the medical review. (See HISTORY-TAKING.)

Preference for subtlety and cleverness over honesty. (Cf. the cultural bent of the traditional Bouki and Ti Malis folktales, where shrewdness and trickery usually triumph.)

Intensely religious, perhaps therefore more basically spiritual and perhaps less materialistic than the Westerner; the Haitian is less reserved, less deterministic.

## PSYCHOLOGY OF THE HAITIAN (con't)

However, do not make the mistake of considering the Haitian peasant as primitive and child-like; as is the case with all complex adults who have experienced various facets of the human condition, (s)he has woven them together into a mysterious fabric called culture. (See also COOPERATION, and PEASANTS.)

**PUBERTY RITES** Non-existent. (See MENARCHE.)

**PUBLIC HOSPITALS** The following list of twenty (some overlapping) complaints, purportedly by then-President Jean-Claude Duvalier, was widely published in the Haitian press in December 1983, following an inspection tour of Port-au-Prince General Hospital. Many would argue that conditions there, as well as in many a provincial public hospital, have changed but little.

- 1) Chronic doctor and nurse absenteeism.
- 2) Generalized lack of respect for authority.
- 3) No effort whatsoever to keep in stock even such basic supplies as cotton, bandages, alcohol, and syringes.
- 4) For emergency cases, they have nothing and can do nothing.
- 5) There is no doctor on duty for emergency cases.
- 6) The various wards are ill-organized, with people sitting around in one doing nothing, while in another there is no one to give assistance.
- 7) There is no adherence to the many rules and regulations.
- 8) The doctors responsible for training the interns do nothing.

## PUBLIC HOSPITALS (con't)

- 9) The hospital is supposedly available to all, but those able to pay receive special attention.
- 10) No medical charts are maintained, and when the doctor assigned to a case is not present, no one knows what to do.
- 11) Services are available only at certain hours, whereas patients needing help arrive day and night.
- 12) General lack of supervision, with workers untrained and unmotivated.
- 13) Enormous favoritism for those with money, position, or political pull.
- 14) Doctors make no effort to keep up with new advances in medicine.
- 15) No medical services on Sundays and holidays.
- 16) No one to receive and direct entering patients.
- 17) Employees who appear only to pick up their check.
- 18) No reporting of theft.
- 19) No contingency plans to meet any sudden surge of patients.
- 20) Generalized low morale which affects even those who initially attempt to make improvements.

See also HOSPITAL.

**RADIO** In a country where some 85% of the population is illiterate, the only effective means of public communication to transmit health messages has proven to be the radio. Electricity is rare, but battery-operated transistors are not.

Often called the "transistor revolution," probably the single most important innovation in public consciousness-raising in modern Haitian (and Third-World) history.

## RADIO (con't)

The broadcasts must, of course, be in Haitian - yet not infrequently one hears programs declared to be "for the good of the greater Haitian public" broadcast in the most technical, bookish French. The result, for all practical purposes, is that the vast majority will then listen only for the music.

**RAIN** Considered almost a certain cause of sickness when an adult is caught out in it, since any sudden change in body temperature, especially from warm to cool, is believed to automatically cause illness. The resulting chill is seen as breaking the body's equilibrium between hot and cold, upon which health is based. (See **HOT/COLD IMBALANCE**.)

**RASHES** \*Can be caused by certain foods, especially eggplant and breadfruit - but these can be cured (homeopathically!) by eating, respectively, burned eggplant and breadfruit nuts.\*

**RELIGION** The three religions of Haiti - Roman Catholicism, Voodoo, and Protestantism - are often described as a continuum, whatever the declared profession of faith of the individual (see **PLURALISM**). The demarcation between these first two is often quite hazy, however, to the extent that there is even a specific designation - *katolik fran* or *katolik levanjil* - for a Roman Catholic who in no way practices Voodoo. The distinction between a Voodooist and a Protestant, however, is quite sharp, and a - or the - major tenet of Haitian Protestantism is a formal renunciation of Voodoo. Yet see **VOODOO AND CONVERSION TO PROTESTANTISM**.

**REPRODUCTIVE CAPACITY** \*Depends upon body warmth. A female is warmer than a male, a young person warmer than an old one.\*

**ROLE MODEL** Don't forget this is what you are - whether you like it or not!

**SALT** \*Added to any beverage can help purify blood tainted by strong emotion.\*

**SANITATION** Personal hygiene very important. Bathing and washing of clothes a constant of the Haitian scene; problem is cleanliness of streams.

On the other hand, it is often difficult to make the peasant understand the necessity of latrines, or to undertake the expense involved. Defecation takes place in nearby bushes, with the traditional Haitian hogs eagerly serving as scavengers. It is difficult to instill seemingly strange new habits in any people.

Often it is believed that if a latrine is 20 feet from a well, the distance is sufficient to make the well-water safe!

**SANPWÈL** (literally: "without body hair") \*Beings who remove their skin at night, leaving it for safe-keeping under a large water jug, and who then fly through the air and suck primarily the blood of infants. Thus one of the main causes, along with *lougawou* (*q.v.*), of high infant mortality. If, however, the skin can be discovered in time and salt or spices thrown on it, the *sanpwèl* will die.\*

**SAPODILLA** \*Whoever plants this (quite useful) tree will soon die afterward.\* Thus those that do exist are almost always the result of chance.

**SCARIFICATION** Burning a small circle or line on the forehead, cheek, shoulder, or buttock is sometimes done so that the Voodoo spirits (*lwa*) will not be jealous of an overly handsome child, and also in order to avoid the

## SCARIFICATION (con't)

attention of those with "evil eye" (*q.v.*). Often performed using a red-hot metal thimble. (See also BURNS and CUPPING-GLASSES.)

**SENSITIVITY** Extreme in many Haitians, as compared to many Westerners. For example, scolding (especially in public) for having delayed medical care etc. is interpreted as a cutting insult which can even cause some to forsake Western medicine altogether. (See SLAPPING.)

**SEX EDUCATION** By observation. Privacy is a rare if almost non-existent commodity given the overcrowded conditions under which most Haitian peasants live.

**SEX OF CHILD** \*If a man wishes to father a son, he should limit his ejaculations as much as possible. The less often he ejaculates, the thicker his sperm - and the thicker the sperm, the more likely to produce a boy.\*

\*If a woman wishes to give birth to a son, she should eat salty, spicy meat dishes, cabbage, at least three different fruits each day, and drink alcohol. For a daughter, she should eat seafood and vegetables, drink plenty of milk, and, above all, avoid salt.\*

\*Determined by position of moon at time of conception. Waxing: boy; waning: girl.\* (See MOON.)

\*If a pregnant woman often stumbles with her right foot, the child will be a boy; with her left foot, a girl.\*

**SEXUAL FANTASIES** Some women claim regular weekly or bi-weekly intercourse leading to orgasm with one or more Voodoo spirits.

**SEXUALITY** Permissive. Any restrictions imposed on one's sexual conduct are essentially those of one's mate(s). Except for the one or two nights a week reserved for a Voodoo mate (see **SEXUAL FANTASIES**), the Voodoo religion places no other restrictions on one's sexual activities, whether often considered "natural" or "unnatural." There is no religious concept of sexual perversion.

Sex is considered by the Voodoo community as simply one of many normal human functions, and in no way an object of shame or embarrassment. Reducing intercourse to simply a necessity of procreation is seen as animalistic, since animals mate only when fertile. For many, however, seemingly a biological function more than an emotional one.

Nevertheless, many Haitian patients experience embarrassment in discussing matters related to sex with a foreign physician of the opposite gender, and occasionally males will object to any examination by a male physician of their mate's genital area or breasts.

**SEZISMAN** \*Shock, fright, any violent emotion or upset heats the blood, making it highly vulnerable to "cold," and can bring on fever, diarrhea, or paralysis. Contact with very cold water, or eating "cold" foods such as avocados, bananas, limes, or mangoes, can even result in death.\* (See **HOT/COLD IMBALANCE**.)

**SICKNESS** See **ILLNESS**.

**SIN** Illness or misfortune is not seen as punishment for sin. A Voodooist may well believe (s)he has angered a Voodoo spirit in some way, but there is no abstract concept of sin or guilt as such in Voodoo.



## SIN (con't)

But for some Haitian Christians the onset of illness, especially if sudden, can raise disturbing questions of personal innocence and guilt. Sickness is perceived as a concrete form of moral punishment.

**SKIN** "The aristocracy of the skin" - one of Haiti's great curses. Traditionally, the lighter the skin, the higher the social standing. Deeply rooted in the Haitian mentality since the slave days when the Mulattoes - children produced by White slave-owning men and Black slave women (the other way around was supposedly unthinkable) - were quite often given not only freedom from slavery, but also enormous advantages of education, plus financial and social distinction. The opposition between Mulatto and Black has been described by some historians as the essential difficulty in unifying and governing the Haitian nation.

Thus, the tactic of some dark women to bear a child by a White, since the resulting Mulatto could well go far in society and be a financial support for her in later years. A form of living insurance.

**SLAPPING** Not to be recommended even for an hysterical patient. Slapping is a great affront in Haitian culture - as well as the spectacle of the White slapping the Black. Can be especially upsetting to the families, who are often present. (See SENSITIVITY.)

**SNEEZING** \*Sign of health, or that one is recovering.\*

**SORE THROAT** \*Can be cured by pulling on one's hair.\*

**SPECIALISTS** \*A doctor is a doctor\* - a concept difficult to combat when trying to refer a Haitian patient. Often the

## SPECIALISTS (con't)

unspoken conclusion is that something indeed mysterious must be wrong, calling instead for the ministrations of a Voodoo practitioner.

**SPELL-CASTING** The infamous stuffed dolls stuck with pins are decidedly not a part of normal, respectable Voodoo practice, but do indeed exist as part of the "left-hand" or malevolent side of Voodoo. The practice is rationalized by arguing that casting an evil spell upon another is simply a means of legitimate self-defense, or a form of just punishment for wrongs inflicted. And as the level of poverty worsens, so does the level of desperation - and of negative magic. The widespread notoriety of the dolls is based on the general philosophy that life's accidents and misfortunes are due to specific ill-will on the part of another human, or of a particular Voodoo spirit. Nevertheless, since many, many persons believe in their efficacy, and since mutual ill-will appears to be a constant of the human condition, the secret practice of supposed malevolent telepathy is by no means rare.

First, it is believed that the practitioner must be a Voodoo sorcerer (*bòkò*), or at least endowed with certain magical powers. Naturally, these services are not without remuneration. The specific instrument used is not necessarily a doll, but can also be a small figurine in wood, lead or wax. The advantage of the doll, however, is that hair, fingernail or toenail clippings, blood, or sperm of the intended victim, can be more easily inserted or rubbed on the doll. An ideal strategy used with the figurines is to insert metal nails covered with blood of the victim and wrapped with his/her hair. Any object such as a piece of clothing belonging to the victim can supposedly increase the efficacy of the curse - thus the advisability of disposing carefully of one's hair, nail clippings, and used clothing. Alternate means are simply sticking pins or

## SPELL-CASTING (con't)

nails into a photograph of the victim (thus part of the fear by some of being photographed), into clothing worn by the victim, into the ground where his/her shadow has just been cast, or into his/her footprint. And then a "well-meaning" friend can be dispatched to inform the intended victim of what has occurred.

Similar ploys are to bury a live chicken or rooster, the recently severed head of a cat or dog, or a calf's heart, near the intended victim's house. Another is to stab to death a goat bearing some of the intended victim's clothing, while repeating the victim's name.

Other major weapons in the surreptitious Voodoo arsenal are the three infamous *koud*: the *koud poud* ("powder attack"), the *koud zè* ("air attack"), and the *koud lanp* ("lamp attack"). The *koud poud* is 'magic' powder consisting of ground-up snake or toad parts, acid from manioc, stinging nettles etc., placed at a door, or on a table, chair or bed. The intended effect is to cause first intensive itching and irritation, leading to complications which can even result in death. A variant of this is to apply the same powder directly to the face of a rival woman, thus making her unattractive. The *koud zè* or *souf poud* ("breath of powder") consists of similar substances which supposedly travel through the air directed at the intended victim, enter the skin through any available lesion causing general infection, or attack the lungs causing unconsciousness and death. The *koud lanp* can be used either for evil or for good: to harm someone, his/her name is repeated over a black bottle filled with oil and a burning wick, and then buried near the intended victim's door. Variations of this consist of burning various noxious substances in a coconut shell or cooking-pot placed near a sacred tree. Conversely, as a love potion, one lights a flame in a coconut shell filled

## SPELL-CASTING (con't)

with syrup, honey, sugar, flower petals etc. and repeats the name of the person desired. Other lamps filled with specific substances are deemed useful for curing the sick, for finding a job, or are simply placed as an offering before a Roman Catholic or Voodoo altar.

Another form of spell-casting is *chanje tèt* (literally: changing heads or persons) whereby a desperately ill patient is supposedly saved by killing another person through evil magic and transferring that person's *gwo bonnanj* or soul to the patient. (See GUARDIAN ANGELS.)

Finally, another form of spell is the pact made with evil Voodoo forces whereby one can enjoy for a time great material success, but which must be paid for by sudden death. Thus the abrupt, unexpected demise of a person of importance is often interpreted as proof of an evil pact. (Cf. Faust legend.)

In general, the initial symptoms observed in the victim as the result of an evil spell are insomnia, loss of appetite, indigestion, headaches, and weight loss, along with ill-defined pains and a generally run-down condition. It is usually during the night that these symptoms are at their worst. Although death is a frequent outcome, a sick person who believes him/herself cursed can often see no reason to consult a Western physician.

The comparison can be drawn with a situation in Western society where, were one to believe that a price had been put on one's head and that a paid killer were lurking in every shadow, the psychological and thereby physical damage could be incalculable. The human mind is a most powerful instrument.

## SPELL-CASTING (con't)

The antidote is of course a counter-spell that one pays another Voodoo practitioner to cast. It then can often become a contest to determine which one has the more effective magic - or control of the intended victim's mind.

Similar processes are used against political enemies, or to turn one political or military leader against another. Another situation which occurs is a bogus spell set up by a would-be Voodoo exorcist, who profits financially by 'saving' the supposed victim from his/her fate.

**SPERM** \*Stored in male's back, at level of the waist. Without periodic intercourse, large amounts accumulate, causing pain. In old age, this accumulation can cause the back to bend over, and one can even become a hunchback.\*

\*Poisons the mother's milk.\* (An unwitting birth-control practice?)

**SPINACH** \*Quite dangerous for babies.\*

**SPITTING** Very frequent among the sick. Also, frequent spitting is considered an early sign of pregnancy.

\*Important in order to avoid inflicting the evil eye (*q.v.*).\*

\*A girl or woman should spit on the ground after urination.\*

**STATUS** A great many Haitian peasants are very status conscious, and are easily scandalized or even offended by what they perceive as improper dress or conduct on the part of those of "high status." Some are shocked by doctors who make a habit of visiting patients in their

## STATUS (con't)

homes, or who simply wear *sapat* - the Haitian informal sandal. Wearing glasses, on the other hand, is a sign of high status.

There seems to be a belief prevalent among some peasants that no really "good" Haitian physician would be practicing in their midst, far out in some rural area. The result of peasant low self-esteem, and/or the recognition of the lack of physical and social amenities? See MEDICAL EDUCATION (WESTERN-STYLE), "To serve the rural masses. . ."

The "big" doctors are thought to be found only in Port-au-Prince. Apparently, however, this attitude does not apply to foreign physicians.

**STERILITY** Always imputed to the woman. The greatest shame which can befall her, causing her to be considered unworthy of being deemed a real woman. She can be totally rejected by her family-in-law and mate, whatever her other qualities. Often seen as a curse placed against her by a rival woman.

\*Effective remedies: holy water, a pilgrimage to Saut-d'Eau (see PILGRIMAGES), special clothing, a magic doll placed between her and her mate each night,\* or the often very personal (and discreet) ministrations of a Voodoo priest - if not of another willing male.

**STERILIZATION OF EQUIPMENT** (Midwives, injectionists, etc.) Extremely difficult in rural Haiti, where fuel (almost always charcoal) is quite expensive by local standards. Set on the traditional three stones over an outdoor fire, maintaining a boiling cauldron for some 15-20 minutes is seldom achieved.

STETHOSCOPE \*Even for a relatively minor cut on the leg, proper treatment has not been administered if a stethoscope has not been applied to the chest.\* For many it is an integral part of the healing rite. (See EXPECTATIONS - PATIENTS'.)

STILL-BORN \*Caused by the failure of a *gwo bonnanj* (see GUARDIAN ANGELS) to occupy the infant's body just after birth. Its presence is indicated by the infant's first wail, its absence by stillness.\*

STOICISM In an overwhelmingly poor country, the tendency is to ignore illness and to delay treatment. Accustomed to great hardship, sickness is seen as just one additional factor. Cost rather than fear seems to be the decisive element.

Two proverbs: "*Bondye ban m yon maleng dèyè tèt, m asepte l.*" (God gave me an infected sore behind my head; I accept it. - I accept my lot.) "*Lavi a gen de tete: yon tete dous, yon tete anmè.*" (Life has two breasts: one sweet breast, one bitter breast.)

See APPENDIX: Forbearance.

SUGAR A national addiction, a dentist's nightmare. The Haitian is weaned on sugar water, and later dotes on *kola* (a bottled fruit drink with a seemingly 95% sugar content). From the ubiquitous chewing on sugar cane, to *rapadou* (brown-sugar candy sold on every street corner), to *tablèt* (peanut brittle-like candy), to coffee laced with so much sugar (4 to 6 teaspoonfuls per cup) that many refer to it as sugar moistened with coffee, an inordinate fondness for sugar and sweets is a striking characteristic of almost the entire population. Sugar is also used in large amounts in the preparation of popular dishes such as *akasan* (a semi-liquid cornmeal preparation) and *labouyi* (hot oatmeal). A provider of quick energy in an often insufficient daily diet.

## SUGAR (con't)

There is a proverb which states: "*Machwè brannen, grangou tchoule*" (literally: "Jaw moves, hunger moves off"), i.e., chewing on something relieves hunger pangs and sugar cane is a chief remedy.

**SUICIDE** Quite rare, as is overt homicide.

**SURGERY** Greatly feared: seen as life-threatening. Patient and relatives require considerable reassurance. (See NOVEMBER.)

Most Haitians are convinced that physical activity after any surgery will be harmful.

**TEETH** \*Are attacked by worms, just as are plants and vegetables. Worms are the cause for the holes or canals (i.e., cavities) found in teeth. So-called nerves and any other matter found in a tooth are in reality remnants of worms.\* Thus one way of saying "to perform root canal surgery" is *wete vè nan dan* (literally, "to extract worms from a tooth") - certainly a more concrete image than the nebulous concept of a nerve. There is supposedly a special herbal concoction which can kill the worms.

\*A flow of black blood rising to one's head can be a cause of violent toothaches.\*

Many believe that sugar cane is actually good for the teeth. While the fibers do help clean the teeth, they inevitably leave a sugar deposit as well, precipitating cavities. (See DENTISTRY.)

\*An old person's tooth can be made to regrow by rubbing the gum with a mixture of crushed ants.\*

See APPENDIX: Teeth.



**TEETHING** (*dantisyon*) Parents sometimes interpret sickness in their children as simply due to teething, and thus delay seeking medical help.

\*Dentition is impeded by cutting the infant's hair before weaning; also by rainwater falling into the infant's mouth\* - although at least one Voodoo priestess believes in sprinkling rainwater in an infant's mouth to prevent bad teeth.

**TETANUS** Neonatal tetanus was already reported in colonial Haiti, causing the death of one-third of babies delivered by Black midwives, but rarely by White midwives. Interpreted by the colonists as an expression of the Blacks' hatred of slavery.

Today believed due to cold (*fredi*) entering the mother during the postpartum period and thus transmitted by her milk, or through the umbilicus of the infant. One folk remedy consists of burning the clothes of the child, mixing the resulting ashes with raw rum (*kleren*), and then having the child drink some of the concoction and bathe in the remainder.

**TIME** The concept of time is often very vague. Many have no access to calendars, and seasons vary but little. Just because a patient tells you, for example, that a certain condition has been going on for two months, this is not necessarily so. It could well be six months - or far less than two months. (See also AGE, and HISTORY-TAKING.)

**TIMOUN**, or **RESTAVÈK** Literally meaning "child," is among the most decried of Haiti's informal social institutions. Typically, a poor peasant family with too many mouths to feed will entrust a child to a well-to-do urban family which will supposedly provide food, clothing, shelter,

*TIMOUN*, or *RESTAVÈK* (con't)

medical care and education, in return for domestic services. All too often, however, the domestic services are the only part of the bargain fulfilled as agreed. In many cases the custom is little better than a form of modern-day slavery, and physical, psychological, and sexual abuse is common. A 1984 UNICEF report estimated that 109,000, or five percent of all Haitian children between the ages of 5 and 18, fall into this category. Recently declared a high-risk group for AIDS.

**TOBACCO** Cigarettes are a status symbol, especially among males. "Comme Il Faut," the Haitian brand, has been somewhat eclipsed lately by large quantities of American cigarettes smuggled in. With an ever decreasing U.S. market, cigarette companies are making all the more effort to market their poison in the Third World, which, for the most part, is still naively unaware of their disastrous effects.

\*Chewing tobacco lessens toothaches, and snuffing tobacco lessens headaches and head colds.\*

\*To be able to give up smoking: attach a clove of garlic to your navel.\*

**TOMBS** Often more costly than the house in which one has passed a lifetime. But proper care for the dead is a necessity: 1) to be sure they will not be angry and return to harm the living; 2) to prevent the deceased from being turned into zombis (*q.v.*), a fate considered far worse than death.

**TOWEL** Often wrapped around the head as a self-proclaimed indicator of great pain and/or despair.

**TRADITIONAL MEDICINE** It has been estimated that approximately two-thirds of rural Haitians go to both traditional healers and Western practitioners, and one-third to traditional healers alone. For Haitians in general, the higher the level of education and income, the more one tends to go to Western practitioners.

The enormous strength of the traditional medical system is that people really *believe* in it. Diagnosis is minimal; divination is the true basis. The healer *knows*, and the patient, the family, the community, believe implicitly. Thus any inner strength of the patient works at maximum efficiency. Thinking is not enough; believing is.

As with cultures world-wide, the Haitian belief in their own medical culture is often so strong that one observes Haitians returning from abroad, at great expense and personal inconvenience, in order to receive what they consider the only really effective medical treatment. Social anthropologists have even described this cultural mindset regarding health practices as "one of the basic social institutions of a society," comparable in effect to a political or economic system.

When the divergence between two medical cultures is too great, there is the very real possibility of a high degree of dissatisfaction on the part of both the health provider and the care recipient. One will not accept the health views of the other, with the result that health care is neither sought nor accepted.

The more that folk beliefs and customs, i.e., the familiar, can be integrated into Western-style medical practice, i.e., the unfamiliar, the more successful that practice will be.

Any too blatant ridicule of existing folk medical practices has been found to be counter-productive. A mutual climate of trust and respect is necessary before Western medicine can begin to be fully accepted.

**TRIAGE** Traditionally, triage consists of battlefield medical decisions, where priority is given to the wounded with the best chance for survival. As for Haiti, Dr. William Hodges gives the following description: "Medical care for the hordes of needy will of necessity always be messy, and even painful. The total amount of human suffering will always exceed the best of our efforts to alleviate it. To sort out 'the sickest of the sick, the poorest of the poor,' is probably one of the world's worst jobs. Easy to spot and admit immediately are the children with sunken eyes and reduced skin turgor dehydrated from diarrhea. Obviously unconscious persons must be admitted - but watch out for those merely pretending. A hand on the forehead can reveal a fever, and the chronically ill with tuberculosis and severe weight loss are also easy to recognize. Much more difficult to judge are the recently ill with possibly typhoid or malaria, or those who have not yet lost much weight. Expect in almost all cases the little game of dramatically increased symptoms and suffering as the physician approaches. And then there is the 'Doctor, if you don't see my baby today, I'm going to leave him for you in the clinic.' Some of the more aggressive will keep changing places to be seen again if the first try has failed. Occasionally, the truly sick will come again the next day to get an examination ticket for someone else, using that person's name - making record-keeping a nightmare."

"Expect speeches: 'Would I sit here for four days if I weren't really sick!' 'Would I have come all the way from... if I weren't dying!' 'If my baby dies tonight, it will be your fault.' Retain your composure. Keep everyone seated. The triage must always not only be but must also appear to be just - which can be especially difficult if, for example, the patient is a well-known imitator simulating a shaking spell or convulsion." (Dr. William Hodges)

## TRIAGE (con't)

Unfortunately, it will often be found politically expedient to grant automatic admission to anyone armed with a special letter from a local political or religious authority. The Haitians accept this bit of injustice matter-of-factly.

But there are indeed medical centers in Haiti where facilities and number of patients make this sort of triage fortunately unnecessary.

**TRUTH** Terminal cancer? Baby will be still-born? Often the Haitian patient prefers not to know. It is better to inform an influential relative who can better judge when and if to do so. The same is true concerning major surgery.

**TUBERCULOSIS** The many terms for tuberculosis (our *Haitian-English English-Haitian Medical Dictionary* lists no less than fifteen) are usually used only to designate what Western medicine calls advanced active pulmonary tuberculosis.

Greatly feared, since both a frequent and obvious cause of death. Highly contagious especially because of crowded housing conditions (see NIGHT) and poor nutrition.

Its extreme contagiousness - as well as seriousness - is well known among the peasant population. Consequently, its victims often try to hide their condition if possible, thereby infecting others.

Carries with it a strong social stigma. Families often desert the patient, and the hospital will have to take charge of burial. Newspapers never give tuberculosis as cause of death.

## TUBERCULOSIS (con't)

Isolation from family and village is a common protective practice. Cf. *maladi ti kay* (little house sickness), and *maladi san fanmi* (sickness without family) - among the numerous terms for the disease.

It has been found that those living along a 'main' road tend to withdraw from treatment less than those who must make a more demanding trip. In addition, high market season, when the greatest amount of cash is available, is the period of fewest withdrawals from treatment. Cost (however low by Western standards) is a major factor for the patient. Often added to that is the cost of local lodging necessary during the first phases of treatment.

The problem of premature patient withdrawal has been called staggering. Once patients begin to feel better, three factors come into play: 1) a strong temptation to withdraw from treatment (until the disease again becomes disabling); 2) cost; 3) trip. A monetary refund for those who complete treatment has proven most effective. Another ploy found effective is free food given each week when they return to get their medicine.

\*Does not occur in children.\*

\*Cannot be transmitted to someone older than oneself - thus only those younger than the affected individual feel the need to take precautions.\*

**TWINS** (*marasa*) Voodoo holds that twins are endowed with strange, magical powers, and are thus the object of special respect and even fear.

Are quite jealous of each other: each must be dressed similarly, and if one receives a gift, the other must receive

## TWINS (*marasa*) (con't)

exactly the same. If one is sickly and the other not, it is because \*the healthy one is sucking the blood of the other.\*

\*Twins are indicated by a dark streak or stripe extending from the expectant mother's pubis to her navel and sometimes slightly higher.\*

A child born following the birth of twins (boy: *dosou*; girl: *dosa*) is considered even more powerful than twins, combining their dual force into one person. On the other hand, the child born preceding twins (*dosou/dosa anvan*) is held to be of little importance, and thus loses status after their birth.

ULCERS Surprisingly high incidence of stomach ulcers - due to frequent anxiety of the Voodooist, as well as to undernourishment?

UMBILICUS According to Dr. Florence N. Marshall, "Cultural habits in rural Haiti dictate that something must be done to the cut end of the cord. 'Because it has always been done so' is the most frequent reason given. In questioning more deeply, it appears that such practices arise from the belief that putting certain substances on the cord will assure its early drying and falling off - crude, mistaken efforts to prevent infection. In more recent years, there is evidence that some of the people are making a vague connection between treatment of the umbilical cord and the development of tetanus. Consequently, more vigorous applications of foreign substances are used..." She goes on to list these substances as pot black, powdered or crushed charcoal, "burned strands of the straw bed mat, nutmeg and candle grease, [concoctions of] leaves, grasses, cotton or feathers; also pork fat, baby powder, cosmetic powder,

## UMBILICUS (con't)

indigo, sand, fresh earth, sugar cane syrup, plantain, starch, wood shavings, dust and water, ginger, red pepper and crude castor oil. Then a patch of cloth or a belly band is applied." (*Advances in Pediatrics*, vol. 15, 1968, p. 69.) A Haitian physician adds "parts of a spider web" to this list. "Sometimes after the beginning of clinical symptoms of tetanus, still more concoctions are used as home remedies to combat the illness." (Marshall, *ibid.*, p. 74)

Implements often used to cut the umbilicus are an unsterilized razor blade (old or new), scissors, a knife, a piece of broken glass, sharp pieces of rock or metal, a machete, simply two rocks, or it is even just burnt with a piece of hot charcoal. The fresh wound is cauterized with a piece of heated iron. (See CHILDBIRTH, "Kits...")

A small bit of the cord is left attached. About four thumb-widths is considered ideal, and measurement is held crucial, since \*the eventual size of the penis or vagina is partly determined by the length of the remaining umbilical stump.\*

Another fixed belief is that this stump 'must' fall off when the baby is three days old. "Numerous manipulations and applications lead to this result on schedule. Then one or another of the substances mentioned is put on the umbilicus, which is obviously still raw. Even when a baby is delivered and handled correctly at a hospital or by a 'good' midwife, the relatives, especially the grandmother, work on the navel, and at the earliest possible moment." (Marshall, *ibid.*, p. 70)

The cord can be tied with thread, string, rags, or grass. \*Loud speech, or handling of a needle by the mother,



## UMBILICUS (con't)

delays the healing of the stump.\* Once detached, the bit of cord is boiled and the water given as medicine should the child become ill.

Traditionally the cord is buried as near as possible to where the birth actually took place, designating one's symbolic home throughout life.

\*Dung rubbed on the navel of a neonate will ensure that (s)he will be fertile.\*

It is estimated that, until the recent, increasingly active programs, neonatal tetanus caused the death of approximately one-third of all live births in Haiti. By way of comparison, the number of neonatal deaths among the rural population of Haiti was approximately 300 times greater than among the rural non-White population of Florida.

UMBILICUS (SWOLLEN) \*Due to: 1) too much crying soon after birth; 2) gas; 3) whooping cough; 4) heredity.\*

UNDERDEVELOPMENT Poor health leads to poor work, which leads to poor output, which leads to poor nutrition, which leads to poor health... A vicious cycle.

"The waste of human resources." (Andrea Couture)

UNMARRIED WOMAN Looked down upon in the community. It is considered far preferable to share a man rather than to be without one.

URINE \*Drinking one's own urine is good for a variety of ills.\*

**VACCINATION** Hardest part by far: the follow-up shots. Perhaps easier to tell the mother when to return (with immunization card) rather than to try to have her memorize the number of shots necessary.

Another great problem is proper refrigeration of the vaccine. And, what if it has remained unrefrigerated for weeks in customs?

**VASECTOMY** Commonly believed will result in impotence. Added to this is the fact that the usual term for "to perform a vasectomy" is *chatre* (to castrate). The only way yet found to popularize is through the direct testimonial of a local man who has had one (and who has subsequently found much favor among members of the fair sex).

**VIRGINITY** Prized for the woman, derided for the male. Traditionally, spots of blood on the sheet after the first night are considered necessary proof. Of course proper timing can make this night coincide with menstruation, or a small animal intestine filled with blood secreted in an appropriate spot can perform the same function.

If a woman has had intercourse only during a Voodoo possession, she will consider herself still a virgin.

\*Certain baths, seated in certain positions, can restore a woman's virginity.\*

**VISION** Color perception will often be found to be quite imprecise (cf. COLORS), whereas night vision is often quite acute.

**VITALITY** Contrast the essential joy and vitality of the Haitian people with (what at least appears to be) the essential sadness of the other destitute peoples of the Americas. Is this the essential quality which will one day be the salvation of Haiti?

VOMITING \*Can be prevented by a large iron key tied around the neck.\*

VOODOO = religion / medicine / way of life.

The all-pervasive folk religion of Haiti. Much of rural Haitian attitudes are informed by Voodoo, a fact not to be taken lightly by the outsider. Because the Haitian peasant is so poor and always in danger of want or illness, he traditionally sees Voodoo as his only resource. And in the world of Voodoo, religion and medicine are inextricably linked. The high incidence of ill health forms a climate of anxiety in which Voodoo flourishes. A revealing fact: fees for treating the sick are usually the Voodoo priest(esse)'s main source of income.

The Voodooist's world is peopled with both the visible and the invisible, with magic both good and bad, with one great God (*Granmèt*), with all-powerful spirits (*lwa*), with the dead (*lemò*), with witches (*lougawou*) and other creatures - and priests (*oungan*) and priestesses (*manbo*) who serve as intermediaries. One must cajole or appease, cheat or conquer the three main potential causes of harm: 1) the Voodoo spirits, 2) the dead, and 3) the twins (*marasa*). All phenomena are spiritual, "animated" by the Voodoo spirits. These spirits and forces are all around us, and more often than not cause ill fortune and disease - when not simply playing tricks on us. They are capricious, without any particular moral or ethical orientation, and can be maneuvered by clever persons to their own aims. Thus negotiating exterior forces forms the framework of one's actions. Evil is exteriorized, not interiorized as in the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Although Voodoo is deeply ingrained in the peasant population, it is unlikely to be discussed with a Western-type practitioner. It is nevertheless obviously of prime

## VOODOO (con't)

importance to know what is in the mind of the patient and what other medical beliefs and practices are being entertained simultaneously. Voodoo furnishes the underlying vantage point from which many a Haitian patient views illness, and the influence of Voodoo cannot be countered if it is not understood. In the mind of the Voodooist, certain health problems are interpreted as religious problems, to be solved by religious means.

Illnesses thought to be of supernatural origin are the specific domain of the Voodoo priest(ess). Treatment consists essentially of the spiritual (based upon Voodoo practices), but also of the physical (based upon herbs). The Voodoo priest(esse)'s paramount task is to ascertain which Voodoo spirit is causing a given illness, and then to appease that spirit through the rituals it desires - as well as which herbal remedies should be taken. Diagnosis consists of interrogating the Voodoo spirits using procedures such as entering into a trance, dream interpretations, or reading of cards. (See DIVINATION/DIAGNOSIS.) Failure to cure is attributed not to the ritualistic system as a whole, but rather to: 1) incorrect diagnosis, i.e., improper identification of the specific Voodoo spirit who is the cause; 2) unbending wrath of the Voodoo spirit involved; 3) lack of the patient's faith in the Voodoo priest(ess); 4) a stronger hex created by an evil sorcerer; 5) the patient's failure to follow instructions. (See ILLNESS.)

If the human mind can be of prime importance in bringing about cures, then it can obviously be of prime importance in bringing about sickness and even death. Thus the psychological power of a Voodoo hex or curse is not to be taken lightly. Haitian peasants are steeped in the traditions of Voodoo, and they constantly witness illnesses and deaths that are (for them) otherwise inexplicable. (See VOODOO DEATH.)

## VOODOO (con't)

Innumerable are the personal enmities brought about by belief in Voodoo, perhaps symptomatic of an underlying belief in man's innately evil nature. For example a woman may believe that her vagina is being rotted out by a *wanga* (hex) placed upon her by a rival woman. (A supernatural explanation of an all too natural contagious venereal disease?) And yet some observers argue realistically that the pervasive anxiety generated by Voodoo constitutes the social cement which ensures the comparative peacefulness of a destitute and overpopulated country. (See PARANOIA.)

In the some thirty or forty Voodoo ceremonies which we have had the privilege of attending, only once upon arriving were we mistaken as to who was the priest, although the clothing of a Voodoo priest(ess) is in no way distinctive. The chief distinguishing characteristic can perhaps best be described as a certain charisma - an air of omniscience, of omnipotence, as though the eyes were looking directly into one's innermost self.

## VOODOO AND CONVERSION TO PROTESTANTISM

Often for protection through what is seen as a more powerful, and certainly more prosperous, religion. More pragmatism than spirituality, in the Christian sense. It may well be through fear of exterior evil forces, not sin or guilt - through desire for deliverance from the evil of this world, not repentance. It can represent a remedy against hardship (missionary-furnished food and medical care), or yet another treatment for "supernatural" illnesses.

In general, Haitian Christians seem to blame illness on the following: 1) God; 2) Satan; 3) magic and the Voodoo spirits; 4) natural causes. One of the principal reasons for

## VOODOO AND CONVERSION TO PROTESTANTISM (con't)

becoming a Protestant is to escape the threats of Voodoo, which by no means necessarily implies a disbelief in Voodoo.

Even those who have purportedly given up Voodoo, as demanded by Protestant missions in Haiti, sometimes suddenly blurt out remarks such as, "But of course I can't deny what I've actually seen myself." Belief in a faith held for many, many generations does not die easily.

Conversion to Protestantism - and thus denouncing the Voodoo spirits - can at some time be deemed dangerous by the convert, should (s)he come to believe the spirits are angry and have decided on punishment through illness or misfortune. Often a convert's death is attributed to the anger of the Voodoo spirits. Much of the conflict, of course, may well center upon a suppressed desire to return to Voodoo.

VOODOO AND WESTERN-TYPE MEDICINE "Integrated medicine." Reportedly, the traditional enmity between Voodoo priest(esse)s and Western-type medicine is largely a thing of the past. More and more it appears that once the Voodoo practitioner has appeased the problem with the supernatural (and collected fees), the patient is then advised to consult a Western-type practitioner to repair the damage remaining from the Voodoo spirit's former wrath. In effect, Voodoo is enlisted to combat the cause, and Western medicine to combat the symptoms. Thus often the problem essentially reduces itself to delay in receiving effective treatment.

Competition or cooperation? In practice, real collaboration has been limited to working with midwives,

## VOODOO AND WESTERN-TYPE MEDICINE (cont')

injectionists, and faith-and-herb healers, with in a few cases strictly Voodoo practitioners called in for certain psychotherapeutic counseling.

"Grapeshot therapy" - or the concurrent treatment pattern. Typically the rural Haitian will consult both the Western and the traditional medical practitioners concurrently. (See TRADITIONAL MEDICINE.)

Patients who believe that they have received a Voodoo curse or hex will rarely if ever admit this to a Western physician, for fear of ridicule. Therefore, if it appears that such may be the case, it is extremely important to ask patients if they think something has been done to them, and then to explain how (if true) Western medicine can definitely help. Symptoms often include weight loss, sleeplessness, depression, lack of appetite, and vague abdominal complaints. Often patients are quite relieved to be able to exteriorize their fears. In some obviously psychosomatic cases, physicians have knowingly accepted working in cooperation with a Voodoo healer.

Question: Then why not go to the Western-type doctor in the first place? Answer: Because if the Voodoo spirit's wrath has not been appeased, the same or a similar sickness will reappear.

Would it be advisable therefore for there to be overt collaboration between Voodoo and Western practitioner? The problem would be that public overtures to the Voodooist would give him/her too great an added prestige in the village. Communication might well be useful, but probably not overt collaboration. Nevertheless, one wonders if someday in Haiti the type of collaboration which has worked so well in Zimbabwe would be

## VOODOO AND WESTERN-TYPE MEDICINE (con't)

possible, namely faith-and-herb healers, midwives, and Western-type physicians all working together in a shared dispensary or clinic.

**VOODOO CONSULTATIONS** The typical consultation takes place in a very small Voodoo sanctuary called a *badji*, before an altar covered with a motley collection of seemingly (to the outsider) unrelated objects, and space enough for only three or four people. The priest(ess) chants, prays, and appears to enter into a trance while being possessed by a Voodoo spirit. This spirit then essentially takes over the consultation, questioning, palpating, and prescribing. The psychotherapeutic force at work here is abundantly evident.

Just how a Voodoo practitioner distinguishes between illness brought on by a Voodoo sorcerer (*bòkò*), and the wrath of a Voodoo spirit (*lwa*), is unclear. Paid informants, as well as gossip, can well be sources in the case of local enmity.

Collusion between Voodoo priest(esse)s can and sometimes does occur. A patient may come to one complaining of having been poisoned. The Voodoo practitioner may well believe (s)he knows which *bòkò* (Voodoo sorcerer) prepared the poison on behalf of a client, and who therefore, for a fee, could indicate not only its nature but also its antidote. If such is the case, the *bòkò*, by revealing the proper cure, thus ends up being paid by one client to cause illness, and indirectly by another to cure the same illness! And he can tell his original client that the person targeted for evil did indeed become ill, but that other magic prevailed.

**VOODOO CURES** A Voodoo cure for a Voodoo illness. A person who believes in the magic of Voodoo evils will most



## VOODOO CURES (con't)

likely believe in the magic of Voodoo remedies. This culture firmly believes that illness can be brought on by spirits or spells, and it believes just as firmly that these illnesses can be cured by other spirits or spells. One can view this as a process of subconscious suggestibility, of psychosomatic suggestion, of self-hypnosis, or of self-fulfilling prophecy. Is it reasonable, or effective, to attempt to cure culture-specific mental problems by therapy devised by and for another, entirely different, culture?

**\*The world is filled with potentially harmful forces. All misfortune is caused by the wrath either of humans or of Voodoo spirits, i.e., of the Visibles or of the Invisibles.\*** Therefore, when ills occur, one must first determine whether the cause is human or otherwise, and then find the appropriate cure. Magic harm wrought by another human can be countered by stronger magic; wrath of the Voodoo spirits can be calmed by the proper offerings. (See PARANOIA.)

Ritual Voodoo cures can be quite intricate and prolonged, sometimes inflicting burns on the patient's body, or even lowering the patient into a grave which is then partially filled in with a thin layer of dirt. (See also INSANITY.) They can consist of rubbing the blood of freshly sacrificed chickens or foul-smelling leaf concoctions over the patient's body. Another cure is formed of a mixture of rum, leaves and spices sprayed from the priest(esse)'s mouth into the face of the patient. Leeches or incisions in the arm or chest are also considered effective.

For mental illness, beating and burning the patient may form an integral part of elaborate ceremonies. Total belief in the Voodoo practitioner's powers, as well as support and reassurance by the community, can well be

## VOODOO CURES (con't)

determining factors. These psychotherapeutic aspects are all-important: the implicit faith of the patient in this healer who possesses a technique for all ills. The omniscient healer - is there a more comforting concept for the patient?

The role that Voodoo can play in certain psychiatric disorders is illustrated by the case of an elderly woman who firmly believed that an evil spell had been cast around her house and that she would die if she were to go out. A Voodoo priest was successfully called in by a Western physician to break the spell and furnish protection against any further similar occurrences. A Voodoo cure for a Voodoo illness, where a Western-type remedy would doubtlessly have been without effect.

Dr. Ari Kiev quotes one Voodoo priest as saying to him: "In order to cure someone successfully, it is necessary for him/her to believe in me, in Voodoo, or in God."

One can also speculate on the problem of the patient who has consciously rejected Voodoo for Protestantism, but who is still subconsciously a firm believer in Voodoo. (S)He thus refuses to have recourse to a Voodoo priest(ess), but the mental problem is still there.

On December 24 is held a special ceremony to ensure health for the following year. A washtub is filled with rum and various herbal concoctions, as well as with the blood of a sacrificial animal, and then blessed through a series of incantations. The members of the congregation strip to their underpants and anoint themselves with the liquid while dancing around the tub.

## VOODOO CURES (con't)

\*Sometimes if one's protective Voodoo spirit (*lwa tèt*) does not come to help in times of sickness, it is simply that (s)he is busy at the bedside of other sick persons who have been more attentive to him/her.\*

Proverb: *Nèg fè, nèg defè* - Man does, man undoes. (*What is done by one Voodoo sorcerer can be remedied by another.*)

Often it is the Voodoo priest(ess) living further away who will be consulted, rather than a nearby one - "distance lends enchantment."

Christians tend to credit God with their cure, Voodooists a specific Voodoo spirit.

**VOODOO DEATH** "If faith can heal, fear can kill." Apparently a very real phenomenon, with occurrences reported not only in Haiti, but in regions as diverse as Africa, Australia, and islands of the Pacific - involving cases where competent Western-type medical authorities have ruled out the possibility of poison, physical injury, or disease. It is claimed that the victims die not because they have made up their minds to die, but because they believe they are bound to die as the result of a Voodoo curse or hex. Deeply rooted insecurity in a fear-ridden environment would create a very special vulnerability in some: "A fatal power of the imagination working through unmitigated terror." Death would supposedly occur from a prolonged state of shock induced by intense emotion. For a discussion of possible physiological causes and symptoms, see Walter B. Cannon (of Harvard Medical School), "'Voodoo' Death," in *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 44, No. 2 (April-June 1942), 169-181.

**VOODOO POSSESSION** (*posesyon*) Seen by non-believers as a form of voluntary self-hypnosis or trance; by believers as

## VOODOO POSSESSION (*posesyon*) (con't)

the high point of the Voodoo religion, when a Voodoo spirit (*lwa*) temporarily takes possession of a mortal's mind and body, speaking and acting through this mortal, and leaving him/her with no subsequent recollection of the event. The first time one is possessed (or "mounted"), the reaction can be especially violent, even throwing oneself into a fire or cutting oneself.

Has been interpreted (by non-believers) as a liberating device approved by Haitian culture, whereby unconscious emotional needs are fulfilled, speech and actions normally forbidden are permitted, and exhibitionist and even sexual needs can be gratified. It can be seen as a healthy expression of suppressed emotions which could cause neurosis and psychosis. An imaginary other self comes temporarily into existence, expressing hidden desires and freeing oneself of frustrations, yet without involving one's responsibility.

A man can just as well be possessed by a female Voodoo spirit as by a male one, and the same is true for a woman. Thus there is an inherent bisexuality in Voodoo, and while under a Voodoo possession, a man can have intercourse with a woman or with another man, or a woman can have relations with a man or with another woman. This is not seen as homosexual activity by the Voodoo community, but rather as an act involving only the Voodoo spirit in question. The same is true even for what would normally be considered incest. Such occurrences are rare, but well illustrate the "other-worldly" nature of the Voodoo possession trance.

**WAKES** A time for loud mourning, as well as for general revelry - the dead person must depart in a merry mood or (s)he could return to do mischief. Drinking, card-playing, and story-telling go on well into the night - as well as wailing.

**WATER** Boiling water is quite often too expensive for the average person: too much charcoal is required, and charcoal does not come cheaply. Thus the bottle-feeding of infants, formula mixed with water, leads to diarrhea. The mothers often realize it is because of the water, so no more water is given. The result: death by dehydration.

Another problem is that those babies who have been given boiled water are then given unboiled water as they are introduced to weaning food, often resulting in a violent onset of diarrhea.

"The number of faucets in a country is a more accurate health indicator than the number of doctors." (Joseph Bentivegna, M.D.)

Rural wells are not infrequently found to contain raw sewage, and the most prevalent rural water source - the local stream - is the site of bathing, washing of clothes, and watering of domestic stock.

\*A body's length away from an animal makes the water safe to drink.\*

\*After having been used by an undertaker (*benyè*), even a few drops of water are highly toxic and can be used as a most deadly poison.\*

**WEANING** The willing consumption of food from the family cooking-pot (*gwo manje*) is considered the essential factor in deciding when a child should be weaned. Teething, walking, and the ability to say one or two words are also important factors.

Often accomplished by applying to the mother's breasts the extremely bitter jelly-like substance found in the leaves of the local aloe (*lalwa*), thus quite effectively repelling the child from the breast.

## WEANING (con't)

Can occur abruptly if another pregnancy is recognized:  
\*the milk must be reserved for the fetus.\*

**WESTERN MEDICINE** Just as organized Christianity was absent from Haiti for over half a century after Independence, Western medicine was also absent.

Both Mulattoes and freed slaves had been forbidden to serve as Western-type physicians, and the White French physicians had been forced to flee. Thus traditional medicine, like Voodoo, came to play an even greater role than during colonial times - and, like Voodoo, became firmly rooted in Haitian mores.

Private Western-type doctors, as well as foreign-operated mission hospitals, are highly regarded. (But see STATUS.)

See also **MEDICAL EDUCATION (WESTERN-STYLE)**.

**WHEELCHAIR** For many, a public announcement that one is seriously ill. To be avoided if possible.

**WHOOPIING COUGH** \*Fears the color red\* - thus a U.S. penny is attached to a red cord and worn around the neck, and predominantly red clothes are worn. Beet juice and a roasted mouse are considered additional cures.

**WI** Beware of the "*Wi, dòk*" ("Yes, doc") syndrome which many overly humble patients instinctively adopt in the belief that this is necessary to receive proper medical care, and as an unconscious reaction to the strangeness of the Western medical setting. Suggestibility is a frequent characteristic.

WI (cont)

A ploy to test the "Wi, dòk" syndrome is the use of ridiculous statements such as: "You've been dead for six months, haven't you?"

Wi does not necessarily mean anything in Haitian. However it can mean: 1) I don't know - and don't want to admit it; 2) I don't understand - and don't want to admit it; 3) I hear you - but not necessarily I will do it; 4) You want me to say yes. Also one often hears the physician proceeding in such Frenchified "Creole" that the patient does not have the slightest idea as to what is being said, but (s)he will continue to answer obediently "Wi, dòk."

WOMB The "wandering womb" belief: \*the uterus moves about the body after childbirth in search of the newly born infant. Symptoms are weakness and confusion, to be remedied by gentle massaging (normally by the midwife) of the uterus until it returns to its proper place.\*

WORMS So ubiquitous among the rural population as to be considered by many as simply a fact of life.

\*Everyone is born with a *manman vè* (mother worm, very large worm), and if this worm dies, you die. Some worms hurt you, but other worms nourish you.\*

\*Caused initially by mother's milk, especially if the child is not weaned early enough. Some of the most harmful are due to spontaneous generation within the stomach, and then make their way to the heart.\*

\*Occur in children from eating too many sweets.\* (Cf. the similar belief in Western society that sweets cause worms in dogs.)

\*Their presence indicated by grinding of the teeth, by crying out or jerking in one's sleep, or by sleep-walking.\*

**WORMS (con't)**

**\*Anti-worm remedies are far more effective if taken when the moon is on the wane.\***

**WOUNDS** **\*To treat a wound filled with pus, pack with sugar - just as fruit is preserved with sugar.\***

**YAWNING** Interpreted as a sign of hunger, not of fatigue or boredom.

**YAWS** **\*Transmitted by insect stings, and thus cured only by the "sting" of a hypodermic needle.\***

**ZOMBIS** Most believe in the existence of the "living dead," human beings reduced to the state of automatons mindlessly toiling away at the will of their master, an unconscious caricature of the condition of a slave. A recent book by a Harvard ethnobotanist (Wade Davis, *The Serpent and the Rainbow*, 1985) explains how persons are reduced to a coma-like state by chemical means (tetrodotoxin), are believed dead, are buried, and then secretly dug up by those who administered the poison. In the process, their minds are impaired, turning them into robots.

Considered a fate far worse than death, sometimes a form of community punishment. One preventive sometimes used is simply to poison the cadaver. There is even a recorded case of a father decapitating his already dead son.

Explicit recognition of zombification is even made in the Haitian Penal Code, Article 246, which equates this practice with murder.



## ZOMBIS (con't)

Someone eminently successful is said to have a zombi secretly working for him. A neighbor's far more productive field may convince some either that a powerful spell has been created by a Voodoo priest(ess), or that a team of zombis is brought out in the dead of night for special tilling and watering.

Supposedly the dreaded *tonton makout* wore dark glasses to give the impression that they were dead-eyed zombis, incapable of human emotions or pity, entirely at the will of a ruthless master - and thus all the more to be feared.

\*An effective anti-zombification ploy is to throw grains of rice into the casket. The deceased will then be so busy counting the grains that (s)he will not respond to the *bòkò's* call to rise.\*

## APPENDIX: 100 HAITIAN PROVERBS ON HEALTH AND SICKNESS

Proverbs are one of the most revealing barometers of a given society, and all the more so in a largely illiterate one. Haiti's innumerable axioms constitute a basis for much of its discourse, as well as expressing its accepted wisdom. The following is a sampling of some which concern health and sickness, though many certainly have other meanings as well which go far beyond.

### AGING

**Fanm se kajou: plis li vye, plis li bon.** - Woman is like mahogany: the older the better.

**Yo fè pi bon wout ak yon vye baton.** - The going's better with an old walking cane.

**Bouch granmoun santi, men sa ki ladann se rezon.**  
The oldster's mouth smells, but out of it comes reason.

**Cheve blan pa vle di vye.** - White hair doesn't mean old.

**Kò timoun rèd, san l pa di; kò granmoun di, san l pa rèd.** - The young person's body is tough, without being hard; the old person's body is hard, without being tough.

**Zo granmoun se lakre.** - The old person's bones are chalk.

**Pitit se baton vyeyès granmoun.** - The child is the old person's walking cane.

**Gwo espwa pa pou vye granmoun.** - Big hopes are not for old people.

### BIRTHING

**Pito dlo a tonbe, kalbas la rete.** - Better that the water falls and that the gourd remains. (*Better to lose the baby than the mother.*)

**Kolik pa tranche.** - Menstrual pains are not labor pains.

**Ze ki kale twò bonè, ti poul la p ap viv.** - If the egg hatches too soon, the little chick will not live.

**Nou pa mande pitit sanble papa l, nou mande erez kouch.** - We don't ask that the child look like its father, but just for a successful delivery.

## DEATH

**Chak lè blese, dènye a touye.** - Each hour wounds, the last one kills.

**Ou pa mare pye lanmò.** - You don't tie up the feet of death.

**Ou ka di konben ou genyen, men ou pa ka di konben ou rete.** - You can say how much you have, but you can't say how much you have left. (*You know how long you have lived, but you don't know how long you have to live.*)

**Ou wè jodi a, ou pa konn denmen.** - You see today, you don't know about tomorrow.

**Yon moun pa janm mouri anvan lè l.** - A person never dies before his time.

**Moun fèt pou mouri.** - Man is born to die.

**Lanmò manke ou, men li pa bliye ou.** - Death misses you, but it doesn't forget you.

**Simityè pa janm refize vyann.** - The cemetery never refuses flesh. (*Don't live too dangerously.*)

**Lavi se kòd sapat: ou pa ka konte sou li.** - Life is a sandal strap: you can't count on it.

**Lanmò granpapa yon moun, se kout tafya yon lòt.** - The death of one person's grandfather is a strong drink for someone else. (*One person's death is another's shot in the arm.*)

**Ou mouri, ou mouri pou je ou.** - When you die, you die alone.

**Vanyan pa mouri vanyan.** - The courageous do not die courageously.

**Se pa tout blesi ki geri.** - Not all wounds heal.

**Lè ou kontre yon zo sou chemen, konnen li te gen chè sou li.** - When you encounter a bone on the road, know that once it had flesh on it.

**Kriye pa leve lanmò.** - Crying doesn't raise the dead.

## DIET

**Sak vid pa kanpe.** - An empty bag doesn't stand up. (*No work gets done on an empty stomach.*)

- Sa ki pa touye ou, li angrese ou.** - Whatever doesn't kill you, fattens you.
- Manje ou plis renmen, se li menm ki va trangle ou.** - The food you like the most is the very one which will strangle you.
- Si ou manje bouji, fòk ou kaka mèch.** - If you eat candles, you have to excrete wicks. (*Whatever goes in comes out. Whatever goes around comes around.*)

## EYES

- Pito ou wè lwen, ou pa avèg.** - Better to be far-sighted than to be blind.
- Nan mitan avèg, bòy se wa.** - Among the blind, the one-eyed is king.
- Ti bwa ou pa wè, se li ki pete je ou.** - The little twig you don't see is the one that puts your eye out.
- Pi bon gad kò, se je.** - The best bodyguard is the eyes.

## FORBEARANCE

- Lavi pi fò pase lanmò.** - Life is stronger than death.
- Byen mal pa lanmò.** - Very sick is not dead.
- Maleng pa janm santi pou mèt li.** - Infected sores never smell to their owner.
- Tete pa janm twò lou pou mèt li.** - Breasts are never too heavy for their owner.
- Grenn kochon pa janm twò lou pou li.** - A pig's testicles are never too heavy for him.
- Nanpwen kavalye ki pa janm tonbe.** - There is no horseback rider who has never fallen. (*Accidents happen to us all.*)
- Gwo chen tonbe, ti chen tonbe.** - Big dogs fall, little dogs fall. (*Large or small, we all get sick.*)
- Sila ki gen tout manm li, bèl anpil.** - The one who has all his limbs is handsome indeed.
- Lè ou malere, tout bagay sanble ou.** - When you are unhappy, everything resembles you. (*When you are down, everything else seems to be down. Subjectivity.*)

**Lapenn pa dire santan.** - Pain doesn't last a hundred years.

## HEALTH

**Lasante se pi gwo richès.** - Health is the greatest wealth.  
**Gwo bounda pa di lasante.** - A large rear end does not necessarily mean health. (*Healthy looks can be deceptive.*)

## HEALTH PRECAUTIONS

**Se mèt kò ki veye kò.** - It's the owner of the body who looks out for the body.

**Atansyon pa kapon.** - Caution is not cowardice.

**Marengwen danse, men li pa bliye janm li.** - The mosquito dances, but he doesn't forget about his legs.

**Lantèman brav pase devan kay kapon.** - The brave person's funeral procession passes by in front of the coward's house. (*The coward outlives the brave.*)

## HUNGER

**Grangou dimanch pi rèd.** - Hunger on Sundays is worse. (*Hunger is all the harder to bear when others are feasting.*)

**Depi yon moun grangou, li soud.** - As soon as a person is hungry, he is deaf. (*Hunger has no ears.*)

## ILLNESS

**Maladi vin sou chwal, li tounen sou bourik.** - Sickness arrives by horse, and goes away by donkey.

**Maladi pa konn bon.** - Sickness does not recognize the good. (*Sickness spares neither the good nor the bad.*)

**Chik pa janm respekte pye gwo mouche.** - Chiggers never respect even big shots' feet. (*Sickness spares no one.*)

**Malè pa gen klaksonn.** - Misfortune has no horn.

**Ti kou ti kou fè mo.** - Many little hits make a hurt.

**Maladi ranje doktè.** - Sickness makes business for doctors.

#### MEDICATION

**Bondye pa janm bay pitit Li penn san sekou.** - God never gives His children pain without help.

**Gwo maladi mande gwo renmèd.** - Serious sickness requires serious medicine.

**Fòk ou pase maladi pou ou konn renmèd.** - You have to have thrown off sickness to know its remedy.

**Plenn nan kè pa renmèd kò.** - Sorrowing in the heart is no remedy for the body.

**Bonè se pi bon doktè nan lemonn.** - Contentment is the world's best doctor.

**Bouche nen ou pou bwè dlo santi.** - Hold your nose to take stinking water.

**Pa antre nan batay san baton.** - Don't go into battle without a stick. (*Inoculation; condoms.*)

**Rete trankil se renmèd pou kò.** - Staying calm is medicine for the body.

#### PAIN

**Wòch nan dlo pa konnen doulè wòch nan solèy.** - The rock in the water cannot know the pain of the rock in the sun.

**Sa ki pa janm soufri, pa konn doulè lòt.** - He who has never suffered does not know the pain of another.

**Bay kou bliye, pote mak sonje.** - He who gives the blow forgets, he who bears the scar remembers.

**Pito lakwa al kay zanmi, li pa al lakay ou.** - Better that the cross goes to the friend's house, and that it not go to your house. (*Better it happen to someone else than to you.*)

**De zòm mouye nan lapli, gen youn ki pi mal.** - Two men get wet in the rain - one gets it worse. (*Misfortune strikes each person differently.*)

**Lavwa pòv yo, se tankou yon klòch an bwa.** - The voice of the poor is like a wooden bell.

## PEDIATRICS

**Lè ou pa gen manman, ou tete grann.** - When you don't have a mother, you nurse from a grandmother. (*You make do with what there is.*)

**Timoun ki byen tete byen kenbe.** - Babies who nurse well do well.

**Pitit ki kriye, se li ki bezwen tete.** - The baby who cries is the one who needs to nurse. (*It's the squeaking wheel that gets the oil.*)

**Pi piti toujou pi rèd.** - The smallest is always the toughest.

**Yon pitit ka gen anpil papa, li ka gen yon sèl manman.**  
- A child can have many fathers, it can have only one mother.

**Odè manman sèlman, se yon medikaman.** - The mere scent of a mother is medicine.

**Pitit mouri nan men manman l, nanpwen repwòch.**  
There is no blame when a child dies in its mother's arms.

## QUACKERY

**Kabrit kaka pilil, li di li se doktè.** - The goat excretes pills and says he's a doctor.

**Chat ap fè longan gri: li konprann li se doktè.** - The cat produces gray ointment and is convinced he's a doctor.

## RECUPERATION

**Kò se zèb: l a pouse ankò.** - The body is like the grasses: it will grow again.

**Avèk pasyans ou ap wè lonbrit foumi.** - With patience you'll see the ant's navel. (*With patience, all is possible.*)

**Twò prese pa fè jou louvri.** - Being too much in a hurry doesn't hasten the dawn. (*Recovery takes time.*)

**Bondye di ou: "Fè pa ou, M a fè pa M."** - God says to you: "You do your part, I'll do Mine."

**Se pa tout medsen ki geri malad yo.** - It's not every doctor who cures his patients.

**Lespwa fè viv.** - Hope gives life.

## SELF-TREATMENT

**Doktè pa janm trete tèt li.** - A doctor never treats himself.  
(*One can never be self-sufficient.*)

**Oungan pa janm geri maleng li.** - A Voodoo priest never cures his own infected sore.

**Kouto pa ka grate manch li.** - A knife cannot scratch its handle.

## SEXUALITY

**Chak fanm fèt ak yon kawo tè nan mitan janm li.** - Each woman is born with rich farming land between her legs.

**Foumi pa janm mouri anba sak sik.** - An ant never dies under a sack of sugar. (*Even the smallest woman can have intercourse with the largest man.*)

**Gason konn bouke, men pa fanm.** - Man eventually gets tired, but woman never. (*Woman's insatiability.*)

## SURVIVAL

**Depi tèt pa koupe, ou espere mete chapo.** - As long as the head is not cut off, you hope to put on a hat. (*When there's life there's hope.*)

**Nanpwen tonbe ki pa leve.** - There's no falling without getting up again.

**Pito ou lèd ou la.** - Better ugly, but alive.

**Lapriyè se renmèd pòv malerez.** - Prayer is the poor woman's remedy.

## TEETH

**Dan pouri gen fòs sou bannann mi.** - Rotten teeth have strength against ripe plantains. (*Even bad teeth are useful.*)

**Dan ou genyen, se ak li ou manje.** - The teeth you have are the ones you eat with.



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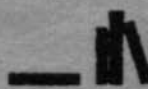


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# From the Third World to the Global South

Written by Alina Sajed

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## From the Third World to the Global South

<https://www.e-ir.info/2020/07/27/from-the-third-world-to-the-global-south/>

ALINA SAJED, JUL 27 2020

The term 'Global South' is not an uncontroversial one. There have been many debates in the last few decades regarding its usefulness, both analytical and historical, but especially its connection to another equally debated term, 'Third World.' In the midst of these debates, however, there has appeared a loose consensus around their meaning and their linkages. I will attempt to elucidate here the meaning and histories of both terms, and the connections and ruptures between them. To do so, I will be drawing on the work of several Marxist intellectuals, such as L.S. Stavrianos and Vijay Prashad, among others. It must be emphasized, however, that the term Global South cannot be considered separately from that of the Third World. I argue that the idea of Global South could not have emerged without taking seriously the conceptual work done by the term Third World, and indeed without the legacy left by Third Worldism and its historical landmarks. The discussion below devotes significant space to understanding not only the emergence of the term Third World, but especially the central role played by processes of capitalist expansion to conceptualizing both Third World and Global South, albeit in different ways and at different historical junctures.

The great victory of the Vietnamese people at Dien Bien Phu is no longer strictly speaking a Vietnamese victory. From July 1954 onward the colonial peoples have been asking themselves: "What must we do to achieve a Dien Bien Phu? How should we go about it?" A Dien Bien Phu was now within reach of every colonized subject. – Frantz Fanon.

In his now classic work *Global Rift*, L.S. Stavrianos (1981: 35-36) argues that '[t]he overseas expansion of European capitalism resulted in the emergence of the Third World through the operation of imperialism.' This is, of course, an argument that draws on a rich Marxist tradition summarized by Karl Marx' famous dictum (articulated in his *Grundrisse*), according to which capital by its nature has to drive beyond every spatial barrier and conquer the whole earth for its market. Both Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) and Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) expanded on this idea. Luxemburg stated that capitalism needed to expand in new areas of the world untouched by capitalist forms of production, in search of natural resources, new markets, and (cheap or free) labour. Alex Callinicos (2002: 321) claims that Luxemburg inaugurated a Marxist tradition that examines the link between capitalist expansion and the violent domination and exploitation of the Global South. Stavrianos draws on this tradition of Marxist thought, which highlights that the very creation of the Third World is intimately connected to processes of capitalist expansion via colonial conquest, in other words, to processes of underdevelopment. The notions of 'underdevelopment' and 'overdevelopment' are crucial to understanding Stavrianos' conception of the Third World. He does not see them as separate, individual and discrete phenomena, rather they are tied together inseparably: Western nations are overdeveloped to the degree that Third World nations are underdeveloped (Stavrianos 1981: 35).

Here, Walter Rodney's work on processes of underdevelopment in Africa is especially pertinent: Rodney (1972) states that underdevelopment is not a product of internal factors of Third World societies, but rather the direct consequence of processes of capitalist expansion, and of the integration of these societies within the capitalist world system. The creation of the Third World was not simply about colonial conquest and incorporating these territories into European colonial empires. Rather (and especially), it had also to do with their active 'underdevelopment' by the colonial metropole through the extraction of raw natural resources and labour for the exclusive benefit of the metropole, and with devastating consequences for local economies, politics and societies. I understand

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'underdevelopment' here in the way articulated by dependency theorist A.G. Frank (1969) in his now classic piece 'The Development of Underdevelopment.' Here, Frank identifies underdevelopment as a conscious political action by the colonial metropole whereby resources belonging to the colonial society/periphery are being extracted and used, but used in a way which benefits dominant states and not the poorer states in which the resources are found. In that sense, according to dependency theory, Third World countries are not 'behind' or in need of 'catching up' to the richer countries of the world. They are not poor because they lagged behind the scientific transformations or lacked the Enlightenment values of the European states. They are poor because they were coercively integrated into the European economic system only as producers of raw materials or to serve as repositories of cheap labour, and were thus denied the opportunity to market their resources in any way that competed with dominant states.

It cannot be emphasized enough thus that the idea of Third World is inseparable from the emergence of global capitalism via colonial conquest and exploitation. The integration of colonial societies into capitalist circuits has permanently changed and restructured local economies with tremendous consequences both for the short term and, more importantly, for the long term. Here the idea of underdevelopment is crucial because it throws light on processes of exploitation and dependence that have begun a couple of centuries ago, and are still very much ongoing. Stavrianos (1981: 39) notes, for instance, that one of the distinguishing features of the Third World is the idea of 'economic growth without economic development', which refers to 'growth determined by foreign capital and foreign markets rather than by local needs.' His definition of the Third World is illuminating: it is not a set of countries or statistics, but rather 'a set of relationships – unequal relationships between controlling metropolitan centers and dependent peripheral regions, whether colonies as in the past or neocolonial "independent" states as today' (Stavrianos 1981: 40). To summarize, the idea of Third World is unthinkable without global capitalism and the rise of global hierarchies and inequality it produced. Here Marxist scholarship has made an invaluable contribution by exploring in depth the twin roots of colonial conquest and capitalist expansion behind the idea of Third World (see James 1938, Du Bois 1947, Rodney 1972, Amin 1976, Wallerstein 1989, Wolf 2010, Davis 2001, Anievas and Nisançioğlu 2015). It has also brought forward the idea that we cannot think and speak of issues such as poverty, war and conflict, environmental degradation and political corruption in the Third World/Global South outside of the global structures that produce and condition these phenomena (see Tsing 2005, Tilley 2020).

I would like to complicate, however, our understanding of the idea of Third World: this idea became a referent not only for a set of global relations of dependence and inequality, but also for 1) a global project premised on a certain common history of colonial domination and exploitation (loosely identified with the Bandung spirit and the emergence of non-alignment); 2) an ideological orientation that started with struggles of decolonization and that acquired global dimensions, whose heyday were the 1960s and 1970s (the so called 'long 1960s'), known as Third Worldism (see Sajed 2019). The former finds its conceptualization in Vijay Prashad's work *The Darker Nations*, where he claims that 'The Third World was not a place. It was a project' (2007: xv). Prashad puts forth the idea of a Third World project to refer to the emergence of a common ideology and a set of institutions that encapsulated its values and goals.

Arguably its best-known landmark is the Bandung conference, which took place in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955, bringing together delegates from twenty-nine nations in Africa and Asia, representing either recently independent countries or those that were in the midst of national liberation struggles. Bandung is associated with the creation of a Third World bloc, that is with a global project that produced a 'transcontinental political consciousness in Africa and Asia' (Young 2001: 191). In the words of Quynh N. Pham and Robbie Shilliam (2016: 6), '[t]he Bandung Conference is remarkable insofar as it provided the first diplomatic space in 20th century international relations that promised an intimacy amongst colonized and postcolonized peoples.' One of the consequences of the conference was, as Vijay Prashad (2007: 41) observes, the creation of a United Nations bloc that would bring together representatives from Africa, Asia, and later Latin America and dominate the General Assembly for decades to come. Another significant legacy of Bandung was the articulation of an economic alternative for the Third World that was meant to provide a different path to development to that imposed by the dominant capitalist model. The UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), established in 1964, is the direct product of Bandung, and emphasizes engagement in trade and development by the Third World on an equitable basis.

The Third World project was thus a collective attempt to establish political and economic sovereignty for the former

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colonial world. The project would find a clearer articulation in 1966, in Havana, Cuba, at the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, also known as the Tricontinental Conference, attended by more than 500 delegates from 82 countries. The resolutions adopted at the conference articulated an anti-imperialist platform for Third World countries against the aggressive foreign policy of the US and its allies. One of the legacies of the conference would be the project of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which emerged in the 1970s as a proposed alternative to the exploitative capitalist system that dominated the global political economy.

The idea of NIEO was brought forth by the countries from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as a way to redress the dire inequalities of the global trade system. The initiative can be dated to the 1973 NAM conference in Algiers, where demands for more equitable economic policies for Third World countries would be put together formally and later forwarded for consideration to the General Assembly at the UN (Cox 1979, Prashad 2012, Anghie 2019). As Anthony Anghie (2019: 432) notes, the principle of 'permanent sovereignty over natural resources' was one of the core principles animating NIEO because it would allow Third World countries absolute economic sovereignty over the use and/or preservation of natural resources within their borders. It would thus not only allow them autonomy over the use of resources, but also protect them against predatory practices and interests of multinational corporations. Indeed, Greg Grandin (2019) argues it was Latin America that pioneered the idea of sovereignty over natural resources, idea which was formally adopted by the UN in 1962: 'In its 1917 constitution, Mexico was the first country in the world to adopt the principle that absolute sovereignty over natural resources belongs to the state.' Sadly, the points on the agenda of NIEO would never be realized: oil crises, the heavy indebtedness of Third World countries via devastating loan conditions, and consistent and active efforts by Western countries to stop and counteract this initiative would effectively stop the agenda of NIEO (see Stavrianos 1981, Prashad 2012, Anghie 2019).

It is thus the failure of the NIEO (and by failure, I mean the active efforts by Western interests to prevent this agenda from being implemented) that signals the demise of the Third World project, and the emergence of what Vijay Prashad (2012: 5) calls 'a new geography of production.' By the latter, he understands both the 'disarticulation of Northern Fordism' but also the rise of new technologies (satellite, communication/internet, containerization of ships) that re-structured dramatically global trade and production (ibid.). One well-known aspect of this is the relocation of production processes from the First to the Third World, thus allowing corporations to take advantage of wage differentials and of significantly fewer restrictions on environmental and labour standards. Prashad (2012) thus sees the idea of the Global South as associated with the rise of neoliberalism and this new geography of production. Prominent features of this shift have included: austerity measures (enforced in the South through the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs), financialization of the global economy (which saw the emergence of certain urban metropolises as hubs of the global financial industry, many of them in the Global South, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, Bahrain, Dubai, Saõ Paolo), soaring rates of unemployment and wage disparities, feminization of workforce (especially in export processing zones).

It is important to make here the following conceptual distinction: whereas some scholars (Grovogui 2011) see an almost seamless continuum from the Third World to the Global South, others such as L.S. Stavrianos (1981) and Vijay Prashad (2012) see continuities but also fundamental ruptures and shifts. Some scholars indicate that the term Global South emerged in the 2000s, to indicate a new geopolitical arrangement after the end of the Cold War (see Dados and Connell 2012). The discussion here, however, is not particularly keen in exploring the provenance of the term but rather to flesh out the historical content behind both the Third World and the Global South, as concepts and realities. So, in some ways, Global South is not simply synonymous with Third World, though they may have overlapping features (and at times they are used interchangeably). Rather the idea of the Global South signals a critical historical juncture that can be dated back to the mid-1970s: the revival of neoliberalism, the demise of the Third World project (with its emphasis on developmentalism, and the quest for meaningful political and economic sovereignty), and the rise of what Jan Scholte (2005) called 'hypercapitalism.'

Writing in 1981, Stavrianos does not use the term Global South; however, ironically, he does note this exact shift by describing it as the Third Worldization of the First World, whereby he makes the argument that the re-location of production processes from the North to the South, and the increasing integration of all societies into an international capitalist economy produced effects within affluent societies that used to be associated with the Third World: increasing poverty and economic disparity, the creation of slums and processes of ghettoization, soaring rates of

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unemployment, among others (Stavrianos 1981: 23-27). Stavrianos does not in any way suggest a levelling of the playing field (albeit in negative terms) between the First and Third Worlds via neoliberalism. Rather he is pointing to the global effects of neoliberalism and the way they re-structured the geography of inequality and oppression.

Global South thus incorporates not only spaces that used to be referred to before as Third World, but also spaces in the North that are characterized by exploitation, oppression and neocolonial relations, such as indigenous and black communities (and immigrant communities) in Western societies; and vice versa, some spaces that used to be part of the Third World now inhabit an ambiguous political and economic space because of rapid processes of modernization and integration into the global economy. Let's think, for instance, of places such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea (the so-called Asian tigers), the countries part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain), which are geographically positioned in the 'South,' though economically (and even politically) occupy spaces in the North. And there are, of course, liminal spaces: countries in Southeast Europe and the Balkans, where some of them have been politically integrated into the European Union (and thus given partial access to political and economic structures of the North). However, through their economic structures and even in socio-cultural terms, they are very much part of the Global South. The liminality of these spaces has become glaringly apparent with the recent Covid-19 crisis, when, in the midst of a general lockdown across the EU, agricultural workers were flown in from Romania into Germany and the UK to meet labour shortage demands for food supply chains threatened by the lockdown. Not only is the health of these workers imperiled, but their working conditions have been so appalling that some workers went on strike protesting lack of wages and degrading living arrangements.

The example above illustrates deep ambiguities and contradictions behind the idea of the Global South, whereby spaces from South/Third World are integrated into institutional arrangements in and by the North, which benefit primarily the North, and the political and economic elites in the South. One such example is NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), a free trade agreement between the US, Canada, and Mexico, which took effect in January 1994. The agreement had as its goal the elimination of trade barriers between the three countries, and the increase of investment among them. On January 1, 1994, on the same day that the NAFTA agreement took effect, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) declared war to the Mexican state. The Zapatista rebellion is made up primarily of poor indigenous peasants from Chiapas, in southern Mexico, whose already precarious livelihoods were devastated by the NAFTA agreement. Their struggles, their unique political philosophy and forms of organization, and their persistence in the face of tremendous odds stacked against them have attracted global attention: numerous groups, social movements, activists, academics, artists and journalists both from the North and the South have reached out in solidarity with the Zapatistas over the last three decades.

This example illustrates another layer of the term 'Global South:' on the one hand, there is the new geography of neoliberalism with its global capillaries of exploitation and dehumanization; on the other hand, there is also the Global South as 'a concatenation of protests against the theft of the commons, against the theft of human dignity and rights, against the undermining of democratic institutions' (Prashad 2012: 9). The protests that have recently exploded throughout the Global South in late 2019 in Chile, Iraq, Ecuador, Bolivia, Algeria, Iran, Lebanon have been chained mobilizations against the depredations of neoliberal capitalism and its local instantiations.

The question that lies at the core of debates around the terms Third World and Global South is the following: what (if anything) connects the Third World project to the Global South? While the rise of emerging economies (the BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has been hailed by some as signalling the end of the US' political and economic hegemony (and that of the West, more generally), and the arrival of multipolarity, others see little hope in this relatively recent development. Richard Pithouse (2018) argues that there is little that links the emancipatory potential of the Third World project (as highlighted by the conferences in Bandung in 1955 and Havana in 1966) to the contemporary reality of the BRICS. Current political leadership of countries making up the BRICS is anything but emancipatory: Modi and Bolsonaro can be accurately described as fascists, Vladimir Putin runs a highly repressive and corrupt regime, while corruption is deeply embedded in Chinese and South African polities. Pithouse thus sees little hope for emancipation among political elites in the Global South; rather, he argues, recovering the emancipatory project of the Third World has to come from building popular and democratic grassroots movements throughout the Global South.

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If the protests that exploded throughout the Global South in late 2019 are to be taken seriously, then the assessment is accurate: we cannot recuperate the promise and potential of the Third World project from current political establishments in the Global South – they have morphed into local/regional conduits of neoliberal repression (there are a few notable exceptions here, such as Cuba). However, it is grassroots movements, both local and transnational, that have kept the legacy of the Third World project alive. Paradoxically, then, the term Global South signals both the turn to neoliberalism but also ‘a world of protest, a whirlwind of creative activity’ (Prashad 2012: 9).

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## About the author:

**Alina Sajed** is Associate Professor in the Department of Political Science, at McMaster University (Canada). She researches and teaches on anticolonial thought and praxis; North Africa and the Middle East; and Third Worldism and its reverberations. She is the author of *Postcolonial Encounters in International Relations* (Routledge, 2013), and the co-editor (with Randolph B. Persaud) of *Race, Gender, and Culture in International Relations: Postcolonial Perspectives* (Routledge, 2018). Twitter @AlinaSajed



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The term 'Global South' is not an uncontroversial one. There have been many debates in the last few decades regarding its usefulness, both analytical and historical, but especially its connection to another equally debated term, 'Third World.' In the midst of these debates, however, there has appeared a loose consensus around their meaning and their linkages. I will attempt to elucidate here the meaning and histories of both terms, and the connections and ruptures between them. To do so, I will be drawing on the work of several Marxist intellectuals, such as L.S. Stavrianos and Vijay Prashad, among others. It must be emphasized, however, that the term Global South cannot be considered separately from that of the Third World. I argue that the idea of Global South could not have emerged without taking seriously the conceptual work done by the term Third World, and indeed without the legacy left by Third Worldism and its historical landmarks. The discussion below devotes significant space to understanding not only the emergence of the term Third World, but especially the central role played by processes of capitalist expansion to conceptualizing both Third World and Global South, albeit in different ways and at different historical junctures.

“ The great victory of the Vietnamese people at Dien Bien Phu is no longer strictly speaking a Vietnamese victory. From July 1954 onward the colonial peoples have been asking themselves: “What must we do to achieve a Dien Bien Phu? How should we go about it?” A Dien Bien Phu was now within reach of every colonized subject. – Frantz Fanon.

In his now classic work *Global Rift*, L.S. Stavrianos (1981: 35-36) argues that '[t]he overseas expansion of European capitalism resulted in the emergence of the Third World through the operation of imperialism.' This is, of course, an argument that draws on a rich Marxist tradition summarized by Karl Marx' famous dictum (articulated in his *Grundrisse*), according to which capital by its nature has to drive beyond every spatial barrier and conquer the whole earth for its market. Both Rosa Luxemburg's *The Accumulation of Capital* (1913) and Lenin's *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism* (1917) expanded on this idea. Luxemburg stated that capitalism needed to expand in new areas of the world untouched by capitalist forms of production, in search of natural resources, new markets, and (cheap or free) labour. Alex Callinicos (2002: 321) claims that Luxemburg inaugurated a Marxist tradition that examines the link between capitalist expansion and the violent domination and exploitation of the Global South. Stavrianos draws on this tradition of Marxist thought, which highlights that the very creation of the Third World is intimately connected to processes of capitalist expansion via colonial conquest, in other words, to processes of underdevelopment. The notions of 'underdevelopment' and 'overdevelopment' are crucial to understanding Stavrianos' conception of the Third World. He does not see them as separate, individual and discrete phenomena, rather they are tied together inseparably: Western nations are overdeveloped to the degree that Third World nations are underdeveloped (Stavrianos

Here, Walter Rodney's work on processes of underdevelopment in Africa is especially pertinent: Rodney (1972) states that underdevelopment is not a product of internal factors of Third World societies, but rather the direct consequence of processes of capitalist expansion, and of the integration of these societies within the capitalist world system. The creation of the Third World was not simply about colonial conquest and incorporating these territories into European colonial empires. Rather (and especially), it had also to do with their active 'underdevelopment' by the colonial metropole through the extraction of raw natural resources and labour for the exclusive benefit of the metropole, and with devastating consequences for local economies, polities and societies. I understand 'underdevelopment' here in the way articulated by dependency theorist A.G. Frank (1969) in his now classic piece 'The Development of Underdevelopment.' Here, Frank identifies underdevelopment as a conscious political action by the colonial metropole whereby resources belonging to the colonial society/periphery are being extracted and used, but used in a way which benefits dominant states and not the poorer states in which the resources are found. In that sense, according to dependency theory, Third World countries are not 'behind' or in need of 'catching up' to the richer countries of the world. They are not poor because they lagged behind the scientific transformations or lacked the Enlightenment values of the European states. They are poor because they were coercively integrated into the European economic system only as producers of raw materials or to serve as repositories of cheap labour, and were thus denied the opportunity to market their resources in any way that competed with dominant states.

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Arguably its best-known landmark is the [Bandung conference](#), which took place in Bandung, Indonesia in April 1955, bringing together delegates from twenty-nine nations in Africa and Asia, representing either recently independent countries or those that were in the midst of national liberation struggles. Bandung is associated with the creation of a [Third World bloc](#), that is with a global project that produced a 'transcontinental political consciousness in Africa and Asia' (Young 2001: 191). In the words of Quynh N. Pham and Robbie Shilliam (2016: 6), '[t]he Bandung Conference is remarkable insofar as it provided the first diplomatic space in 20th century international relations that promised an intimacy amongst colonized and postcolonized peoples.' One of the consequences of the conference was, as Vijay Prashad (2007: 41) observes, the creation of a United Nations bloc that would bring together representatives from Africa, Asia, and later Latin America and dominate the General Assembly for decades to come. Another significant legacy of Bandung was the articulation of an economic alternative for the Third World that was meant to provide a different path to development to that imposed by the dominant capitalist model. The UNCTAD (the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development), established in 1964, is the direct product of Bandung, and emphasizes engagement in trade and development by the Third World on an equitable basis.

The Third World project was thus a collective attempt to establish political and economic sovereignty for the former colonial world. The project would find a clearer articulation in 1966, in Havana, Cuba, at the First Solidarity Conference of the Peoples of Africa, Asia, Latin America, also known as the Tricontinental Conference, attended by more than 500 delegates from 82 countries. The resolutions adopted at the conference articulated an anti-imperialist platform for Third World countries against the aggressive foreign policy of the US and its allies. One of the legacies of the conference would be the project of a New International Economic Order (NIEO), which emerged in the 1970s as a proposed alternative to the exploitative capitalist system that dominated the global political economy.

The idea of NIEO was brought forth by the countries from the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) as a way to redress the dire inequalities of the global trade system. The initiative can be dated to the 1973 NAM conference in Algiers, where demands for more equitable economic policies for Third World countries would be put together formally and later forwarded for consideration to the General Assembly at the UN (Cox 1979, Prashad 2012, Anglie 2019). As Anthony Anglie (2019: 432) notes, the principle of 'permanent sovereignty over natural resources' was one of the core principles animating NIEO because it would allow Third World countries absolute economic sovereignty over the use and/or preservation of natural resources within their borders. It would thus not only allow them autonomy over the use of resources, but also protect them against predatory practices and interests of multinational corporations. Indeed, Greg Grandin (2019) argues it was Latin America that pioneered the idea of sovereignty over natural resources, idea

which was formally adopted by the UN in 1962: 'In its 1917 constitution, Mexico was the first country in the world to adopt the principle that absolute sovereignty over natural resources belongs to the state.' Sadly, the points on the agenda of NIEO would never be realized: oil crises, the heavy indebtedness of Third World countries via devastating loan conditions, and consistent and active efforts by Western countries to stop and counteract this initiative would effectively stop the agenda of NIEO (see Stavrianos 1981, Prashad 2012, Anghie 2019).

It is thus the failure of the NIEO (and by failure, I mean the active efforts by Western interests to prevent this agenda from being implemented) that signals the demise of the Third World project, and the emergence of what Vijay Prashad (2012: 5) calls 'a new geography of production.' By the latter, he understands both the 'disarticulation of Northern Fordism' but also the rise of new technologies (satellite, communication/internet, containerization of ships) that re-structured dramatically global trade and production (ibid.). One well-known aspect of this is the relocation of production processes from the First to the Third World, thus allowing corporations to take advantage of wage differentials and of significantly fewer restrictions on environmental and labour standards. Prashad (2012) thus sees the idea of the Global South as associated with the rise of neoliberalism and this new geography of production. Prominent features of this shift have included: austerity measures (enforced in the South through the infamous Structural Adjustment Programs), financialization of the global economy (which saw the emergence of certain urban metropolises as hubs of the global financial industry, many of them in the Global South, such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Shanghai, Bahrain, Dubai, São Paulo), soaring rates of unemployment and wage disparities, feminization of workforce (especially in export processing zones).

It is important to make here the following conceptual distinction: whereas some scholars (Grovogui 2011) see an almost seamless continuum from the Third World to the Global South, others such as L.S. Stavrianos (1981) and Vijay Prashad (2012) see continuities but also fundamental ruptures and shifts. Some scholars indicate that the term Global South emerged in the 2000s, to indicate a new geopolitical arrangement after the end of the Cold War (see Dados and Connell 2012). The discussion here, however, is not particularly keen in exploring the provenance of the term but rather to flesh out the historical content behind both the Third World and the Global South, as concepts and realities. So, in some ways, Global South is not simply synonymous with Third World, though they may have overlapping features (and at times they are used interchangeably). Rather the idea of the Global South signals a critical historical juncture that can be dated back to the mid-1970s: the revival of neoliberalism, the demise of the Third World project (with its emphasis on developmentalism, and the quest for meaningful political and economic sovereignty), and the rise of what Jan Scholte (2005) called 'hypercapitalism.'

Writing in 1981, Stavrianos does not use the term Global South; however, ironically, he does note this exact shift by describing it as the Third Worldization of the First World, whereby he makes the argument that the re-location of production processes from the North to the South, and the increasing integration of all societies into an international capitalist economy produced effects within affluent societies that used to be associated with the Third World: increasing poverty and economic disparity, the creation of slums and processes of ghettoization, soaring rates of unemployment, among others (Stavrianos 1981: 23-27). Stavrianos does not in any way suggest a levelling of the playing field (albeit in negative terms) between the First and Third Worlds via neoliberalism. Rather he is pointing to the global effects of neoliberalism and the way they re-structured the geography of inequality and oppression.

Global South thus incorporates not only spaces that used to be referred to before as Third World, but also spaces in the North that are characterized by exploitation, oppression and neocolonial relations, such as indigenous and black communities (and immigrant communities) in Western societies; and vice versa, some spaces that used to be part of the Third World now inhabit an ambiguous political and economic space because of rapid processes of modernization and integration into the global economy. Let's think, for instance, of places such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, South Korea (the so-called Asian tigers), the countries part of the Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain), which are geographically positioned in the 'South,' though economically (and even politically) occupy spaces in the North. And there are, of course, liminal spaces: countries in Southeast Europe and the Balkans, where some of them have been politically integrated into the European Union (and thus given partial access to political and economic structures of the North). However, through their economic structures and even in socio-cultural terms, they are very much part of the Global South. The liminality of these spaces has become glaringly apparent with the recent Covid-19 crisis, when, in the midst of a general lockdown across the EU, [agricultural workers were flown in from Romania into Germany and the UK](#) to meet labour shortage demands for food supply chains threatened by the lockdown. Not only is the health of these workers imperiled, but their working conditions have been so appalling that [some workers went on strike](#) protesting lack of wages and degrading living arrangements.

The example above illustrates deep ambiguities and contradictions behind the idea of the Global South, whereby spaces from South/Third World are integrated into institutional arrangements in and by the North, which benefit primarily the North, and the political and economic elites in the South. One such example is NAFTA (North American Free Trade Agreement), a free trade agreement between the US, Canada, and Mexico, which took effect in January 1994. The agreement had as its goal the elimination of trade barriers between the three countries, and the increase of investment among them. On January 1, 1994, on the same day that the NAFTA agreement took effect, the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) declared war to the Mexican state. The Zapatista rebellion is made up primarily of poor indigenous peasants from Chiapas, in southern Mexico, whose already precarious livelihoods were devastated by the NAFTA agreement. Their struggles, their unique political philosophy and forms of organization, and their persistence in the face of tremendous odds stacked against them have attracted global attention: numerous groups, social movements, activists, academics, artists and journalists both from the North and the South have reached out in solidarity with the Zapatistas over the last three decades.

This example illustrates another layer of the term 'Global South': on the one hand, there is the new geography of neoliberalism with its global capillaries of exploitation and dehumanization; on the other hand, there is also the Global South as 'a concatenation of protests against the theft of the commons, against the theft of human dignity and rights, against the undermining of democratic institutions' (Prashad 2012: 9). [The protests](#) that have recently exploded throughout the Global South in late 2019 in Chile, Iraq, Ecuador, Bolivia, Algeria, Iran, Lebanon have been chained mobilizations against the depredations of neoliberal capitalism and its local instantiations.

The question that lies at the core of debates around the terms Third World and Global South is the

following: what (if anything) connects the Third World project to the Global South? While the rise of emerging economies (the BRICS: Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa) has been hailed by some as signalling the end of the US' political and economic hegemony (and that of the West, more generally), and the arrival of multipolarity, others see little hope in this relatively recent development. Richard Pithouse (2018) argues that there is little that links the emancipatory potential of the Third World project (as highlighted by the conferences in Bandung in 1955 and Havana in 1966) to the contemporary reality of the BRICS. Current political leadership of countries making up the BRICS is anything but emancipatory: Modi and Bolsonaro can be accurately described as fascists, Vladimir Putin runs a highly repressive and corrupt regime, while corruption is deeply embedded in Chinese and South African polities. Pithouse thus sees little hope for emancipation among political elites in the Global South; rather, he argues, recovering the emancipatory project of the Third World has to come from building popular and democratic grassroots movements throughout the Global South.

If the protests that exploded throughout the Global South in late 2019 are to be taken seriously, then the assessment is accurate: we cannot recuperate the promise and potential of the Third World project from current political establishments in the Global South – they have morphed into local/regional conduits of neoliberal repression (there are a few notable exceptions here, such as Cuba). However, it is grassroots movements, both local and transnational, that have kept the legacy of the Third World project alive. Paradoxically, then, the term Global South signals both the turn to neoliberalism but also 'a world of protest, a whirlwind of creative activity' (Prashad 2012: 9).

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### Further Reading on E-International Relations

- [The Global South is in Exile](#)
- [The Global South as a Political Project](#)
- [Digital Trade as a Global South Challenge](#)
- [Opinion – The Hypocrisy of the UK Government’s Plans for Girl’s Education in the Global South](#)
- [Signs from the Global South: Development with Deaf Communities](#)
- [State-Building, Sovereignty and Migration Management in the Global South](#)

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## Gender Disparity in Third World Technological, Social, and Economic Development

Anthony I. Akubue

Despite their seemingly intractable problems, Third World countries have made remarkable progress in improving the well-being of their people in recent decades. In what seems a recurring observation in its annual Human Development Reports, the United Nations Development Program (UNDP) notes that the human progress that developing countries achieved in a period of three decades took the industrialized countries a century to attain. People are living longer, infant mortality rates and illiteracy rates have declined significantly, and appreciable improvements in basic-needs fulfillment of citizens have been realized. A troubling concern, however, is the notion that gains from progress have not been equally beneficial to the genders. Males tend to be better off in most cases, often capturing a disproportionate share of the proceeds than females. There is much evidence in support of the claim that women are in the majority of the poor in the Third World today. According to the UNDP ( 1995 ), 70% of an estimated 1.3 billion people living in poverty worldwide are women, most of them living in developing countries. However, the feminization of poverty is not so much about more women than men being poor, but about the "severity of poverty and the greater hardship women face in lifting themselves and their children out of the trap" ( UNDP, 1997, p. 64 ). This differential gender impact underlies the UNDP ( 1997 ) statement that "for too long it was assumed that development was a process that lifts all boats, that its benefits trickled down to all income classes-and that it was gender neutral in its impact. Experience teaches otherwise" ( p. 1 ).

This article is about Third World women in relation to technological and socioeconomic progress. It examines the differential gender outcome of this progress and probable causes. Nzewi ( 1996 ) attributed obstacles to women engaging in and pursuing careers in science, technology, and mathematics (STM) to factors of tradition and cultural norms, attitudes and prejudices, religion, poverty, and ignorance. Inherent in the socialization process of societies is a particularly damaging depiction of gender roles as biological rather than social constructs. The power of the socialization process in inhibiting women's education in science, engineering, mathematics, and technology education is often underestimated and has not received the attention it deserves among professionals in the field. The view espoused in this article is that this indoctrination inspires phobia, diffidence, and lack of interest among girls and women, who tend to believe that some academic disciplines and professional careers are beyond their abilities. This mindset is a

powerful force that is contributing to the perpetuation of poverty among Third World women in particular and the Third World in general. Logic provides that peace cannot endure where poverty prevails, and that the poor will migrate toward relief if relief does not come to them.

## Some Background

Investigations into women's issues in relation to technological, social, and economic progress have been relatively recent, but rural women have for years been affected one way or another by modern technology and development. Women and girls in Third World societies are more likely than men and boys to have less access to technology, education, technical training, land, credit, and basic needs. Historically, women have performed mostly laborious, gender-assigned duties with skills and tools passed down from generation to generation. The duties of Third World women can be placed into three categories: reproductive and nurturing, family and household management, and productive and/ or income-generating roles ( Momsen, 1998 ; UNDP, 1997 ). Studies have shown that in developing countries women, especially poor women, work an average of 12 to 18 hours a day compared to an average of 8 to 12 hours a day for men ( Jacobson, 1993 ; Momsen, 1998 ). Among the tasks women perform are subsistence farming, food production and processing, traditional weaving and sewing, soap-making, petty trading, craft-making, baking, shop-keeping, procuring energy fuel and water, household work, payment of child- ren's school fees, animal care, caring for the elderly, and raising children ( Akubue, 1995 ).

*My use of the term "Third World" was as a result of my research of its origin and meaning Alfred Sauvy coined it in the early 1950s as a forward looking and hopeful way of describing what was taking place in Africa and Asia in their quest for political independence. Like the Third Estate of pre-Revolutionary France and its role in the French Revolution, the Third World possessed a revolutionary potential to rise in rebellion against foreign rule and domination. This prediction materialized with the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement, a nationalist organization, in 1961. According to one writer, the Third World became a positive concept symbolizing the new and experimental arena of global politics of neither capitalist nor communist ideology. This is why I use the term, even though the 1989 fall of communism (the Second World) prompted calls for its discontinued use. Many leaders from the Third World continue to prefer that name to others.*

## Access to Productive Resources

The gap between male and female literacy rates in the Third World has been narrowing, although female illiteracy continues to be higher than male illiteracy. Out of an estimated 840 million illiterate adults in the developing world, 538 million of them are women. The female illiteracy rate stands at about 39% in contrast with a male illiteracy rate of 21% ( Momsen, 1998 ; UNDP, 1997 ). Women and girls tend to receive less education and training than men and boys in most Third World societies ( Herz, 1989 ). This is not surprising because in the absence or poor enforcement of legislation on compulsory education for all children, coupled with the tendency to value sons over daughters, girls are less likely than boys to go to school. Investments in education continue to be higher for sons than for daughters. This is in spite of studies showing that the education of girls tends to produce far-reaching socioeconomic benefits for the girls and women themselves, their families, and the society in general ( Bellew, Raney, & Subbarao, 1992 ; Hadden & London, 1996 ; Herz, 1989 ; Summers, 1992 ). Indeed, most studies have revealed that when schools open their doors wider to girls and women, as well as boys and men, the benefits multiply. Dr. J. E. Aggrey, an eminent educator from Ghana, observed that "if you educate a man, you simply educate an individual, but if you educate a woman, you educate a family" ( Topouzis, 1990, p. 62 ). Among the short-term benefits of educating girls and women are smaller families, better spacing of births, healthier children, less economic dependence, and less vulnerability to abusive spouses. "These initial gains seem also to be readily translated into a range of longer-term benefits that include longer life expectancy, declines in overall mortality rates, and improvements in both social and economic development rates" ( Hadden & London, 1996, p. 43 ).

Increasingly, parents in Third World societies are realizing the importance of educating their daughters, but there are still some impediments. Not only are there more illiterate women than there are illiterate men, but also two thirds of the children not enrolled in school are girls ( Momsen, 1998 ).

As much as women would like to participate in adult literacy programs, their incredible responsibilities and workloads keep them from taking advantage of opportunities. The persistence of poverty among many families also works against the education of girls and women. Due mostly to hardship in poor households, girls are more likely than boys to stay at home to help their mothers with income-earning efforts and other household chores. "In fact, the increasing tendency in many areas of keeping girls out of school to help with their mothers' work virtually ensures that another generation of females will grow up with poorer prospects than their brothers" ( [Jacobson, 1993, p. 75](#) ). The concern for the safety of daughters is another critical factor in the decision whether to send girls to school. Their vulnerability, the fear of becoming victims of rape, and a strong taboo on pregnancy out of wedlock are reasons to shield girls from the vagaries of life outside the home. In some societies, parents see educating girls as an exercise in futility since they are given away in marriage and the reward of years of education may elude the natal family. Lastly, the impact of colonial perspectives on gender roles continues to influence gender educational opportunities. A curriculum that emphasizes housework, for instance, does not help women improve their capabilities as farmers. This curriculum is, however, sustained on the premise that humanity would be best served if women could "improve the way in which they cared for their children and catered for the family needs. As a result family welfare programs were devised which gave women instruction in home economics, in improved nutrition, health, and hygiene" ( [Young, 1993, p. 19](#) ). Yet, women play an indispensable role in food production and processing in Third World countries. For example, women in Africa produce 80% of domestically consumed food, 70% to 80% of food crops grown on the Indian sub-continent, and about 50% in Latin America and the Caribbean ( [Jacobson, 1993](#) ; [Momsen, 1998](#) ). Estimates from Kenya suggest that providing women with the same access to factors and inputs as men would increase the value of their output nearly 22% ( [World Bank, 2000](#) ).

The agricultural extension service is overwhelmingly a male-dominated profession in the Third World; only 13% of the agents in the late 1980s and early 1990s were women. In the continent of Africa and India, the statistics were as meager as 7% and 0.5%, respectively ( [UNDP, 1995](#) ). Trained and equipped usually in urban environments still laden with vestiges of colonialism, male extension agents are, not surprisingly, partial to men, even in areas where women are responsible for major cash or food crop production. A study of the pattern of visits by extension workers to farmers in Kenya showed that 49% of the female-operated farms were never visited by an agent in contrast with only 28% of male or jointly operated farms ( [Momsen, 1998](#) ). The gender bias against women is further compounded by cultural and religious practices that prohibit direct contact between women and male strangers/extension agents ( [Akubue, 1995](#) ; [Young, 1993](#) ). Moreover, with a ratio of one extension agent to 2,000 or 3,000 farmers, extension systems in many Third World countries are severely constrained and understandably cannot meet the overwhelming demand for their services. The situation is quite the opposite in Europe and North America, where one extension agent serves 300 to 400 farmers ( [Quisumbing, 1998](#) ). Under this condition, it is often assumed that husbands would pass information on to their wives from extension service workers. Studies in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and the Caribbean, however, show that such information communicated indirectly is often distorted and less accurate ( [Akubue, 1995](#) ). According to studies in Kenya, "women farmers generally adopt the advice given by extension agents; where they do not, the principal reason they cite are lack of credit and income to buy inputs, and lack of enough land" ( [Herz, 1989, p. 44](#) ).

Generally, rural financial institutions still prefer and require land title as collateral for loan extension in many Third World countries. This requirement tends to be partial to male borrowers, since land ownership and title in most cases belong to men ( [Akubue, 1991](#) ). "In the patrilineal cultures found in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, much of sub-Saharan Africa, and Latin America, women gain access to land only through their husbands or sons" ( [Jacobson, 1993, p. 70](#) ). This has not always been the traditional system of land tenure in the Third World. The current system is very much the result of European views of what constitutes gender-appropriate roles, which replaced a precolonial system of communal land ownership. To implement the new system, colonial administrations registered communal land and made land titles out in men's names ( [Momsen, 1991](#) ; [Quisumbing, 1998](#) ; [Young, 1993](#) ). Contemporary Third World development professionals have tacitly endorsed past actions by maintaining the status quo. For most rural women, access to land is usually in the form of user rights rather than absolute ownership rights ( [Quisumbing, Brown, Feldstein, Haddad, & Pena, 1995](#) ). In instances where women have ownership rights, their share is usually small relative to men's. Lacking outright land ownership and land title commonly required by banks for loan extension almost guarantees lack of funding for the women. The



traditional moneylenders' practice of charging usury rates is an exorbitant and exploitative alternative source of credit. Without a propitious rural financial market to count on, women have difficulty mobilizing enough start-up capital for new businesses or expanding existing undertakings. Women, like men, need credit to acquire essential appropriate technology, tools, and material input to improve productivity, profits, and standard of living. Not surprisingly, the cumulative effects of protracted denial of women's access to productive resources, education, and training are worsening gender disparity and inequity.

## The Impact of Technological, Social, and Economic Development

Not having as much access as men inhibits rural women's technological literacy and, definitely, their motor, cognitive, and interpersonal communication skills. Consequently, some researchers have contended that the "most common result of 'development' is to relegate women to the subsistence sector in agriculture and low-paying jobs in manufacturing and industry" ( [Tadesse, 1982, p. 79](#) ). Manufacturing and Industry Technological development in the modern industrial sector unmistakably has opened up diverse job opportunities for Third World women. However, questions have been raised about the quality of the jobs thus created. These have been mostly low-wage, low-skill, dead-end jobs where they are easily dispensable. Lacking the necessary skills and specialization, women workers in modern sector factories "mostly are engaged in non-technological gathering, assembling, arranging and packaging activities and therefore technical skills are not being transferred equally to men and women" ( [Srinivasan, 1981, p. 91](#) ).

Regardless of what they are called, maquiladoras in Mexico or export processing zones (EPZs) elsewhere in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, they are industrial plants owned or subcontracted by multinational corporations with headquarters in the industrialized nations. They are export-oriented assembly and manufacturing firms producing goods primarily for re-export to Europe and North America. These industrial plants, predominantly electronics, textiles, apparel, and footwear industries, hire mostly female labor ( [Akubue, 1995](#) ; [Momsen, 1998](#) ). It is claimed that women have a number of attributes that are not commonly exhibited by men. Women are said to be nimble-fingered, dexterous, docile, patient, and obedient, and to possess better attention spans than men do. Interestingly, these fine characteristics have contributed significantly to women's vulnerability in the maquiladoras or EPZs.

As manufacturing with laborsaving, capital-intensive technology has grown in the maquiladoras and EPZs, the traditional labor-intensive assembly for which they are known no longer enjoys the monopoly it once did, and the characteristic female labor dominance is on the wane. For example, the percentage of female workers in the Mexican maquiladoras fell from a 1982 figure of 77% to 61% in 1990 ( [Wilson, 1992](#) ). Also, cases of sexual harassment and molestation, as well as inhumane and unhealthy working conditions, are not uncommon at these enterprises ( [Kelly, 1983](#) ; [Pena, 1997](#) ). Mitter ( [1995](#) ) conceded that jobs in the factories are not perfect, but argued that the "conditions of employment are superior to alternatives that women are likely to find as domestic workers, prostitutes, or as workers in the informal sector" ( [p. 23](#) ). This assertion is reasonable but only to the degree that one believes that half a loaf of bread is better than no bread at all.

Utilizing women to the extent of their potential in all spheres of life is not a matter of doing them a favor, but engaging the enormous human resource of one half of humanity for the betterment of communities and nations. A study of women workers in the Dominican Republic shows that they are usually fired when they fail to meet increasing output quotas, get married, or become pregnant ( [Momsen, 1998](#) ). Paradoxically, the so-called advantages of the female gender have merely served to congregate women at the lower rungs of the organizational ladder and increase their vulnerability. The situation is not much different for women in the mechanized agricultural sector.

## The Agricultural Sector

It is not unusual for the introduction of a new farm technology to result in radical shifts in gender roles in agricultural labor. Anderson ( [1985](#) ) stated that "when a technology is introduced, those who either already enjoy higher status or who are in a position to corner it may move into tasks that were previously low status when done without the benefit of the new technology" ( [p. 61](#) ). Since men are more likely than women to have access to technology and associated technical training, any shifts in sex roles due to new agricultural technologies would tend to favor mostly men. Momsen ( [1991](#) ) argued similarly that the "introduction of a new tool may cause a particular job to be reassigned to the opposite sex and men tend to

assume tasks that become mechanized" ( p. 50 ). Thus the introduction of post-harvest food processing technologies may mean the loss of a traditional source of income for rural poor and landless women. For example, women who depend on the traditional hand pounding with mortar and pestle to de-husk rice or grain as hired labor may lose their job as a result to rice, corn, or oil mills operated by men. This is especially the case in Africa and Asia, where many women fit into this category of hired rural labor ( [Momsen, 1991](#) ; [Quisumbing et al., 1995](#) ).

In rural West Africa, hired female labor process palm nuts and kernels for the extraction of widely consumed palm oil. Most of these women lost their jobs with the introduction of oil mills operated by men. Still, for Moslem women restricted by purdah from work outside the homestead and in the company of men, technology-induced relocation of the workplace to the mills may mean the loss of a vital source of income. Furthermore, while male landowners in Africa and elsewhere experienced lightened workload and expansion in cash crop cultivation with modern tractors and improved animal-powered farm equipment, work for their wives increased, with more area to weed, hoe, and plant ( [Jacobson, 1993](#) ). A study of a Tiv farm development project in Nigeria showed that women experienced "a disproportionately high share of the labor increase without a corresponding increase in income. Female labor requirements rose by 17%, while those of men rose by only 6%" ( [Young, 1993, p. 52](#) ). These conditions for women simply cannot be dismissed as fortuitous and without connection to existing power relations and decision-making processes in the Third World.

## Decision Making

It appears from the above that technology and development have actually been contributing to widening the gender gap instead of reducing it. The general image of technological and socioeconomic development is and has been that of a male directed and controlled process. Seen as such, development has commonly been viewed as a process that is structured by men and for men, and women are expected to abide without questions. The literature is replete with evidence that women are often not involved or consulted in the planning and designing of technology-based development projects and programs with direct impact on them. For instance, projects involving solar cookers in India, hydraulic palm oil presses in Nigeria, and high yield variety maize in Mexico were implemented with little input from women who are and have traditionally been responsible for cooking and palm oil processing. The introduction of solar cookers in India, Kenya, and elsewhere seems expedient given the serious problems of deforestation and fuelwood scarcity. As logical as this innovation seemed, rural women resisted it mainly because of their labor patterns, food habits, and the intermittent nature of the sun. For instance, women cook the main meal of the day when they return from the farms in the evening. The solar cooker is not very useful at sunset, and it is highly unlikely that some women would readily abandon established labor patterns in the village to accommodate a new technology. Furthermore, since the solar cooker must face directly into the sun to be effective, it requires constant relocation to track the sun as it changes positions. This is inconvenient, to say the least. Finally, even though some governments subsidize the cost of solar cookers as in India for instance, the price remained prohibitive for a large number of people ( [Blankenberg, 1991](#) ).

The problems with the introduction of the solar cooker and similar schemes elsewhere were due mostly to flaws in the planning process. As appropriate as the innovations seemed, their planning and introduction lacked the valuable input of the women who are the majority of the target end-users. This mistake is often perpetuated by the erroneous assumption that men who dominate the decision-making process know what women need. The urgency of listening to women articulate their needs and including them in decision-making cannot be overemphasized. As the saying goes in India, "As a bird cannot fly on one wing, no society can make progress unless its women too join men in all activities" ( [Bhattacharya & Bose, 1995, p. 93](#) ). Science and technology have become the most potent sources of change and empowerment in modern society. To insist on the age-old practice of excluding women in decisions concerning their development is to be unwise and myopic.

Women are conspicuously under- represented in decision and policy making concerning technological and socioeconomic development. Explaining the reason for this condition, Young ( 1993 ) suggested plausibly that development practitioners are cautious not to violate what may be strongly regarded cultural practices and values. Mostly male- dominated government officials from the Third World often claim that concerns about the absence of women at high levels of government and their lack of active involvement in policy making is a Western preoccupation of no interest even to their women. The few women in positions

of power and authority are being lost through attrition as many of them experience first-hand what it entails to be "lonely at the top." However, efforts to improve the status of women and to enlist their self-confidence, intellectual, and decision-making capabilities for the benefit of society have culminated in landmark conferences and policy adjustments worldwide.

## Confronting Gender Bias

As a result of concerted efforts in recent decades, the plight of women in general is a topic of serious research, discourse, and action worldwide. Various governments are cooperating with international agencies to initiate gender sensitive policies and programs. For instance, in 1973, the U.S. Congress adopted the Percy Amendment (Section 113 of the 1973 Foreign Assistance Act) sponsored by Republican Senator William Percy (retired) of Illinois. As the amendment requires, U.S. bilateral development assistance "shall be administered so as to give particular attention to those programs, projects and activities which tend to integrate women into the national economies of foreign countries, thus improving their status and assisting the total development effort" ( [Blumberg, 1990, p. 2](#) ). The amendment also directed the U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) to include the likely effects of development projects on women in its feasibility studies of projects. The Women in Development (WID) Office of the AID was established in direct response to this amendment. The office assists in the preparation and testing of case studies involving projects funded by the AID. This legislation was unprecedented in its strong endorsement of women

as contributors and agents of economic development as well as its beneficiaries. Planners, therefore, must guard against the negative effects of their projects on women and focus on the need to enhance women's productivity, raise their income, and promote their access to economically productive resources as a means to achieving overall national economic growth. ( [Overholt, Anderson, Cloud, & Austin, 1985, p. 11](#) )

Similar efforts followed the U.S. example. The British Commonwealth, for example, in 1980 established a Women and Development (WAD) program that received the endorsement of all of its member nations ( [Momsen, 1991](#) ). Third World governments have also initiated pragmatic educational reforms that are having positive impact on their literacy rates. More girls and young women are enrolling in schools today than ever before. The combined female primary and secondary enrollment in the developing world jumped dramatically from 38% in 1970 to 68% in 1992 ( [UNDP, 1995](#) ). Governments have also been working in alliance with multilateral agencies in the march toward gender equality.

The United Nations has been and remains an active agent of change in its global work on gender matters. The World conferences on women held in Mexico City, Mexico, in 1975; Copenhagen, Denmark, in 1980; Nairobi, Kenya, in 1985; and Beijing, China, in 1995 have kept attention focused on the condition of women and produced action plans for improving women's status worldwide ( [Kaye, 1995](#) ; [Young, 1993](#) ). Not only was 1975 designated International Women's year, the UN Decade for Women, from 1976 to 1985, started with the creation by the UN General Assembly of a Voluntary Fund for the decade that became known as the UN Fund for Women (UNIFEM). UNIFEM's efforts are focused on three areas: strengthening women's economic capacity as entrepreneurs and producers, promoting governance and leadership that increase women's participation in decision-making processes that shape their lives, and promoting women's human rights ( "[UNIFEM,](#)" [1998](#) ). The 1975 conference in Mexico adopted the World Plan of Action (WPA) from the UN.

The WPA is a compendium of objectives encompassing priority issues such as enabling "educational opportunities for women, better employment prospects, equality in political and social participation, and increased welfare services" ( [Young, 1993, p. 25](#) ). The subsequent conferences in Copenhagen, Nairobi, and Beijing have been vital to review work in progress, evaluate accomplishments and challenges, pass important resolutions, and develop follow-up action plans. Professional associations also work cooperatively with the UN for gender equality and equity. For instance, the Gender and Science and Technology Association (GASAT) has through its conferences worked toward narrowing the gender gap in relation to increasing female presence in the fields of science and technology education. GASAT made vital contributions towards the inclusion of science and technology in the Platform of Action during the last UN conference on women held in Beijing, China ( [GASAT, 1998](#) ). All this has been impressive, but it goes without saying that this concerted effort to improve the status of women must continue without

abatement, for there is much more yet to be done.

## The Work to Be Done

Women's positions in most contemporary social institutions in Third World countries continue to be subordinate in many cases and border on tokenism in others. A thorough examination of the cultural and political milieu in educational systems and the workplace is imperative to identify and isolate factors that work against women's enrollment and success in technological fields and their upward mobility in public and private organizations. Any attempt to improve the enrollment of women in fields such as technology education, engineering, and science where they are poorly represented must start with attempts to identify and remove impediments keeping them out of these disciplines. Changes in institutional cultures, societal power relations, social values, and stereotypes are inevitable in this effort. Successfully identified, information about results must be widely disseminated and factored into all future program design and development.

The dissemination of information is crucial and cannot be overlooked in the effort to eradicate gender disparity and improve the status of women in general. Information dissemination will not only reduce the common practice of reinventing the wheel, but will also speed up the adaptation and replication of successful programs as needed in different locations. Due primarily to extensive publicity, highly successful Rotating Savings and Credit Associations (ROSCAs) such as the Grameen Bank of Bangladesh, which provide micro loans to rural women, are increasing in number and have been very effective in empowering women ( Akubue, 1991 ). ROSCAs have enabled rural women, denied loans from conventional financial institutions for lack of collateral and track records, to purchase low-cost appropriate technologies for new businesses or to expand existing ones. Looms, hand-sewing machines, improved cooking stoves, hand grinders, manual typewriters, and hand tools are some examples of appropriate technologies purchased with loans from ROSCAs.

Programs in Mexico and Jamaica, for instance, teach young, unemployed, low-income women technical skills for jobs traditionally associated with the male gender. With assistance from UNIFEM, 10 women from Tempoal in Mexico started a thriving manufacturing enterprise after receiving training as welders and machinists in Colombia, South America. The women started a company to manufacture simple, easily affordable water pumps for export and domestic sale in Mexico. In the Caribbean island of Jamaica, a skill-developing training program that prepares women for careers in the construction industry is known for its high job placement rates ( Antrobus & Rogers, 1980 ; Dorman, 1991 ; McLeod, 1986 ). The success of these programs is a strong testimony that gender roles are primarily social constructs as opposed to indelible biological impositions. Associations such as the GASAT remain unwavering in their belief that given a level playing field, women are quite capable of mastering the skills for careers in science, technology, and mathematics.

However, more extensive improvements in gender equality are possible if the replication of successful projects is executed in tandem with other strategies. Famous professional women can be enlisted as role models in a multifaceted strategy especially to inspire young women to pursue academic education and careers in traditionally male-dominated fields such as technology education, engineering, and computer science. Even in the United States where parity in literacy rates has been achieved between the genders, women still constitute a very small percentage of students graduating with bachelor's degrees in engineering and computer science. Only 9% and 29% of students who earn bachelor's degrees in engineering and computer science, respectively, are women ( Rengel, 2000 ). Using famous women engineers, technologists, and scientists as role models, young women can be encouraged to enroll in related majors. For instance, Sarah Akbar of Kuwait Oil Company was a petroleum engineer and a member of the Kuwaiti team of firefighters who fought the inferno at Kuwait oil wells when operation Desert Storm ended in 1991. Sarah was the first woman ever in Kuwait and in the Middle East to participate in a potentially hazardous task of that kind. The publicity that followed Sarah's bravura turned her into a role model, symbol of equality, and mentor for young Kuwaiti women. A study at Kuwait University later showed that the number of women enrolled in petroleum engineering increased substantially since Sarah's unprecedented feat ( Soliman, 1993 ). Sarah's efforts were a lesson in self-confidence, courage, and risk-taking for women, and another refutation of the theory that we are born with naturally assigned, not to speak of unchangeable, gender roles. However, to be effective, the task of collecting and making this and other successful schemes available for dissemination must be the responsibility of a central body

established and supported by governments in the Third World. Centers for the collection and dissemination of information on effective strategies for improving women's status and achieving gender equality have been set up in many Third World countries in recent years. Women's bureaus "collate, collect and coordinate existing information as well as encourage, fund and partially direct future research" ( Nelson, 1981, p. 49 ). The charge of most women's bureaus is not only to ensure that women play a greater, and important, part in all development projects, but also to plan, coordinate, and monitor a wide variety of other projects having to do with women. To this end, women's bureaus act as catalysts integrating women into male-dominated areas such as the agricultural extension profession. Making sure that women are recruited and trained includes educating male colleagues on respect for and sensitivity to issues concerning women. Women's bureaus and similar agencies are definitely a welcome idea, but they can be subverted by inadequate funding, lack of trained personnel, and having little or no political clout. According to Young ( 1993 ), many of these agencies have not been very effective for these reasons.

Finally, socialization in traditional societies often includes risk aversion for women. The march toward gender equality will be better served with strategies that assist women to unlearn years of belief that risk-taking is improper for the female gender. Being able to give up what one "is" for what one "could become" is the essence of risk-taking. Women are by tradition and mores more likely than men to avoid taking risks for fear of failing. It is important to point out here that failure is itself an important aspect of the learning process. Properly managed, failure can be a positive guide to success. The notion of doing things for instead of with women, the result of the social and cultural orientation in most communities, presents a problem in that it denies them the chance to acquire vital knowledge and contacts. To sincerely work toward a society of gender equality and equity, women have to have access to political and economic networks. Speeches and reports that extol the benefits of gender equality are nothing more than empty rhetoric if they are not followed up with commensurate action. As Jacobson ( 1993 ) aptly remarked, "development strategies that limit the ability of women to achieve their real human potential are also strategies that limit the potential of communities and nations" ( p. 76 ). Those of us in science and technology need to become involved through scholarly papers and presentations to lend credibility and a sense of urgency to the plight of Third World women and girls. In a "shrinking" world made possible through advances in transportation and communications technology, regional problems tend to quickly extend beyond regional boundaries.

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## Health in the third world

the role of international co-operation

Luiz Pereira da Silva

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## HEALTH IN THE THIRD WORLD: THE ROLE OF INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION

*Luiz Pereira da Silva*

Expectations of the benefits from the introduction of new biotechnologies on the health of people in the third world is reflected in the immense publicity given to them not only in the specialized press but also in the mass media.

Therefore, it is not necessary here to re-emphasize the new possible applications to health sciences provided by DNA recombinant techniques, molecular genetics, monoclonal antibodies and other modern techniques for the diagnosis, prevention and treatment of human diseases.

Taking for granted that most if not all of the people in the audience are aware of these potential benefits, the speaker is more inclined to discuss a few general points related to the introduction of new biotechnologies in the third world. By assuming an 'against the stream' attitude, the speaker is conscious of the fact that he will probably be considered as having conservative views. He accepts this blame and asks for the comprehension of his younger colleagues.

The speaker will try to define some problems which he thinks are specific to third world conditions, to raise some questions on the introduction of new biotechnologies and to develop arguments in favour of particular policies he thinks must be followed by governmental agencies, either national or international to provide a rational basis for the use and development of biotechnologies. Finally, he will try to define the type of international co-operation that he thinks could contribute to accelerate socio-cultural progress in the third world and would lead to an improvement in the infra-structure necessary for the development of health policies.

### *Specificity of Third World Problems*

The first thing to define is the existence of specific problems of health in the third world. They consist first in the nature of the health problems: malnutrition, high incidence of infectious and parasitic diseases, high rates of maternal, neonatal and infantile mortality, low quality and

insecurity of housing and working conditions, with high incidence of accidents. Most of these problems, which drastically decrease the expectation of life and seriously deteriorate the living standards are determined by social and economical structures. Medical care measures are only of limited effect and correspond to the use of traditional products like antibiotics and chemical drugs.

The second important feature of health problems in the third world is the inadequacy or absence of the structures necessary to provide health care: hospitals, welfare centres, and the low (or insufficient) qualification of the staff responsible for health care. In respect to the subject discussed here, namely the introduction of modern biotechnology in health sciences and in medical practice, one important deficiency is the absence of national pharmaceutical and chemical industries for drugs and pesticides in most countries of the third world and the weakness or absence of a biological industry for vaccines, sera and blood products and derivatives. As a consequence, all the medical measures of the health policies in the third world, from the public health level to the private clinical medicine are entirely dependent on the importation of technology in the form of drugs, products, machines and equipment.

### *A Rational Policy for the Introduction of New Biotechnologies*

With this picture of the health problems in the third world we will try first to describe some errors and illustrate how they can be avoided.

1. New biotechnologies cannot, in any case, replace measures at the social-economical level responsible for the basic problems of health.
2. New biotechnologies are not obligatorily giving the best solutions for health problems in substitution to traditional biotechnology.
3. New biotechnologies cannot (or are difficult to) be introduced independently of the complex economical and technological infra-structures necessary for their functioning.
4. New biotechnologies cannot be employed out of context of a solid scientific environment and a precise evaluation of interdisciplinary and technological interactions.

5. New biotechnologies will not be an area in which can proliferate small new enterprises full of original ideas and opening fantastic opportunities for imaginative young people.
6. New biotechnologies applied to health will not be an area of activity from which important financial benefits are to be expected.

After having considered all of these negative views on the use of new biotechnologies in the third world, the speaker will discuss some positive ones which are important:

1. Some of the important problems of public health in the third world would benefit enormously from the introduction of new biotechnologies, like for the diagnosis and prevention of hepatitis, malaria, AIDS and other diseases.
2. Most of the countries in the third world, in addition to a majority of poor people, have also a fraction of the population with relatively high socio-economic conditions, and consequently health problems, equivalent to those of developed countries.
3. The absence of strong local industry occupying areas of economical activity and using traditional technology liberate countries of the third world from conservative pressure of lobbies.

A rational policy on the introduction of modern biotechnologies in health sciences and in medical care in the third world must take into consideration both the positive and negative constraints discussed above. According to the speaker's point of view it must respect some basic points:

- Development of scientific and technological education, scientific and technological research without any dicotomy but looking for equilibrium and association of both activities;
- Acurate planning of investments to provide, through the development of economical and technological backgrounds, the opportunity for the flowering of different innovation;
- Stimulate the participation of the scientific community through an open and large debate on selecting priorities and choosing technological alternatives;

- Define social priorities and integrate public health programs in a general project of socio-economic development.

#### *International Co-operation*

The difficulty in defining a rational model for the development of international co-operation in the area of new biotechnologies is the difficulty in defining the protagonists. Since technologies are finally to produce goods and since the production of goods is a function of Industry, 'new biotechnological products' are as result produced by the different branches of the 'Industrie de pointe' in Pharmacy, Chemistry, Mechanics, Electronics, etc. As we know these industries are nowadays developing a tremendous international commercial war for conquering markets. To create artificial needs is often more important than to satisfy a real necessity. Marketing is more decisive than scientific accuracy.

The past experience of the third world of co-operation in Industry is quite negative. The example of what happened with the pharmaceutical industry in Latin America in the 1960s is illustrative. During the Second World War, and in the years just after, many Latin American countries had developed a promising pharmaceutical industry. This, however, collapsed when confronted with the multinational enterprises invading the market during the economical 'boom' of the 1960's which offered a series of new products like antibiotics, neuroleptics, tranquillizers, etc. (which, of course, were all covered by patents).

If we wish to avoid the repetition of this phenomenon with new biotechnologies we need to have very clear ideas on the mechanisms by which international co-operation and technological and commercial exchange must be oriented. For the moment there is no reason for an excess of optimism, since all the available indicators point to an undesirable evolution and this for a series of reasons:

- New biotechnologies and their derived products applied to health sciences and medical care are more and more the 'affaire' of giant chemical-pharmaceutical enterprises, which are normally more interested in selling products than in transferring know-how. In the 1970s we observed the creation of a large number of new small enterprises dealing with biotechnology, especially in the USA but also in Europe, nowadays most of them have disappeared or have

been absorbed by the giant industrial conglomerates either national or multinational.

- To regulate the exchange of technologies between developed countries and to conciliate conflicts arising from the industrial and commercial activities of national and multinational giant enterprises, European countries have created structures at the supranational level, like the EEC, which have all the political support from national governments and which are provided with the necessary social, political and economical authority to guarantee and support their role.
- Apart from some political tribunes in United Nations, there is no equivalent international organisations to regulate the interactions and exchanges among developed and underdeveloped countries with the exception of those in charge of the police supervision at the financial level like IMF.
- In these conditions it is easy to realize that free direct interactions between industrial protagonists, bringing together, on the one side experienced giant enterprises and on the other inexperienced small and poor companies will more often generate good business for the first than useful technological transfer for the second.
- Therefore, the natural tendency of trade, interactions and ‘co-operation’ will be (and already is in many respects) the invasion of nascent markets in the third world countries by commercialized products, either imported or produced by local subsidiaries of multinational enterprises. They will satisfy the needs (real or artificial) of the fraction of the population referred to above as being similar to the consumer society present in developed countries.

If following this model, transfer of new biotechnologies will reinforce economical and technological dependence, create artificial social needs, create foreign commercial exchange imbalance and deform the priorities of national health policies.

The only way that third world countries have to protect them-selves against all these negative consequences of ‘free exchanges’ and ‘open borders’ is to refuse them and to regulate the international co-operation according to their national interest and health policies.

### *Conclusion*

The speaker has already defined some of the main principles he thinks must be followed by third world countries in order to favour a rational introduction of modern technology obtained from developed countries.

If we assume that all men are alike and that all of them would benefit from a general improvement in the health of the third world, then it is possible perhaps to express some wishes concerning practical recommendations that could be addressed to the EEC to favour know-how transfer in the area of new biotechnologies.

- Creation of permanent bilateral structures between EEC and the equivalent regional inter-governmental organizations, for the study, regulation, financial support and control of technological transfer projects.
- Developing and amplifying the already existing programmes of scientific co-operation between third world and European laboratories. Give priority to institutions of the third world directly involved in research in health sciences to allow them to elaborate new adapted techniques and products.
- Developing programmes of scientific and technological training for third world students giving preference to projects conducted in local laboratories and institutions. The organization of permanent summer schools with a minimum of permanent administration and the participation of relevant European technicians and scientists would be a welcome formula.
- Elaborate programmes to drain the surplus of trained people in Europe to work for periods of one to a few years in laboratories of the third world with financial support from the EEC or international agencies. In this respect, a welcome initiative would be to stimulate well-trained young Europeans, during their military service, to go to work in third world laboratories.

All these and other possible initiatives might be developed in coordination with WHO and their regional agencies. A dose interaction with parallel projects related to agriculture would certainly increase their impact.

**TARIQ ALI**

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**THE  
FORTY-YEAR  
WAR IN  
AFGHANISTAN  
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# The Forty-Year War in Afghanistan

# The Forty-Year War in Afghanistan

A Chronicle Foretold

Tariq Ali



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For *all* the people of Afghanistan, old and young, who have suffered the traumatic effects of a forty-year war, and especially for the Afghan women whose struggle, as with many of their peers in South Asia, is far from over.





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# Preface

The fall of Kabul to the Taliban on 15 August 2021 is a major political and ideological defeat for the American Empire. The crowded helicopters carrying US embassy staff to Kabul airport were startlingly reminiscent of the scenes in Saigon – now Ho Chi Minh City – in April 1975. The speed with which Taliban forces stormed the country was astonishing; their strategic acumen remarkable. A week-long offensive ended triumphantly in Kabul. The 300,000-strong Afghan army crumbled. Many refused to fight. In fact, thousands of them went over to the Taliban, who immediately demanded the unconditional surrender of the puppet government. President Ashraf Ghani, a favourite of the US media, fled the country and sought refuge in Oman. The flag of the revived Emirate is now fluttering over his presidential palace.

In some respects, the closest analogy is not Saigon but nineteenth-century Sudan when the forces of the Mahdi swept into Khartoum and martyred General Gordon. William Morris celebrated the Mahdi's victory as a setback for the British Empire. Yet while the Sudanese insurgents killed an entire garrison, Kabul changed hands with little bloodshed. The Taliban did not even attempt to take the US embassy, let alone target American personnel.

The twentieth anniversary of the 'war on terror' thus ended in predictable and predicted defeat for the US, NATO and others who clambered on the bandwagon. However one regards the Taliban's policies – I have been a stern critic for many years – their achievement cannot be denied. In a period when the US has wrecked one Arab country after another, no resistance that could challenge the occupiers ever emerged. This defeat may well be a turning point. That is why European politicians are whinging. They backed the US unconditionally in Afghanistan, and they too have suffered a humiliation – none more so than Britain.

Biden was left with no choice. The United States had announced it would withdraw from Afghanistan in September 2021 without fulfilling any of its 'liberationist' aims: freedom and democracy, equal rights for women, or the destruction of the Taliban. Though it may be undefeated militarily, the tears being shed by embittered liberals confirm the deeper extent of its loss. Most of them – Frederick Kagan in the *New York Times*, Gideon Rachman in the *FT* – believe that the drawdown should have been delayed to keep the Taliban at bay. But Biden was simply ratifying the peace process

initiated by Trump, with Pentagon backing, which saw an agreement reached in February 2020 in the presence of the US, Taliban, India, China and Pakistan. The American security establishment knew that the invasion had failed: the Taliban could not be subdued no matter how long they stayed. The notion that Biden's hasty withdrawal has somehow strengthened the militants is poppycock.

The fact is that after twenty years the US has failed to build anything that might redeem its mission. The brilliantly lit Green Zone was always surrounded by a darkness that the Zoners could not fathom. In one of the poorest countries of the world, billions were spent annually on air-conditioning the barracks that housed US soldiers and officers, while food and clothing were regularly flown in from bases in Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait. It was hardly a surprise that a huge slum grew on the fringes of Kabul, as the poor assembled to search for pickings in dustbins. The low wages paid to Afghan security services could not convince them to fight against their countrymen. The army, built up over two decades, had been infiltrated at an early stage by Taliban supporters, who received free training in the use of modern military equipment and acted as spies for the Afghan resistance.

This was the miserable reality of 'humanitarian intervention'. Though credit where credit is due: the country has witnessed a huge rise in exports. During the Taliban years, opium production was strictly monitored. Since the US invasion it has increased dramatically, and now accounts for 90 per cent of the global heroin market – making one wonder whether this protracted conflict should be seen, partially at least, as a new opium war. Trillions have been made in profits and shared between the Afghan sectors that serviced the occupation. Western officers were handsomely paid off to enable the trade. One in ten young Afghans are now opium addicts. Figures for NATO forces are unavailable.

As for the status of women, nothing much has changed. There has been little social progress outside the NGO-infested Green Zone. One of the country's leading feminists in exile remarked that Afghan women had three enemies: the Western occupation, the Taliban and the Northern Alliance. With the departure of the United States, she said, they will have two. (At the time of writing this can perhaps be amended to one, as the Taliban's advances in the north saw off key factions of the Alliance before Kabul was captured.) Despite repeated requests from journalists and campaigners, no reliable figures have been released on the sex-work industry that grew to service the occupying armies. Nor are there credible rape statistics – although US soldiers frequently used sexual violence against 'terror suspects', raped Afghan civilians and green-lighted child abuse by allied militias.<sup>1</sup> During the Yugoslav civil war, prostitution increased and the region became a centre for sex trafficking. UN involvement in this profitable business was well documented. In Afghanistan, the full details are yet to emerge.

Over 775,000 US troops have fought in Afghanistan since 2001. Of those, 2,448 were killed, along with almost 4,000 US contractors. Approximately 20,589 were

wounded in action according to the Defense Department. Afghan casualty figures are difficult to calculate, since ‘enemy deaths’ that include civilians are not counted. Carl Conetta of the Project on Defense Alternatives estimated that at least 4,200–4,500 civilians were killed by mid-January 2002 as a consequence the US assault, both directly as casualties of the aerial bombing campaign and indirectly in the humanitarian crisis that ensued. By 2021, the Associated Press was reporting that 47,245 civilians had perished because of the occupation. Afghan civil rights activists gave a higher total, insisting that 100,000 Afghans (many of them non-combatants) have died and three times that number have been wounded.

In 2019, the *Washington Post* published a 2,000-page internal report commissioned by the US federal government to anatomize the failures of its longest war: *The Afghanistan Papers*. It was based on a series of interviews with US generals (retired and serving), political advisers, diplomats, aid workers and so on. Their combined assessment was damning. General Douglas Lute, the ‘Afghan war czar’ under Bush and Obama, confessed, ‘We were devoid of a fundamental understanding of Afghanistan – we didn’t know what we were doing ... We didn’t have the foggiest notion of what we’re undertaking ... If the American people knew the magnitude of this dysfunction ...’ Another witness, Jeffrey Eggers, a retired Navy SEAL and a White House staffer under Bush and Obama, highlighted the vast waste of resources: ‘What did we get for this \$1 trillion effort? Was it worth \$1 trillion? ... After the killing of Osama bin Laden, I said that Osama was probably laughing in his watery grave considering how much we have spent on Afghanistan.’ He could have added: ‘And we still lost.’

Who was the enemy? The Taliban, Pakistan, all Afghans? A long-serving US soldier was convinced that at least one-third of Afghan police were addicted to drugs and another sizeable chunk were Taliban supporters. This posed a major problem for US soldiers, as an unnamed Special Forces honcho testified in 2017:

They thought I was going to come to them with a map to show them where the good guys and bad guys live ... It took several conversations for them to understand that I did not have that information in my hands. At first, they just kept asking: ‘But who are the bad guys, where are they?’<sup>2</sup>

Donald Rumsfeld expressed the same sentiment back in 2003. ‘I have no visibility into who the bad guys are in Afghanistan or Iraq,’ he wrote. ‘I read all the intel from the community, and it sounds as though we know a great deal, but in fact, when you push at it, you find out we haven’t got anything that is actionable. We are woefully deficient in human intelligence.’<sup>3</sup> The inability to distinguish between a friend and an enemy is a serious issue – not just on a Schmittean level, but on a practical one. If you can’t tell the difference between allies and adversaries after an IED attack in a crowded city market, you respond by lashing out at everyone, and create more enemies in the process.

Colonel Christopher Kolenda, an adviser to three serving generals, pointed to

another problem with the US mission. Corruption was rampant from the beginning, he said; the Karzai government was ‘self-organized into a kleptocracy’. That undermined the post-2002 strategy of building a state that could outlast the occupation. ‘Petty corruption is like skin cancer, there are ways to deal with it and you’ll probably be just fine. Corruption within the ministries, higher level, is like colon cancer; it’s worse, but if you catch it in time, you’re probably okay. Kleptocracy, however, is like brain cancer; it’s fatal.’<sup>4</sup> Of course, the Pakistani state – where kleptocracy is embedded at every level – has survived for decades. But things weren’t so easy in Afghanistan, where nation-building efforts were led by an occupying army and the central government had scant popular support.

What of the fake reports that the Taliban were routed, never to return? A senior figure in the National Security Council reflected on the lies broadcast by his colleagues:

It was their explanations. For example, [Taliban] attacks are getting worse? ‘That’s because there are more targets for them to fire at, so more attacks are a false indicator of instability.’ Then, three months later, attacks are still getting worse? ‘It’s because the Taliban are getting desperate, so it’s actually an indicator that we’re winning’ ... And this went on and on for two reasons, to make everyone involved look good, and to make it look like the troops and resources were having the kind of effect where removing them would cause the country to deteriorate.<sup>5</sup>

All this was an open secret in the chanceries and defence ministries of NATO Europe. In October 2014, the British defence secretary Michael Fallon admitted that ‘mistakes were made militarily, mistakes were made by the politicians at the time and this goes back ten, thirteen years ... We’re not going to send combat troops back into Afghanistan, under any circumstances.’ Four years later, Prime Minister Theresa May redeployed British troops to Afghanistan, doubling its fighters ‘to help tackle the fragile security situation’. Now the UK media is echoing the Foreign Office and criticizing Biden for having made the wrong move at the wrong time, with the head of the British armed forces Sir Nick Carter suggesting a new invasion might be necessary. Tory backbenchers, colonial nostalgists, stooge-journalists and Blair-toadies are lining up to call for a permanent British presence in the war-torn state.

What’s astonishing is that neither General Carter nor his relays appear to have acknowledged the scale of the crisis confronted by the US war machine, as set out in *The Afghanistan Papers*. While American military planners have slowly woken up to reality, their British counterparts still cling to a fantasy image of Afghanistan. Some argue that the withdrawal will put Europe’s security at risk, as al-Qaeda regroups under the new Islamic Emirate. But these forecasts are disingenuous. The US and UK have spent years arming and assisting al-Qaeda in Syria, as they did in Bosnia and in Libya. Such fear-mongering can only function in a swamp of ignorance. For the British public, at least, it does not seem to have cut through. History sometimes presses urgent truths on a country through a vivid demonstration of facts or an exposure of elites. The current

withdrawal is likely to be one such moment. Britons, already hostile to the War on Terror, could harden in their opposition to future military adventures and occupations. Perhaps joined this time by US and EU citizens.

I have been writing on Afghanistan and the region for a long time. This book consists of both longer essays and shorter pieces. It's sad that it took history forty years to confirm my theses. Those of us who founded the 2001 UK coalition Stop the War are desperate to disband it, but not just yet.

*London*  
*15 August 2021*



# Introduction

Afghanistan emerged in the middle of the eighteenth century as a tribal confederacy with a strong king at its head. Coveted by Russian tsar and British viceroy alike, its impassable fastnesses enabled it to avoid occupation by either colonial power. The British Empire waged three wars in Afghanistan. The first lasted four years (1839–42) and ended with the annihilation of the British army, a huge Afghan triumph that had an impact in India. It was undoubtedly one of the inspirations for the Great Uprising of 1857 that almost toppled the British. It later inspired Kipling to write *Kim*, an adventure yarn with an ideological lining: tsarist Russia was viewing Afghanistan with greedy eyes, and hence the British took pre-emptive measures. A more traditional explanation was advanced by imperial civil servants. In a special report completed in 1855, Richard Temple, secretary to the chief commissioner of the Punjab, ascribed the British defeat to the ‘barbarism’ of their opponents:

Now *these tribes are savages* – noble savages perhaps – and not without some tincture of virtue and generosity, but still absolutely barbarians nevertheless ... They have nominally a religion, but Mahomedanism [*sic*], as understood by them, is no better, or perhaps is actually worse than the creeds of the wildest race on earth ... They are thievish and predatory to the last degree. The Pathan mother often prays that her son might be a successful robber ... Such briefly, is their character, replete with the unaccountable inconsistencies, with that mixture of opposite vices and virtues belonging to savages.<sup>1</sup>

In fact, the Afghan tribes were not so dissimilar to the Scottish Highlanders fighting for the Jacobite cause and an independent Scotland in 1745–6, and brutally massacred in Culloden by the Hanoverian Duke of Cumberland on behalf of the British state. The Pashtun language Pashto, a tributary of Persian, and an oral culture based on it was common in Afghanistan. As for the ‘noble savages’, they still sing the poems of Khushal Khan Khattak, a seventeenth-century leader of the Khatak tribe and a very fine lyrical poet in Homeric mould, who defended Pashtuns against Mughal depredations during Aurangzeb’s reign. In his poem ‘Spring Thoughts’, he describes how Pashtun warriors brought a Mughal army led by Hindu, Sikh and Muslim generals to its knees, the edge of the Pashtun sword driving the enemy into retreat. It ends with a fierce attack on the Mughal emperor himself:

*Of Aurung’s losses who can tell the tale?*

*The wealth of Hind incontinent he spills  
His red gold beggared on our barren hills.  
No bounds are set on Aurung's ill intent,  
Damned by his father's curse, malevolent,  
A king unkingly, faithless, false, forsworn,  
His truth is lies, his honesty a scorn.  
Twixt him and us fair compact is there none,  
If Mogul stand, then we are spent and done.*

The British returned for a three-year return 'Great Game' match from 1878–80. This war they won after bitterly contested battles. General Roberts was the de facto British military dictator and on being instructed to withdraw he ordered the destruction of the medieval Kabul bazaar, an architectural gem still in use at the time. It was a meaningless act of cultural savagery whose only function was to assert British superiority.<sup>2</sup> The British subsequently imposed the Durand Line as a 1,600-mile frontier between British India and Afghanistan, dividing the Pashtun tribes in order to weaken Afghanistan, which was henceforth not permitted to have its own foreign policy (like Japan today) and was christened a 'buffer state'. The border, as both the Soviet Union and the United States discovered during their respective occupations, is virtually impossible to police.

In the first decades of the twentieth century, Afghanistan was still not much different from what it had been a hundred years earlier. A mosaic of competing tribes and nationalities – ranging from the dominant Pashtuns (themselves bitterly divided), the Tajiks and the Uzbeks, to Hazaras (of Mongol descent), Nuristanis and Baluch – ensured that no strong central authority maintained its power for very long. The gulf between Kabul and the countryside was rarely, if ever, breached. But the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the overthrow of the Ottoman Caliphate by Kemal's new model army in 1919 stirred modernizing ambitions in the young Afghan King Amanullah, who was a staunch opponent of the Durand Line. Chafing under British tutelage, and surrounded by radical intellectuals who looked to Enlightenment ideals from Europe and the bold example from Petrograd, Amanullah briefly united a small, educated elite with the bulk of the tribes and won a famous military victory against British arms in 1919 in the third Anglo-Afghan war.

Success in the field gave Amanullah the confidence to launch a reform programme, partially inspired by Kemal's revolution in Turkey. A new Afghan constitution was proclaimed, promising universal adult franchise. If implemented, it would have made Afghanistan one of the first countries in the world to give all women the right to vote. Simultaneously, emissaries were dispatched to Moscow to seek assistance. Though the Bolshevik leaders were themselves beleaguered by multiple armed interventions from the Entente powers, they treated the Afghan overtures quite seriously. Sultan-Galiev, who wanted to mobilize Russia's Muslims to spread communism through Asia, received

the messengers from Kabul warmly on behalf of the Comintern. Meanwhile Trotsky sent a secret letter to the Central Committee of the Russian Communist Party from his armoured train at the front line of the civil war. In this remarkable dispatch, he wrote:

There is no doubt at all that our Red Army constitutes an incomparably more powerful force in the Asian terrain of world politics than in the European terrain. Here there opens up before us an undoubted possibility not merely of a lengthy wait to see how events develop in Europe, but of conducting activity in the Asian field. The road to India may prove at the given moment to be more readily passable and shorter for us than the road to Soviet Hungary. The sort of army which at the moment can be of no great significance in the European scales can upset the unstable balance of Asian relationships of colonial dependence, give a direct push to an uprising on the part of the oppressed masses and assure the triumph of such a rising in Asia ... The road to Paris and London lies via the towns of Afghanistan, the Punjab and Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

A hallucinatory document by one of Trotsky's military specialists proposed the creation of an anti-imperialist cavalry corps of 30,000–40,000 riders to liberate British India.

Nothing came of such schemes. No doubt the failure of Tukhachevsky's march into Poland two years later had a sobering effect in Moscow. Amanullah got no more than friendship and advice from the Bolsheviks. The British, understandably nervous, were now determined to overthrow him. They imported T. E. Lawrence 'of Arabia' to help organize a tribal revolt. Looking back, it appears like a dress rehearsal for the US operation during the Soviet occupation in the 1980s. The propaganda campaign mounted by the British to convince tribal conservatives included doctored photographs of the Afghan queen, a proto-feminist, in a swimming costume. New Delhi purchased the services of a couple of leading tribes, fomented religious opposition to the king, and finally toppled him with a military coup in 1929. The Comintern journal *Inprecorr* commented that Amanullah had only survived for a decade thanks to 'Soviet friendship'; more pertinently, the senior Bolshevik Raskolnikov remarked that Amanullah had introduced 'bourgeois reforms without a bourgeoisie', whose cost had fallen on peasants whom he had failed to win over with an agrarian reform, allowing Britain to exploit social and tribal divisions in the country.

Stagnation continued after the Second World War, and few considered the possibility of a republic, let alone a more radical outcome. Zahir Shah, the last king of Afghanistan, was a mild nationalist who nonetheless harboured an intense dislike of the British Empire and had, for that reason, maintained friendly relations with Mussolini and the Third Reich till 1945. When he was removed in a palace coup by his cousin Daud in 1973 and exiled to the Italian Riviera, most observers agreed that the country had made surprisingly little progress over the preceding 150 years. Its rentier economy and land-locked status had made it heavily dependent on aid, with a huge gulf between the wealthy elite and the bulk of the population. The modern world barely intruded even in the cities, with the exception of Kabul. Five years later, Daud too was overthrown by his erstwhile allies in a Communist-led coup d'état, thus ending the rule of the Durrani. This regime too imploded. In 1979, to prevent its collapse, the Soviet Union sent the

Red Army across the border to try to save a crumbling and isolated regime. It was obvious at the time that the entry of Soviet troops would bring a horrific counter-reaction and wreck the region for decades. The United States, taking over the historic role of Britain, had already begun arming the religious opposition, using the Pakistani army as a conduit. What followed is the subject matter of this book.

I

Moscow, Washington, Lahore  
1979–2000

# 1.

## Soviet Troops Out of Afghanistan!

January 1980

The decision of the Soviet Union to send troops to remove Hafizullah Amin, general secretary of the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), replace him with Babrak Karmal, and occupy parts of the country must be condemned on every count. It disregards the rights of the people of Afghanistan to determine their own future: it tramples under foot the rights of the PDPA (limited though these were) to choose its own leaders; and it will aid the most reactionary and backward-looking forces in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

Ever since the overthrow of the Daud dictatorship in April 1978 in a military coup, the PDPA has struggled to establish its rule. It was a difficult task. In the first place Afghanistan is an extremely difficult country in which to make a social revolution. There are only two factories in the whole country and the size of the working class is extremely small. If you add to that the proliferation of small shopkeepers in the cities, and a deeply-rooted tribal structure with tribal property rights, the magnitude of the tasks which faced the new leaders becomes obvious. These problems could have been overcome only by a patient process of educating the masses coupled with a series of radical social measures. But the Stalinist tradition of the PDPA, coupled with the proximity of Moscow, ruled out this course.

To institute a regime as autocratic as the one it replaced – despite much talk about democracy – was hardly likely to excite the citizens of Afghanistan. Only a thoroughgoing revolutionary democracy could have allowed the new regime to win the support of the masses. Instead, the press was curbed and the model of the new government (in terms of its propaganda) was clearly the Kim Il Sung regime in North Korea. Factional struggles in the PDPA were solved by expulsions and ultimately killings. Amin's predecessor, Taraki, was killed in September 1979 during one such struggle. The right-wing religious leaders utilized all this to strengthen their rebellion. The use of napalm and Soviet helicopters and planes to bomb the tribes into submission was bound to fail.

Now the Russians have committed themselves further to shore up a regime whose initial popular support in the first few months after the overthrow of the hated Daud has now totally evaporated. Their style of intervention is not unfamiliar. Shoot the

recalcitrant leader (Imre Nagy in Hungary and now Amin in Afghanistan), replace him with a more amenable figure, and use Soviet troops and tanks to ensure stability. But Afghanistan is not Eastern Europe. The Russian intervention will enable the right-wing rebels to win more support internally and externally. Afghanistan will become the front-line for the Cold War, where Russian soldiers (carefully chosen from Central Asia) can be killed by proxy. The Soviet intervention will also give succour to all those in the United States and Western Europe who have been arguing that US imperialism should play a more interventionist role in different parts of the globe. Brezhnev's message to Babrak Karmal congratulating him on his 'election to office' must surely be one of the more cynical gestures from a Stalinist leader in recent years.

Genuine revolutions can only succeed with mass support. Any attempt to substitute Russian soldiers for the people of Afghanistan can end only in disaster. Either the Russians will have to withdraw in any event and accept a government of a different complexion, or they will get bogged down in a long war. There is no third option. That is why we have no hesitation in calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russian troops. Far from aiding the struggle against pro-imperialist forces in Afghanistan, they can only hinder it. All observers are agreed that the motley collection of religious oppositionists have mass support, but no coherent political project. The entry of Soviet troops may well help to give them one.

## 2.

# Between the Hammer and the Anvil

1983

The Soviet decision to intervene in Afghanistan was taken some time after a visit to the country in April 1979 by a top Soviet delegation led by General Alexei Yepishev, first deputy minister of defence and president of political affairs of the Soviet army and navy.<sup>1</sup> Yepishev is a self-acknowledged Stalinist and architect of the invasion of Czechoslovakia in August 1968. His visit was designed to gain a first-hand assessment of the situation in the field, before preparing a detailed plan of action. Yepishev is well known in Eastern Europe as the figure in the Stalinist Apocalypse who symbolizes death and destruction. He visited Prague prior to the entry of Soviet tanks, and was a guest of General Jaruzelski in Poland three months before the imposition of martial law. The Yepishev Plan was approved by the Politburo after a long debate: Brezhnev admitted that ‘it was no easy decision’, and was only taken after the Central Committee had taken into account ‘all the relevant circumstances’.

On 27 December 1979, tens of thousands of Soviet combat troops crossed the Oxus River (Amu Darya), which forms the Soviet–Afghan border, and embarked on a military occupation of the country. The Soviet Union initially claimed that they had been invited by Amin and the PDPA; but Amin was reported dead soon after the Russian troops arrived (together with a KGB general, Victor Paputin). Within a few weeks, the new Afghan leader, Babrak Karmal, who together with the bulk of his cabinet had been transported to Kabul in Soviet planes, was to denounce Hafizullah Amin as an ‘agent of the CIA’. Neither Karmal nor the Soviet press provided any details to substantiate this. If the charge was true, then it was necessary to ask how long Amin had worked for the CIA. This was not an unimportant question, given Amin’s key role as the chief liaison between the PDPA and its military cells prior to the April 1978 coup. If Amin had been recruited before then, the implication would be that what Karmal still refers to as the ‘April Revolution’ was in fact a dastardly plot manufactured in Washington! But the allegation can best be treated as belonging to the characteristic bureaucratic code whereby opponents are denounced as agents of foreign powers – a procedure whose genealogy can be traced without difficulty to the Soviet purges and show-trials of the thirties.



## Soviet strategy

A much more fundamental question was why the Soviet Union had intervened militarily outside Eastern Europe for the first time since the Second World War. The answer did not lie in the mountains of Afghanistan. It would be wrong to perceive the Soviet move as motivated by anything so trifling as the situation in that country. The top Soviet politicians, and in particular the Soviet generals, are extremely cautious men. A fundamental bureaucratic conservatism underlies their actions, internally and externally. The view, common among politicians and political columnists in North America and Western Europe, that the Soviet Union is an aggressive power, hellbent on expansion, is far from the truth. In its essence, Soviet foreign policy since the late twenties and thirties has been dominated by one overriding concern: the preservation of stability and the status quo inside the USSR.

At the end of the Second World War, the Soviet leaders refrained from taking advantage of the break-down of the capitalist system in France, Italy and Greece. They adhered faithfully to the Yalta Agreement, which divided Europe into 'spheres of influence'. It is true that the Yugoslav partisans refused to accept any deal and pushed through a process of revolution; but that was hardly the responsibility of Stalin.<sup>2</sup> The Cold War of the late forties and fifties was, in many ways, a response to the crisis of colonialism in Asia: Vietnam (1945), Korea (1945) and China (1949) saw the outbreak of social upheavals that threatened Western hegemony in the region. The United States responded by putting pressure on the USSR in the West. Then, in the sixties, a new 'spirit of detente' was generated, as a consequence of which the Soviet Union maintained friendly relations and did not embarrass the United States throughout the period of the latter's military intervention in Vietnam. There were both political and economic reasons for what the Brezhnev–Nixon joint communique referred to as a 'new era of collaboration'.

Post-war Soviet foreign policy has, in its own fashion, attempted to mimic the United States. In seeking to win over Third World states, the Soviet Union has provided military and economic aid to large numbers of regimes in Asia, Latin America and Africa whose social systems were far removed from any form of socialism. The difference between Soviet and US foreign policy, however, remains crucial. Washington is the policeman of the world, seeing its main function as to prevent social revolution anywhere. Its strategic war cry can be summed up by inverting a well-known formula: 'Permanent Counterrevolution'. This gives US policy a political coherence and concrete aims, which its Soviet counterpart lacks. Attempts to expand the influence of the USSR have been motivated by purely nationalist considerations. The Soviet foreign minister, veteran Politburo member Andrei Gromyko, once defined his country's policy in the following crisp sentences:

Our foreign policy is and will continue to be characterized by resoluteness in defending the state interests of the Soviet people, in safeguarding the inviolability of our land frontiers, maritime coasts and air space, and in protecting the dignity of the Soviet flag and the rights and security of Soviet citizens.<sup>3</sup>

This is a far cry indeed from the declarations of the early Comintern, or the aspirations of the delegates attending the anti-imperialist congress at Baku in 1920. It is, however, far closer to the truth than the fantasies advanced by the State Department in Washington. Gromyko's forthright declaration also exposes the vacuity of a new breed of Western fellow travellers, many of them ex-Maoists, who attempt to provide a radical cover to Soviet foreign policy. Finally, it is a refreshing change from the vapid outpourings of Soviet foreign policy experts seeking vainly to reconcile bureaucratic nationalism with lip-service to the traditions of Bolshevism.

This foray into basic Soviet aims is not irrelevant, if we are interested in unravelling the real reasons for the Kremlin's military intervention in Afghanistan. In our opinion, these can only be grasped within the overall context of the changes in world politics over the preceding two decades. It is, of course, impossible adequately to discuss these important changes and shifts in alliances and perceptions here. We can only refer to the pivotal transformations, in order to develop our argument in relation to South Asia.

The fall of Saigon in 1975 signalled a politico-military humiliation unprecedented in the annals of US history. In that sense, it marked a turning point in world politics. The impact of this victory, however, was blunted. The Sino-US *rapprochement* had helped to lessen the isolation of the United States in Asia (and also in Africa). The emergence of Pol Pot as *asui generis* Stalinist chieftain in Kampuchea was an unmitigated disaster, both for the people of Kampuchea (who suffered the most) and for the hitherto powerful attraction exercised by the Indochinese revolution. The Vietnamese intervention in Kampuchea and the Sino-Vietnamese war could only engender further confusion. The Peking-Washington axis became the central obsession of the Soviet leadership, which not surprisingly perceived it as directed against the Soviet Union.

The result was a shift in Soviet foreign policy. Without breaking from the general framework of detente, the Russian leaders sought to extend their influence (in traditional big-power terms) wherever and whenever they had the opportunity. However, it must not be forgotten that this was occasioned by Washington's determination to reverse the political repercussions of the defeat in Vietnam. The American counter-offensive led to non-ratification of the Salt 2 agreements, the decision to site Cruise missiles in Western Europe, and an undisguised relaunching of the arms race. This development was accelerated after the fall of the Shah. Within the span of five years, the United States had lost the use of two giant military machines in South Vietnam and Iran. The Sandinista victory in Nicaragua, in July 1979, only compounded the siege mentality that was beginning to develop in Washington. Reagan's election a year later was, in part, the

fatal consequence of this mood.

In this context, the Soviet political and military leaders felt that not all that much was to be lost by a direct military intervention in Afghanistan. They saw no reason why they should not benefit from the weakness of the United States in the region, following the overthrow of the Shah. The decision to intervene was taken by Moscow and Moscow alone. It was designed to preserve a regime closely linked to the USSR and to prevent the emergence of a government more friendly to Peking or Washington. Though official Soviet propaganda explained the Kremlin's reasons for invading a sovereign state as a response to 'foreign interference', the actual purpose was to remove Amin and replace him with a more pliant politician. Babrak Karmal's first speech was characteristic: 'Today is the breaking of the machine of torture of Amin and his henchmen, wild butchers, usurpers and murderers of tens of thousands of our countrymen, fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters, children and old people.'<sup>4</sup> The fact that some of the henchmen were included in Karmal's new government must have weakened the impact of the verbal assaults on his predecessor's crimes. Though the release of thousands of political prisoners was undoubtedly popular, all the old problems in fact remained. Karmal pledged not to practise socialism, to abolish all anti-democratic laws, to respect Islam and to permit political parties to function. From this, it would appear that the Russians hoped to establish a national coalition government and restore the status quo ante, though with an increased role for themselves. Such a view displayed complete naivety. To imagine that the Afghan people would rush to welcome Karmal as a 'liberator', when he arrived with 100,000 Soviet troops, was a dangerous misreading of the real situation. In fact, the Soviet invasion was wrong on every count.

There can be little doubt that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was a gross violation of the right of the Afghan people to national self-determination. This right cannot be abrogated simply because the Afghan masses have stubbornly refused to support the PDPA. Moreover, it should be pointed out that the entry of Soviet troops was not even requested by a majority of the PDPA. There is thus no analogy with the military aid provided by the Cubans to Angola and Ethiopia.<sup>5</sup> Nor can it seriously be argued that the Kremlin's decision to occupy Afghanistan was a defensive measure, vital to the security of the Soviet state. The USSR has coexisted satisfactorily with virtually every government in Afghanistan since the twenties. It maintained friendly relations with the Shah, despite the fact that Iran under his rule was the largest US base in that region. The existence of NATO bases in Turkey has not led to a military invasion of that country.

## Mounting opposition

In fact, the entry of Soviet troops further weakened the PDPA regime. Its political credibility reached an all-time low, and it resorted once again to repression. Karmal and his colleagues are regarded by the overwhelming majority of Afghans as 'quislings'. The result is hardly surprising. The Russian presence has united the vast majority of Afghanistan's citizens, despite political, religious or ethnic differences. Apart from the Karmal faction of the PDPA and its tiny network of supporters, almost everyone is hostile to the occupying forces, including even a layer of the *Khalq*. Those sectors of the population in the towns which were previously neutral, or even sympathetic to the PDPA, are now inclined to favour any resistance to the regime. The results of the invasion on the political front have thus been catastrophic for the Afghan left. Despite its total halting of the reforms and its cynical utilization of Islam,<sup>6</sup> the Karmal regime has not been able to establish any legitimacy.

The argument that the Soviet Union and its supporters regard as central to their case is the fact that the resistance is receiving outside backing. They point to the refugee camps in Pakistan, and insist that Zia's regime is training the guerrillas. This is true, but does not resolve the real problem, which is lack of support inside the country. If the PDPA, which comprises several thousand members and sympathizers at most, were an organization based on some degree of mass mobilization (like the South Yemenis in the early sixties, the Angolans and Ethiopians in the seventies, or the Nicaraguans and El Salvadorean FMLN today) it would be able to deal with the Peshawar-based reactionary groups. The key to the impasse does not lie in Peshawar, but in Kabul. The resistance which is active inside the country functions with its own rules, and is largely autonomous of the Peshawar organizations.

Since the Soviet invasion, the Western press, following the lead of the government-controlled media in Pakistan, had published wildly exaggerated reports of rebel activity.<sup>7</sup> Most of these can easily be discounted, yet the reality remains different from that portrayed by propaganda handouts distributed in Kabul. What is beyond dispute is that there have been semi-uprisings in Kandahar and Herat; student demonstrations in Kabul; mutinies inside the Afghan army, followed by substantial desertions and the emergence of small but influential left-wing groupings inside the resistance. Within the country, those opposing the occupation acquire their weapons from the enemy. They have also found it necessary to resort to traditional guerrilla tactics, favoured by the terrain and by the fact that the cities are well patrolled. In June 1980, *Pravda* described the guerrilla methods as follows:

The Afghan rebels have reduced the size of individual fighting units to 30-40 men, and they like to use ambushes at bridges and narrow places ... They blow up a bridge or create an avalanche, and then open fire from high terrain ... If a strong military column is passing, they let the reconnaissance and advance units through. Then they open fire suddenly and with close aim, and scatter quickly ... They mine roads, and then set up rifle and machine-gun cover of the mined area. One can feel the hand of professional foreign instructors.<sup>8</sup>

The last sentence quoted above is clearly designed to explain away the effectiveness of the resistance. The experience of guerrilla war throughout history reveals that, if a movement has real support, then the masses learn very quickly. Even if Pakistan sealed off its border with Afghanistan and prevented the Peshawar-based organizations from operating, the resistance inside the country would not disappear.

Moscow's political position is almost untenable. They have told friendly regimes that, once the Karmal government is able to secure its base and police the country on its own, then the Soviet Union will withdraw. This could only be an argument for a permanent occupation – which one doubts is a serious possibility for either the Politburo or the army chiefs, who between them dominate Soviet politics. In fact, the longer the Soviet soldiers remain, the greater the chances of a massive internal resistance developing and ultimately confronting the Russians with a hard choice: large-scale massacres (which have hitherto been avoided) or withdrawal. While the Western press has concentrated on the extreme right-wing Peshawar-based groups, those who had been following developments in South Asia for many years prior to the Russian invasion have concentrated on the resistance that has developed inside the country. Lawrence Lifschultz, a South Asian specialist for the *Far Eastern Economic Review*, has described the left-wing groups operating against the Russians:

Among the various local internal fronts is woven another, more national, organization that links several resistance groups. It is called the Jebheye Mobarizin Mujahid-i-Afghanistan, which roughly translated means the National Front of Militant Combatants. It was this organization which staged the Bala Hisar mutiny in the Kabul garrison on 6 August 1979. Several leftist organizations are operating within this front and in individual capacities within various regional fronts. These are all organizations which took a critical attitude to the Soviet Union and the Khalq (Masses) and Parcham (Flag) wings of the PDPA during the various debates on 'revisionism' which swirled through Afghani leftist intellectual circles in the late 1960s and 1970s.

Another internal resistance group is the Sazman-e-Azadbaksh Mardom-e-Afghanistan (SAMA, Organization for the Liberation of the Peoples of Afghanistan) which is linked to a number of internal fronts. Still another is the Grohe-Inquilabi Khalqiae Afghanistan (the Revolutionary Group of Afghanistan), which also remains extremely active in the anti-Soviet resistance, particularly in various rural areas. SAMA members appear to be most active in Kabul and other urban centres. Lastly, another Marxist tendency which never regarded itself as either pro-Peking or pro-Moscow, called Millat (The Nation), remains an active element in the present resistance. While a number of these anti-Soviet Marxist tendencies are active within the various internally based united fronts, none can be said to be taking an openly leading role. Given the reputation the Khalq, the Parcham, and the Soviet Army have collectively given the word socialism in Afghanistan over the past year, they recognize it will be quite some time before their concepts can again be discussed in anything like a positive context.<sup>9</sup>

The resistance, like most guerrilla formations during an early stage of development and clarification, is at its weakest during pitched frontal battles. One such clash, the battle of Panjshir Valley, which took place in March 1982, resulted in heavy casualties for the rebels as the Soviet army brought in its heavy artillery and air cavalry. Several hundred civilians and guerrillas were killed, and several hundred captured. But the Russians are perfectly well aware that they have to make decisive gains on the political field as well.

Here they are reviving the time-honoured ruses and strategies of British imperialism. The government department to which the Russians pay the most attention is the Ministry of Tribes and Nationalities, where the key figure is Najibullah, the head of Afghan Intelligence, who works under the direction of his Soviet superiors. The main function of this ministry is to win tribal support. This is attempted by extending lavish financial aid and patronage on the old English model, while developing a youth volunteer corps to provide a network of informers in the countryside. The ministry has had some limited successes, but few believe that such methods can guarantee even a temporary stability.

While the Soviet Union is totally wrong to imagine that the internal resistance would disappear without external aid, it does have truth on its side when it maintains that the United States is not interested in a settlement in Afghanistan. Western interest in Afghanistan postdates the Soviet invasion. Prior to the crossing of the Oxus River by the Russians, no concern with the fate of the country or its people was expressed by Western leaders. Since December 1979, indeed, more books have been published and articles written about Afghanistan than in the entire two centuries and more since the country was first established. It would be difficult to claim that US interest in contemporary Afghanistan is motivated by anything other than a desire to see the Soviet army held down by tribal warriors and humiliated before the entire Third World. In that sense, the Indian prime minister Indira Gandhi has been quite right to deny flatly that the United States was interested in an early settlement of the dispute. The Pentagon and State Department are not unaware of the fact that continued Soviet involvement in South Asia makes their own intervention in Central America much easier. The international situation, in that regard, makes a Soviet withdrawal much more difficult.

Some have argued that if Soviet forces returned to their country, there would be serious danger of a bloodbath of PDPA leaders and supporters. This danger can certainly not be discounted – though, given the relatively small number of party members and sympathizers, it would not be difficult for them to be given temporary exile in Soviet Central Asia, until conditions were ready for their return. But the more important aspect of the problem, in our opinion, has generally been ignored. It is by no means certain that, in the event of a Soviet withdrawal, it is the Peshawar-based fundamentalist groups which would form the government. What is equally possible is that the Afghan army would emerge as the immediate guarantor of stability and would aid the formation of a national government composed largely of ethnic and political groups based inside the country. The inability of the right-wing opposition to unite despite the Russian occupation is, in itself, an interesting reflection on the endemic political instability and inter-group rivalry that afflicts these organizations, with Iran and Saudi Arabia providing alternative poles of attraction. It is likely that whatever government comes to power in Kabul following a Soviet retreat would not win the support of progressive liberals, enlightened social-democrats or socialists anywhere in the world. This may be unpalatable to some, and quite unacceptable to others, but the

lessons are still clear: there can be no short-cuts to socialism. Mass support has to be an essential ingredient. The Afghan people must be permitted to elect and choose their own government. Experience is the best educator of oppressed peoples.

Some writers have evoked another scenario. Fred Halliday, for instance, has written:

In Afghanistan itself events alone will show whether Russia's gamble can in the long run succeed, producing the sort of social advance now seen in Mongolia, where the Communist regime was established in 1921 by comparably direct military intervention in support of a small revolutionary movement.

True, this is one possible option, but in our view it is farfetched. There is very little comparison between Soviet policy towards Outer Mongolia in the twenties and today in Afghanistan. We might allude to several crucial differences.

First, the Soviet regime in 1921 was qualitatively different from the present-day bureaucracy. Even the most hostile anti-Soviet scholars in the West admit that the Communist International was not just a Great Russian manoeuvre designed to facilitate world conquest, but rather an instrument for achieving social change on a global scale. Lenin's advice to the Mongolian revolutionaries was extremely sober and cautious: 'The revolutionaries will have to put in a good deal of work in developing state, economic and cultural activities before the herdsman elements become a proletarian mass.'<sup>10</sup> In 1921, the infant Soviet Republic was immersed in a civil war in which the counter-revolution had the active support of the major capitalist powers. Baron Roman von Ungern-Sternberg, a general of the White armies notorious for his sadism and cruelty, had taken his forces with him into Mongolia. The aim of the operation was to form an anti-Bolshevik alliance with Mongolia as a base. Mongolia itself was governed by a tribal autocrat, Bogd Khan, who was incapable of resisting the White invasion. To complicate matters further, there was a Chinese army also present in the region.

Despite all this, the Soviet Union avoided military intervention in Mongolia until the very last. It first sought to reach an accommodation with the Chinese, and pledged to respect Mongolia's buffer status, provided the Chinese turned their fire on Ungern's crazed Cossacks and rid Mongolia of all forms of autocracy. It was only when the Chinese armies proved incapable of the task that Red Army units crossed into Mongolia in June 1921, in order to defeat the Whites and provide vital aid to the Mongolian partisans in their fight against the Chinese.<sup>11</sup> The troops stayed in the country for four years.

The analogy with Afghanistan in 1979 is, therefore, false on virtually every level. The political orientation of the Russians in Afghanistan today has far more in common with the attempt of a big power to preserve its influence in a semi-colonial country than it does with the Soviet response to events in Outer Mongolia in 1921. It is true that the Russians are militarily capable of assimilating Afghanistan into the Soviet bloc; but the price would be too high both inside the USSR and on a world scale. It would be a big

risk for the Kremlin leaders, for they might thereby unwittingly import political instability into the very heart of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics.

In Pakistan, the main impact of these events has been to strengthen the military regime of Zia-ul-Haq, and to aid those who are arguing for the army to have a semipermanent Turkish-style presence in the political life of the country. The million or more Afghan refugees are being used by Islamabad to bolster its standing in the Gulf States and Washington. On a more fundamental level, however, the debacle in Afghanistan has had extremely negative effects on mass consciousness in the North-West Frontier Province. While the Zia regime remains unpopular, and there is growing resentment against the more privileged sections of the Afghan refugees, the mood is one of resignation and despair. A different outcome in Afghanistan could have led to serious repercussions in the region: a slow movement towards socio-economic reform, coupled with political democracy and a meaningful autonomy for all ethnic minorities, would undoubtedly have aroused the hopes and aspirations of Pakistan's Pushtuns. The contrast with their own existence under a strongly centralist military regime would have been obvious to the inhabitants of every rural centre. This, however, was not to be. The disastrous experience of PDPA power was followed by direct Soviet intervention. This was hardly an inducement to self-activity by the Pushtuns of the NWFP. The results are visible: it is the army and its rule that has benefited from the misadventure in Afghanistan.



### 3.

## The Arrival of the Taliban

2000

Brezhnev's 1979 plunge into Afghanistan was exactly what Carter's National Security chief Zbigniew Brzezinski had been hoping for. The interview published by the French weekly *Le Nouvel Observateur* of 15–21 January 1998 leaves little room for doubt:

*Q:* The former director of the CIA, Robert Gates, stated in his memoirs [*From the Shadows*, 1996] that American intelligence services began to aid the Mujahidin in Afghanistan 6 months before the Soviet intervention. In this period you were the national security adviser to President Carter. You therefore played a role in this affair. Is that correct?

*Brzezinski:* Yes. According to the official version of history, CIA aid to the Mujahidin began during 1980, that is to say, after the Soviet army invaded Afghanistan, 24 Dec. 1979. But the reality, secretly guarded until now, is completely otherwise: Indeed, it was 3 July 1979 that President Carter signed the first directive for secret aid to the opponents of the pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. And that very day, I wrote a note to the president in which I explained to him that in my opinion this aid was going to induce a Soviet military intervention.

*Q:* Despite this risk, you were an advocate of this covert action. But perhaps you yourself desired this Soviet entry into war and looked to provoke it?

*B:* It isn't quite that. We didn't push the Russians to intervene, but we knowingly increased the probability that they would.

*Q:* When the Soviets justified their intervention by asserting that they intended to fight against a secret involvement of the United States in Afghanistan, people didn't believe them. However, there was a basis of truth. You don't regret anything today?

*B:* Regret what? That secret operation was an excellent idea. It had the effect of drawing the Russians into the Afghan trap and you want me to regret it? The day that the Soviets officially crossed the border, I wrote to President Carter: We now have the opportunity of giving to the USSR its Vietnam War. Indeed, for almost 10 years, Moscow had to carry on a war unsupportable by the government, a conflict that brought about the demoralisation and finally the breakup of the Soviet Empire.

*Q:* And neither do you regret having supported Islamic fundamentalism, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?

*B:* What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? A few crazed Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?<sup>1</sup>

The Russian leaders fell headlong into the trap. Politburo documents from that period make interesting reading. Till two days before the decision was taken, the entire Politburo was opposed to military intervention. Something happened to change their minds. What this was has yet to be revealed, but the answer probably lies in the CIA archives. What is most likely is that US disinformation implying that the Afghan leader,

Hafizullah Amin, was on the verge of changing allegiances played a big part in shifting the Politburo. Moscow did state that Amin was a CIA agent, but at the time this was dismissed as the usual blackening of names that precedes all Big Power interventions. The entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan transformed an unpleasant civil war funded by Washington into a jihad enabling the mujahideen ('holy warriors') to appear as the only defenders of Afghan sovereignty against the foreign army of occupation. Brzezinski was soon posing for photographs in a Pathan turban on the Khyber Pass and shouting 'Allah is on your side', while Afghan fundamentalists were being feted as freedom-fighters in the White House and Downing Street.

Washington's role in the Afghan war has never been a secret, but few citizens in the West were aware that the United States utilized the intelligence services of Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan to create, train, finance and arm an international network of Islamic militants to fight the Russians in Afghanistan. A former Middle East correspondent for the *Christian Science Monitor* and ABC Television, John Cooley, who gained easy access to retired and serving officials in the states mobilized, has written a fascinating account of this final episode of the Cold War.<sup>2</sup> Although he does not always cite his sources, and some of what he says should be viewed with scepticism, his information corroborates much that was widely bruited in Pakistan during the eighties. According to his account, the US drew in other powers to the anti-Soviet jihad. Cooley contends that Chinese help was not restricted to the provision of weapons, but extended to the provision of listening-posts in Xinjiang, and even dispatch of Uighur volunteers whose costs were covered by the CIA. Some form of Chinese assistance was privately always acknowledged by the generals in Islamabad, though Beijing has never admitted it. Cooley even suggests the PRC has not been immune to the post-Soviet-withdrawal-syndrome: Islamic militants turning on the powers that armed them. However, the country not mentioned by Cooley is Israel, whose role in Afghanistan remains one of the best kept secrets of the war. In 1985 a young Pakistani journalist working for *The Muslim*, Mansur, accidentally stumbled across a group of Israeli 'advisers' at the bar of the Intercontinental Hotel in Peshawar. Aware that the news would be explosive for the Zia dictatorship, he informed his editor, some friends and a visiting WTN correspondent. A few days later the mujahideen, alerted by Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), captured and killed him.

In the course of his account, Cooley describes a meeting in 1978 in Beirut with Raymond Close, former station chief of the CIA in Saudi Arabia, who clearly charmed him. If he had questioned him more closely, he would have discovered that Close had previously been posted to Pakistan, where his father had been a missionary teacher at the Forman Christian College in Lahore. His son was fluent in Persian, Urdu and Arabic. In nominal retirement, he would have been ideally placed to help orchestrate operations in Afghanistan, and their back-up in Pakistan, where the Bank of Credit and Commerce International (BCCI) functioned as a channel for CIA funding of clandestine

activities, and laundering profits from the heroin trade. Cooley's argument that the United States and its relays in the region paid a heavy price for victory in Afghanistan is indisputable. In Egypt, Sadat was executed by Islamist soldiers as he was taking the salute at a military parade. In Pakistan, Zia – not to speak of his fellow-passengers Arnold Raphael, US ambassador in Islamabad, and General Rahman, of Pakistan's ISI – died in a mysterious plane crash that few believe was an accident. The five thousand US marines still in Riyadh are not there to threaten Saddam Hussein, but to defend the Saudi Royal Family.

Afghanistan itself, a decade after Soviet withdrawal, is still awash with factional violence. Veterans of the war have helped to destabilize Egypt, Algeria, the Philippines, Sudan, Pakistan, Chechnya, Daghestan and Saudi Arabia. They have bombed targets in the United States and declared their own war against the Great Satan. Osama bin Laden whose icon adorns the jacket of Cooley's book, has become the bugbear of US official and popular fantasies – after starting his career as a Saudi building tycoon with links to the CIA. When the Pakistani generals pleaded with the Saudi dynasty to send a princeling from the Royal Family to lead the holy war, he was sent as a friend of the palace instead. Doing better than expected, he was to surprise his patrons in Riyadh and Foggy Bottom. Cooley concludes with the following advice to the US government:

When you decide to go to war against your main enemy, take a good, long look at the people behind you whom you chose as your friends, allies or mercenary fighters. Look well to see whether these allies already have unsheathed their knives – and are pointing them at your own back.

His pleas are unlikely to move Zbigniew Brzezinski, who repudiates regrets.

Ahmed Rashid's *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia* is the first credible account of the rise to power of the Taliban.<sup>3</sup> The author is a courageous Pakistani journalist who has been reporting from Afghanistan since 1978, and refused to be intimidated or suborned in his pursuit of truths inconvenient to the powers that be. After the Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the de facto alliance of states that had backed different factions of the mujahideen soon fell apart. Islamabad did not want any broad government of reconstruction, preferring – with US and Saudi support – to impose its own pawn, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, on the country. The result was a series of vicious civil wars, punctuated by unstable ceasefires, as Hazaras (backed by Iran), Ahmed Shah Masud (backed by France), and the Uzbek general Dostum (backed by Russia) resisted. When it became obvious that Hekmatyar's forces were incapable of defeating these foes, the Pakistan army shifted its backing to the students it had been training in religious schools in the North-West Frontier since 1980. By 1992 the chief minister of the North-West Frontier Province could remark that the juvenile fanatics in the madrassahs might or might not 'liberate' Afghanistan, but they would certainly destabilize what was left of Pakistan.

## Taliban characteristics

The Taliban were orphans of the war against the Russian infidel. Trained and dispatched across the border by the ISI, they were to be hurled into battle against Muslims they were told were not true Muslims. Rashid captures their outlook vividly:

These boys were a world apart from the Mujaheddin whom I had got to know during the 1980s – men who could recount their tribal and clan lineages, remembered their abandoned farms and valleys with nostalgia and recounted legends and stories from Afghan history. These boys were from a generation who had never seen their country at peace. They had no memories of their tribes, their elders, their neighbours nor the complex ethnic mix of peoples that was their homeland. They admired war because it was the only occupation they could possibly adapt to. Their simple belief in a messianic, puritan Islam was the only prop they could hold onto and which gave their lives some meaning.

This deracinated fanaticism – a kind of bleak Islamic cosmopolitanism – made the Taliban a more effective fighting force than any of their localized adversaries. Although Pushtun in origin, the Taliban leaders could be sure their young soldiers would not succumb to the divisive lure of ethnic or tribal loyalties, of which even the Afghan left had found it difficult to rid itself. When they began their sweep from the frontier, a war-weary population often greeted them with an element of relief: citizens in the larger towns had lost faith in all the other forces that had been battling at the expense of civilian life since the Soviet departure.

If the Taliban had simply offered peace and bread, they might have won lasting popular support. Soon, however, the character of the regime they were bent on imposing became clear to the bewildered population. Women were banned from working, collecting their children from school and, in some cities, even from shopping: effectively, they were confined to their homes. Girls' schools were closed down. The Taliban had been taught in their madrassahs to steer clear of the temptation of women – male brotherhood was a condition of tight military discipline. Puritanism extended to repression of sexual expression of any kind; although this was a region where homosexual practices had been common for centuries, recruits guilty of the 'crime' were executed by the Taliban commanders. Outside their ranks, dissent of any sort was brutally crushed with a reign of terror unmatched by any preceding regime. The Taliban creed is a variant of the Deobandi Islam professed by a sectarian strain in Pakistan – more extreme even than Wahabbism, since not even the Saudi rulers have deprived half their population of all civic rights in the name of the Koran. The severity of the Afghan mullahs has been denounced by Sunni clerics at al-Azhar in Cairo and Shiite theologians in Qom as a disgrace to the Prophet. The great Pakistani poet Faiz, whose ancestors came from Afghanistan, could have written his lines from prison about the land of his forebears:

*Bury me underneath your pavements, oh my country*

*Where no person now dare walk with head held high,  
Where true lovers bringing you their homage  
Walk furtively in fear of life and limb;  
A new-style law-and-order is in use  
Stones and bricks are locked up and dogs turned loose –  
Villains are judges and usurpers both,  
Who speaks for us?  
Where shall we seek justice?*

Certainly not from the Commander-in-Chief in the White House or his aide-de-camp in Downing Street. Little was heard from these pulpits for human rights as the women of Afghanistan were subjected to a vile persecution. Rashid notes tartly that a few mild words of criticism from Hillary Clinton were more designed to soothe American feminists during the Lewinsky scandal – not a very demanding task – than to alter the situation in Kabul or Kandahar or Herat, ancient towns where women had never before been reduced to such depths of misery. American business was less hypocritical. Responding to complaints about the pipeline it is constructing from Central Asia through Afghanistan to Pakistan, a spokesman for the US oil giant Unocal explained why capitalism is gender-blind: ‘We disagree with some US feminist groups on how Unocal should respond to this issue ... We are guests in countries who have sovereign rights and their own political, social, religious beliefs. Walking away from Afghanistan would not solve the problem.’ Nor, of course, improve the rate of return on its projected investments.

Rashid makes clear that the Taliban could not have swept across Afghanistan without the military and financial backing of Islamabad, sustained in turn by Washington. The top Taliban commander Mullah Omar, today the one-eyed ruler of Kabul (and Bin Laden’s father-in-law), was long on the direct payroll of the Pakistani regime. The conquest of power, however, has had an intoxicating impact on the Afghan zealots. The Taliban have their own goal for the region – a Federation of Islamic Republics that would enforce a *Pax Talibana* from Samarkand to Karachi. They now control sufficient revenues from the heroin trade to fund their land campaigns. But they want access to the sea and have made no secret of their belief that Pakistan with its nuclear arms will fall to them one day. They know they enjoy strong support at the lowest and highest levels of the Pakistan army. Lt. Gen. Mohammed Aziz, Chief of the General Staff, and Lt. Gen. Mahmoud Ahmed, the director of the ISI, the two senior commanders who currently flank Pakistan’s more secular-minded military dictator, Pervez Musharraf, are well known for their Taliban sympathies. The sad and squalid story of the wreckage of Afghanistan is told well by Cooley and Rashid, but the tragedy is far from over.

## 4.

# 'Try and Disarm Us if You Can'

1999

Islamabad remains the official capital, but these days real power in Pakistan is exercised from the Punjabi capital of Lahore. This city, dry, warm and abundant, where I spent the first twenty years of my life and which I still love, is always changing, usually for the worse. The old Mall at its lower end, near Kim's Gun, was once the haunt of bohemians of every sort. Poets, artists, left-wing intellectuals, film directors could be seen at their tables in the Coffee House, cursing the dictator of the day or discussing the merits of blank verse as they dipped their samosas in a mint-chilli compote and sipped tea throughout the month of Ramadan. That was more than thirty years ago. Queen Victoria's statue, which once sat in front of the Punjab Assembly building, has long since gone. Some imaginative soul decided to replace history with fantasy. A giant stone Koran is poised precariously on the plinth where the Queen once sat.

The Mall is Lahore's principal thoroughfare, linking the Civil Lines and cantonment of the old colonial city to the bazaars and monuments of the Mughal Empire. It is choked with cars and taxis moving at five miles an hour. A much-favoured taxi and rickshaw pin-up these days, I noticed, is Osama bin Laden. The State Department's 'most wanted terrorist' is well on his way to becoming a Pakistani hero. Contrary to what outsiders may think, his popularity is not confined to the plebeian sections of the city: many middle-class students are searching for extreme solutions in the guise of religion, and not just in Lahore. This city, more than any other, is an accurate guide to what is going on in the rest of the country, because Pakistan, since the defection of Bangladesh, is really an extended Punjab. The provinces of Sind, Baluchistan and the Frontier are sparsely populated and largely tribal.

It is the abdication of its traditional role by a corrupt and decaying state, combined with the surreal neo-liberal economic prescriptions handed down by the politburos of the IMF and World Bank, that has created the space for political Islam. In successive general elections people have voted against hardline religious parties. (The Pakistani electorate casts proportionately fewer votes than the Israeli electorate for religious extremists.) Until now, Islamism has derived its strength from state patronage rather than popular support. The ascendancy of religious groups is the legacy of General Zia, who

received political, military and financial support from the United States and Britain throughout his eleven years as dictator. The West needed Zia to fight the Afghan war against the former Soviet Union. Nothing else mattered. The CIA, for example, turned a blind eye to the sale of heroin to fund the Mujahideen, and the number of officially registered heroin addicts in Pakistan rose from 130 in 1977 to 30,000 in 1988.

In the same period, a network of madrassahs (religious boarding schools) was established throughout the country. Initially, most of these were funded by foreign aid from a variety of Islamic sources. Since board and lodging were free, it was not only the children of Afghan refugees who flocked to them: poor peasant families were only too happy to donate a son to the madrassahs. It would be a mouth fewer to feed at home and the boy would be educated; as they saw it, he might find a job in the city or, if he was really lucky, in one of the Gulf States.

These schools, however, had no interest in education in a secular sense: what they provided was a new kind of 'religious scholarship'. Together with verses from the Koran (to be learned by rote), the children were taught to banish all doubts. The only truth was divine truth and the only code of conduct was to be found in the Koran and the Hadith. Virtue lay in unthinking obedience. Anyone who rebelled against the imam rebelled against Allah. The madrassahs had a single function: they were nurseries designed to produce fanatics. The primers, for example, stated that the Urdu letter *jeem* stood for 'jihad'; *tay* for *tope* ('cannon'); *kaaf* for 'Kalashnikov' and *khay* for *khoon* ('blood'). The older pupils were instructed in the use of sophisticated hand weapons and taught how to make and plant bombs. ISI agents provided training and supervision. They also observed the development of the more promising students, or *taliban*, who were picked out and sent for more specialized training at secret army camps, the better to fight the holy war against the unbelievers in Afghanistan.

Pakistan's oldest Islamic party, the Jamaat-i-Islami, grew in influence during the Zia years. Its leaders assumed that they would run the madrassahs. The party has always prided itself on its cadre organization, based on the Leninist model of small cells, and has shunned mass membership – although this may have been because it, in turn, was shunned by the masses. With the advent of the madrassahs, its leaders thought their time had come – the students, they believed, were all potential recruits – but they were to be disappointed. Since dollars were freely available thanks to the war, different Islamic factions emerged and began to compete with each other for mastery in the schools and a division of the spoils. The ISI became the arbiter of intra-religious disputes and favoured some groups against others.

For a time the Afghan war consumed the energies of the rival religious groupings. After the first, Cold War version was over, the Pakistani state refused to accept a coalition government in Afghanistan. It was Benazir Bhutto's government that unleashed the Taliban, backed by Pakistan army commando units, in an attempt to take Kabul. The US, fearful of Iranian influence in the region, backed the decision. The dragon seeds

sown in 2,500 madrassahs produced a crop of 225,000 fanatics ready to kill and die for their faith when ordered to do so by their religious leaders. General Naseerullah Babar, Pakistan's minister for the interior, confided to friends that the only solution to the Taliban menace inside Pakistan was to give the extremists their own country and this, he said, was what he had decided to do. The argument was disingenuous at the time, but in the light of what has happened over the last two years, he deserves to be tried as a war criminal.

With the Cold War at an end, the militant Islamic groups had served their purpose and, unsurprisingly, the US no longer felt the need to supply them with funds and weaponry. Overnight they became violently anti-American and began to dream of revenge. Pakistan's political and military leaders, who had served the US loyally and continuously from 1951 onwards, also felt humiliated by Washington's indifference. 'Pakistan was the condom the Americans needed to enter Afghanistan,' a retired general told me. 'We've served our purpose and they think we can just be flushed down the toilet.'

The Pakistan army – one of the Pentagon's spoilt brats in Asia – was loath to see the country relegated to the status of Kuwait. That was the meaning of last year's nuclear tantrum. It had the desired effect: Pakistan is back on the 'B list' of countries in the US State Department. On 29 November, the foreign minister Sartaj Aziz attempted to soothe Western opinion. 'I see no possibility of an accidental nuclear war between Pakistan and India. Pakistan has an effective control and command system.' This is pure nonsense, but even if it were true, imagine what would happen if the Taliban took over the Pakistan army. Every political leader in Pakistan is aware of the danger. Nawaz Sharif is trying to pre-empt political Islam by stealing some of its clothes, but this is a tactic that rarely works.

The irony of the present situation is that religion in the Punjab was always a relaxed affair. The old tradition of Sufi mysticism, with its emphasis on individual communion with the creator and its hostility to preachers, had deep roots in the countryside. But the annual festivals at the tombs of the Sufi saints, during which the participants sang, danced, drank, inhaled bhang and fornicated to their hearts' content, as they had done for centuries, were forbidden when General Zia placed the country under martial law. In their place came a peculiarly non-Punjabi form of religious extremism, approved by Washington, funded by Saudi petro-dollars and carefully nourished by Zia.

Ninety per cent of Pakistan's Muslims are Sunnis. The rest are mainly Shi'as. The Sunnis themselves are divided into two major schools of thought. The Deobandis represent orthodoxy. The Barelvis believe in a more synthetic Islam, defined and changed by local conditions. For many years their disputes were literary, or took the form of public debates. No longer. Every faction now lays absolute claim to Islam. Disputes are no longer settled by discussion, but by machine-guns and massacres. Some Deobandi factions want Shi'ism declared a heresy and the Shi'as physically eliminated.



A war between the sects has been raging for nearly three years. The Sunni Sipah-e-Sahaba (Soldiers of the First Four Caliphs) have attacked Shi'a mosques in the heart of Lahore and massacred the faithful at prayer. The Shi'as have responded in kind. They formed the Sipah-e-Muhammed (Soldiers of Muhammed), got Iranian backing and began to exact a gruesome revenge. Several hundred people have died in these intra-Muslim massacres, mainly Shi'as.

In January this year, an armed Taliban faction seized a group of villages in the Hangu district of Pakistan's North-West Frontier. They declared the area to be under 'Islamic law' and promptly organized the public destruction of TV sets and dish antennae in the village of Zargari. This was followed by the burning of 3,000 'obscene' video and audio cassettes in the small square in Lukki. There is something comical in this hostility to television – it reminds me of a Situationist spectacle in the sixties – but humour is not something associated with the Taliban. 'The hands and feet of thieves will be chopped off and all criminals brought to justice in accordance with Islamic laws,' the leader of the movement, Hussain Jalali, announced after the burning of the TV sets.

Jalali's aim is to extend the Afghan experience to Pakistan. 'What can we do?' a supporter of the Sharif brothers asked me, wringing his hands in despair. 'These bastards are all armed!' I pointed out that some of the bastards were being armed by the government to create mayhem in neighbouring Kashmir, and that our bloated army was also armed. Why wasn't it asked to disarm these groups? Here the conversation ended. For it is no secret that religious extremists have penetrated the army at every level. What distinguishes the new extremists from the old-style religious groups is that they want to seize power and for that they need the army.

Ahle-Hadis, one of the most virulent groups, is a creation of the ISI. It wants to see the Saudi model implanted in Pakistan, but without the monarchy. It has supporters and mosques everywhere, including Britain and the US, whose aim is to supply cadres and money for the worldwide jihad. This group is drawn from the most orthodox of the Sunni sects; it doesn't have a mass following, but it does have Rafiq Tarrar's support and government ministers grace its meetings. Its sub-office is at 5 Chamberlaine Road in Lahore. I was tempted to go and interview them, but the sight of thirty heavily-armed guards made me change my mind. The group's armed wing, Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (Soldiers of Medina), could not exist without the patronage of the army. It has a membership of 50,000 militants and is the leading participant in the jihad to 'liberate' Indian Kashmir. Its 'soldiers' are trained by the army at eight special camps in Azad (Pakistani-controlled) Kashmir, funded by Saudi Arabia and the government of Pakistan. The movement recruits teenagers from poor families for the holy war and has lost several hundred members in Kashmir. The government pays 50,000 rupees (about £600) for each corpse returned from the battlefield: 15,000 go to the family of the 'martyr' and the rest helps to fund the organization.

The Harkatul Ansar (Volunteers Movement), once funded by the US and backed by

the ISI, was declared a terrorist organization by the State Department last year, and promptly changed its name to Harkatul Mujahideen. Its fighters were among the most dedicated Taliban and it has shifted its training camps from the Punjab to Afghanistan. Osama bin Laden is its leader. He continues to maintain close contacts with the ISI and his supporters have warned the government that any attempt to abduct him or ban his organization would lead to an immediate civil war in Pakistan. They boast that the army will never agree to be used against them because it contains too many of their supporters.

Both these groups want to take over Pakistan, but not in harness. Each dreams of an Islamic Federation, which will impose a Pax Talibana stretching from Lahore to Samarkand, but avoiding the 'Heretics' Republic of Iran'. For all their incoherence and senseless rage, their message is attractive to those who yearn for some semblance of order in their lives. If the fanatics promise to feed them and educate their (male) children they are prepared to forgo the delights of CNN and BBC World.

The alternative to an Islamic Federation is to mend the breach with India. The recent visit to Lahore of the Indian prime minister, Atal Vajpayee, was welcomed by business interests and an otherwise critical press. There is a great deal of talk about a new permanent settlement: an EU-style arrangement incorporating India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, an opening of the frontiers and a no-war pact between India and Pakistan. This is undoubtedly the most rational solution on offer, but it would necessitate the disarming of the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba and other groups. The Indian prime minister demanded that this be done as a gesture of goodwill. 'Try and disarm us, if you can,' the Lashkar-e-Tayyaba retorted. 'If you do, we will have to do now what we were planning to do in two years' time. It's up to you.' It is this desire for a head-on clash, whatever its probable outcome, that distinguishes the new wave of Islamic militants in Pakistan. Mercifully, they still constitute a minority in the country, but all that could change if nothing else does.

## II

# Operation Enduring Disaster 2001–08

## 5.

# Into Pakistan's Maelstrom

10 October 2001

For the last three weeks Pakistan's military rulers have been trying to convince the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden and avoid the catastrophe being prepared. They failed. Since Osama is the son-in-law of Mullah Omar, the leader of the Taliban, this was hardly surprising. The more interesting question is whether Pakistan, after withdrawing its own soldiers, officers and pilots from Afghanistan, has managed to split the Taliban and withdraw some of those totally dependent on its patronage. This would be a key aim of the military regime to maintain its influence in a future coalition government in Kabul.

Relations between Pakistan and the Taliban leadership have been tense this year. Last year, in an effort to cement Pak-Afghan friendship, Pakistan dispatched a football team to play a friendly against Afghanistan. As the two teams faced each other in the stadium at Kabul with the referee about to blow the opening whistle, bearded security forces entered and announced that the Pakistani footballers were indecently attired. They were wearing normal football shorts, whereas the Afghans were dressed in surreal long shorts which came down well below the knees. Perhaps it was felt that the rippling thighs of the Pakistanis might cause upheavals in the all-male audience. Who knows? The Pakistani players were arrested, their heads were shaved and they were all flogged in public while the stadium audience was forced to chant verses from the Koran. This was Mullah Omar's friendly warning shot to the Pakistani military to assert the independence of his leadership and his loyalty to Bin Laden.

The bombing of Kabul and Kandahar by the United States and its ever-loyal British ally will not have seriously affected the fighting strength of the Taliban. The combined force – including Bin Laden's special brigade of Arabs – is now reported to consist of 30,000–40,000 hardened veterans. Nonetheless, the Taliban are effectively encircled and isolated. Their defeat is inevitable. Both Pakistan and Iran are ranged against them on two important borders. It is unlikely they will last more than a few weeks. Obviously some of their forces will go to the mountains and wait till the West withdraws before attacking the new regime, likely to be installed in Kabul when the octogenarian King Zahir Shah is moved from his comfortable Roman villa to less salubrious surroundings in the wreckage of Kabul.

The Northern Alliance backed by the West is marginally less religious than the Taliban, but its record on everything else is just as abysmal. Over the last year they have taken over the marketing of heroin on a large scale, making a mockery of Blair's claim that this war is also a war against drugs. The notion that they would represent an advance on the Taliban is laughable. Their first instinct will be revenge against their opponents. However, the Alliance has been weakened in recent days by the defection of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, once the favourite 'freedom-fighter' of the West, welcomed in the White House and Downing Street by Reagan and Thatcher. This man has now decided to back the Taliban against the infidel. Sustaining a new client state in Afghanistan will not be an easy affair given local and regional rivalries. General Musharraf has already told Pakistanis he will not accept a regime dominated by the Northern Alliance. This is hardly surprising since his army has been fighting the Alliance for over a decade.

Till now the Pakistan army (unlike its Arab counterparts) has avoided a coup mounted by captains and colonels. It has always been the generals who have seized power and kept the army united, largely by sharing out the pieces of silver. It is an open question whether that will be enough on this occasion. A lot will depend on the aftermath of the current war. A major concern for the overwhelming majority of Pakistanis is that the Taliban, cornered and defeated in their own country, will turn on Pakistan and wreak havoc on its cities and social fabric. Peshawar, Quetta, Lahore and Karachi are especially vulnerable. By that time the West, having scored a 'victory', will turn a blind eye to the mess left behind.

As for the supposed aim of this operation – the capture of Bin Laden – this is unlikely to be easy. He is well-protected in the remote Pamir mountains and might well disappear. But victory will still be proclaimed. The West will rely on the short memory of its citizens. But let us even suppose that Bin Laden is captured and killed. How will this help the 'war against terrorism'? Other individuals will decide to mimic the events of September 11 in different ways.

More importantly, the focus will shift to the Middle East. In Saudi Arabia fierce factional struggle within the royal family is in progress. Saudiologists have long recognized that Crown Prince Abdullah is close to the Wahhabi clerics. But he will still face a bitterly angry population – as will Hosni Mubarak of Egypt. The prospect of eruptions in these two countries is growing and the consequences of the Anglo-American war in Afghanistan are likely to be incendiary.

## 6.

# The King of Greater Afghanistan

30 November 2001

The Pandora's box of the American Empire is still open, releasing its monsters and fears on a world still not fully under its control. The Northern Alliance is a confederation of monsters. Attaching dissidents to the chains of a tank and crushing them, executing defenceless prisoners, raping men and women, these are all in a day's work for the guardians of the heroin trade. Blemishes of yester-year? No such luck. We've been spared pictures of many of these atrocities, but Arab TV viewers knew what was going on long before the massacre of Mazar-i-Sharif. The Geneva Convention is being violated every single day.

The facts are these: the situation in Afghanistan is inherently unstable. Turf wars have already begun in 'liberated' Kabul, though open clashes have been avoided: the West is watching and money has been promised. But once the marines depart, with or without the head of Bin Laden, the alliance will discover that there is no money for anything except waging war. Schools and hospitals and homes are not going to be sprouting next spring or the one after in Afghanistan or Kosovo. And if the eighty-seven-year-old King Zahir Shah is wheeled over from Rome, what then?

Nothing much, thinks the West, except to convince the Pashtuns that their interests are being safeguarded. But judging from past form, Zahir Shah might not be satisfied with the status quo. A document from the German Foreign Office, dated 3 October 1940, makes fascinating reading. It is from State Secretary Weizsacker to the German legation in Kabul and is worth quoting in some detail:

The Afghan minister called on me on September 30 and conveyed greetings from his minister president, as well as their good wishes for a favourable outcome of the war. He inquired whether German aims in Asia coincided with Afghan hopes; he alluded to the oppression of Arab countries and referred to the 15m Afghans [Pashtuns, mainly in the North-West Frontier Province] who were forced to suffer on Indian territory.

My statement that Germany's goal was the liberation of the peoples of the region referred to, who were under the British yoke ... was received with satisfaction by the Afghan minister. He stated that justice for Afghanistan would be created only when the country's frontier had been extended to the Indus; this would also apply if India should secede from Britain ... The Afghan remarked that Afghanistan had given proof of her loyal attitude by vigorously resisting English pressure to break off relations with Germany.

The king who had dispatched the minister to Berlin was the twenty-six-year-old Zahir

Shah. The minister-president was his uncle Sardar Muhammad Hashim Khan.

What is interesting in the German dispatch is not so much the evidence of the Afghan king's sympathy for the Nazi regime. It is the desire for a Greater Afghanistan via the incorporation of what is now Pakistan's North-West Frontier Province and its capital Peshawar. Zahir Shah's return is being strongly resisted by Pakistan. They know that the king never accepted the Durand Line, dividing Afghanistan and Pakistan, not even as a temporary border. They are concerned that he might encourage Pashtun nationalism.

Islamabad's decision to hurl the Taliban into battle and take Kabul in 1996 was partially designed to solve the Pashtun question. Religion might transcend ethnic nationalism. Instead the two combined. A proto-Taliban group, Tehrik-e-Nifaz-i-Shariah-e-Mohammed (TNSM) seized a large chunk of the Pakistan tourist resort of Swat during Benazir Bhutto's government and imposed 'Islamic punishments', including amputations. She was helpless to act, but last week Musharraf imprisoned the TNSM leader, Soofi Mohammed Saeed.

Not all the repercussions of this crude war of revenge are yet to the fore, but the surface calm in Pakistan is deceptive. With armed fundamentalists of the Lashkare-Taiba threatening to take on the government if attempts are made to disarm them, the question of how much support they enjoy within the military establishment becomes critical. The inflow of US aid and the lifting of sanctions has persuaded Musharraf's opponents within the army to leave him in place, but for how long?

Add to that the appalling situation in Kashmir with a monthly casualty rate higher than Palestine, where Indian soldiers and Pakistani-infiltrated jihadis confront each other over the corpses of Kashmiri innocents. If Delhi were to use the 'war against terrorism' as a precedent, the subcontinent could implode.

## 7.

# The Dam Will Burst Sooner or Later

2002

After 11 September, Pakistan's military rulers attempted to convince the Taliban to hand over Osama bin Laden and avoid the catastrophe in store. They failed. The more interesting question was whether Pakistan, after withdrawing its own soldiers, officers and pilots from Afghanistan, had managed to split the Taliban and withdraw those sections totally dependent on its patronage. This was a key aim of the military regime if it was to maintain its influence in a future coalition government in Kabul. It succeeded in pulling out a large chunk of the Taliban fighters. Some returned to Pakistan. Others were instructed to shave their beards and join some of the factions jockeying for power in Kabul.

I've never believed in the myth of Afghan invincibility. True, they defeated the British twice during the nineteenth century, but helicopters, bomber jets and cruise missiles had not then been invented. The Soviet army was defeated because of the massive military and economic aid provided by the United States and the direct military intervention of Pakistan's ISI. The notion that the Taliban could resist this assault was laughable.

Sustaining a new client state in Afghanistan will not be an easy affair given local and regional rivalries. The first attempt was made after the year-long mujahideen civil war that had followed the collapse of the PDPA regime. In March 1993 the Saudi king Pakistan and Iran brought the warring Islamic factions together. A detailed semi-constitutional plan based on power-sharing and the creation of a national army which would take over all heavy weaponry was solemnly agreed in Islamabad. It was also agreed that an Election Commission would be set up to prepare the election of a Grand Constituent Assembly, which would vote on a new constitution. Even though rival warlords could barely conceal their distaste at being present in the same room, the Pakistani prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, was so excited by his own success that he suggested they all fly off together to Mecca and seal the agreement in the Holy City itself. The warlords – leaders of the nine mujahideen factions – smiled benignly and boarded the plane. The Mecca Accord was duly signed in the presence of King Fahd who was *compos mentis* at the time. Nawaz Sharif told the Afghans that history and Allah would never forgive anyone who violated an agreement signed in Mecca. But it



didn't work. Hardly had they returned to Afghanistan than fighting broke out between the main factions. General Syed Razaqat of the Pakistan army provided an interesting, if inadequate, explanation for the civil war:

Five evils gradually slipped out of the holy womb of jihad: weakening of Afghan identity, sharpened focus on ethnicity, emergence of sectarian aspect, the cult of warlordism, and the habit of foreign powers to interfere in the internal affairs of Afghanistan. The first undermined the pride, which all people of Afghanistan had in being known and called Afghans.

Much more had emerged from the 'holy womb': an addiction to ready supplies of cash, weaponry and heroin. The first two had dried up once the Soviet Union was defeated. The third remained, and all the mujahideen factions were involved in it in one capacity or another: cultivation, processing, distribution. The factions' supply routes varied. The Pashtuns used the Pakistani port of Karachi. The Hazaras and Tajiks found it easier to work with the powerful Russian mafia which controlled distribution in all the former Soviet republics and had a massive base to supply Europe in Albania and, later, Kosovo. Rivalry between the groups was not based so much on ethnic hostility as simple greed. When the Taliban did a deal with the United States in 2000 and agreed to burn the poppy fields under their control in return for \$43 million, their rivals in the Northern Alliance were delighted. They now had the monopoly. The Russian mafia had defeated the heroin merchants of Pakistan.

The old warlords who had assembled in Mecca in 1993 were not in evidence at Bonn in 2001. Some were dead. Others preferred to stay at home. This time their representatives, carefully vetted by Western intelligence agencies, handpicked by a veteran UN fixer, Lakhdar Brahimi, and carefully dressed in smart Western suits, were quite happy to mouth a rhetoric that pleased their new hosts. In Mecca, they had thanked Almighty Allah for their triumph against the infidel. This time they were thanking the 'infidel' for their victory against the 'bad seed of Noah' and 'false Muslims'. This time they spoke in honeyed tones of 'one country, one nation, at peace with itself, marching confidently on the road to modernity, and no threat to its neighbours'.

Napoleon's mother, on being congratulated by courtiers for having so many children seated on the thrones of Europe, responded tartly: 'But will it last?'

The facts are these: the situation in Afghanistan is inherently unstable. Only fantasists could suggest otherwise. The notion that the Alliance in its present form could last out a few years is risible. Turf wars have already begun in 'liberated' Kabul, though open clashes have been avoided. There is too much at stake. The West is watching. Money has been promised. Putin and Khatami are urging caution. But the dam will burst sooner rather than later. The former CIA collaborator Hamid Karzai can always get a job modelling chic Pashtunwear in North America and Europe, the US pro-consul Zalmay Khalizad can return to the White House or Unocal, but what of the dying and suffering people of Afghanistan? Once the Marines depart, with or without the head

of Bin Laden, the Alliance will discover that there is no money for anything these days except waging war. The boy-scout propaganda that 'we're remaking the world' is designed for domestic consumption. Schools and hospitals and homes are not going to be sprouting next spring or the one after in Afghanistan or Kosovo. I fear that this story, too, is not done.

8.

## So, Was It Worth It?

October 2003

### An Exchange with Mike O'Brien, UK Minister for Trade, Investment and Foreign Affairs

Dear Mike,

The difference between Britain and Afghanistan, of course, is that in Afghanistan there is a strong opposition. Karzai is so confident of his popularity in Kabul (his writ does not extend beyond the capital) that no Afghan is permitted to guard him. Elsewhere the various factions of the Northern Alliance and remnants of the Taliban control the country.

The aim of the war and occupation was to capture and kill Osama bin Laden and Mullah Omar and shackle al-Qaeda. The result has been a dismal failure. The video earlier this year of Osama and his deputy wearing their Chitrali hats and strolling cheerfully in the Hindukush was a cheeky reminder that on this front the war has been a dismal failure.

Removing the Taliban from power was always a secondary aim. The condition of the population is certainly not better today than before the war. The reconstruction has turned out to be a joke. The women's liberation talked about so eagerly at the time by the first ladies of Bush and Blair has come to nought. More money is being spent on feeding and housing Western troops than on the war-weary citizens of Afghanistan. And it will end badly, just like the Soviet intervention did in the eighties. I fear another civil war is waiting in the wings.

Yours, Tariq

Dear Tariq,

So scathing, so cynical, so wrong. When I drove through the suburbs of western Kabul, every building I passed had been damaged by twenty years of civil war. You impressively described those wars in your book, *The Clash of Fundamentalisms*.

But I saw a lot of people in those derelict homes making bricks and rebuilding. They were building because they had hope that the future could be better. I talked to people who were so glad that the Taliban were gone that they had tears in their eyes; women

who no longer had to wear the burqa and who could send their daughters to school. I went to a school for the blind to present the children with some braille machines because the Taliban had destroyed them all. 'Failure', you say. It's not what they say.

Those who opposed intervention in Afghanistan would have denied hope to these people. But you are right on one thing. There are still mega-problems. There are drug warlords and poverty and injustice. There are terrorist incidents. The government needs the ability to better enforce its writ outside Kabul.

Yes, it will take years to sort out the mess created over decades. But there is today a hope that defies any hard-bitten cynicism. Those people impressed me with their determination to rebuild. Karzai is an ordinary man trying to do an extraordinary thing, to create a democracy from devastation. There are no guarantees that he will succeed, but we should do all we can to help. The UN and the world have not turned their back. There is a lot of money going in there. Rebuilding will be hard and will take time, but it is worth it.

Best wishes, Mike

Dear Mike,

You sound like a *Pravda* man I argued with in the early 1980s. He too accused me of cynicism when I denounced the Soviet intervention as something that would end badly. In reality the Russians did push through an effective modernization in the towns that provided an educational system for all (including women), and the number of women working in schools and hospitals multiplied rapidly. That was the time when Reagan and Thatcher welcomed the bearded mujahideen and introduced them to the Western media as 'the equivalent of our founding fathers'. They certainly were the founding fathers of the Taliban.

I doubt whether the current bunch can do anything that remotely resembles the Soviet modernization. How can Western regimes busy dismantling the welfare state and privatizing everything at home create a social democratic paradise in Afghanistan?

The burqa is back in business, I'm afraid, enforced by the men who rule the country with Washington's blessing. Human Rights Watch has spoken to women who said they veiled themselves to avoid violence and harassment. Add to that the fact that ministers are busy demolishing homes (possibly not the ones you visited) to grab land, and that senior Afghan military commanders and officials are involved in corruption and violence on a daily basis. This is reality for the majority of Afghans.

There has been little reconstruction. Very little of the \$4.5bn (£2.7bn) pledged in Tokyo in 2002 – a pittance even then – has come through. The World Bank estimates that a minimum of \$13bn is needed to reconstruct the country. It was no problem finding \$11bn to fight the war and occupy the country, but it's virtually impossible to raise funds to repair the infrastructure. This is the pattern of all the recent wars. In most cases foreign interventions create more problems than they can solve. The Western states act

usually to defend their own interests.

As for poor Hamid Karzai, he is a longtime worker for the US intelligence agencies like his friend Zalmay Khalilzad who put him there. But he seems to represent nobody inside Afghanistan. I fear he might be bumped off despite the all-American bodyguard.

There are two choices. Either he could be put on a Paris catwalk to model shawls, or the Dear Leader could find him a safe New Labour constituency. It would be mean-spirited, having used him as a filter, to let the brutes of the Northern Alliance flush him down.

Yours, Tariq

Dear Tariq,

I doubt that many Afghans would share your charitable view of Soviet occupation. But let's not let political prejudice get in the way of the facts, eh? \$4.5bn was pledged at Tokyo but you missed out that it was pledged over five years, not all in one year. Much of that money is now flowing and will continue over the next five years.

Schools have opened, hospitals operate and a road is to be built from Kabul to Jalalabad. Some \$1.8bn in foreign aid was spent last year and the UK alone provided £45.5m at the start of last year. We are committed to spending £322m over five years – £122 million more than we pledged at Tokyo.

Okay, so all this will not create a social democratic paradise. I think Afghans, like the rest of us, are prepared to wait for paradise if they could get peace and a reasonable standard of living now. And things are not as bleak as you portray. Four million children are now back at school, 37 per cent of them are girls and the numbers are rising; 8 million children have been vaccinated against measles, preventing 30,000 deaths; over 6 million children have been immunized against polio; and more than 2 million refugees have voted with their feet and returned to Afghanistan because they now have hope. In addition, more than 400,000 internally displaced persons have also been able to return home.

Not paradise, but Hamid Karzai will not have to go looking for a New Labour constituency. He will have a few remarkable achievements to put before his own people in the presidential election due in 2004.

Best wishes, Mike O'Brien

Dear Mike,

My only point about the Soviet occupation was that, like Washington, they believed their modernizing reforms would do the trick. Now the arguments you deploy are virtually the same. The difference is that the Russians did achieve much more. Incidentally, the figures you supply are already being challenged by all sides. Many refugees who went back have returned to Pakistan. Law and order does not exist, not

even in parts of Kabul.

The barons of the Northern Alliance control the country and are biding their time. That's why I would urge you again to get Karzai out while you can. He would make a good politician in this country and surely Hartlepool beckons ...

The imposition of a puppet regime, propped up by NATO troops, thousands of miles away from base, is untenable. It might have helped to build the image of the Dear Leader as a War Leader ('... grave, not grandiloquent ... sincerely moved ... this emotional fluency is a wonderful gift in politics, especially at times of war', gushed Philip Stephens in the *Financial Times*). But no amount of cluster-bombs and daisy-cutters can solve the problem.

Very few Afghans support this occupation. Sooner or later you'll have to pull out the Marines. Then what? A Northern Alliance bid for power and a new forward thrust by the Pakistan army. This time their boys will be clean-shaven and attired in modern dress. It could go down well on the networks and Fox TV. The modern soldiers of our closest ally sweeping the bearded men of the Northern Alliance out of the way and retaking Kabul. It could happen.

I hope, Mike, that you will soon emerge as the leader of the anti-war faction in New Labour, but beware the Hoon example. He, too, was once a junior minister at the Foreign Office and prone to wild exaggerations. In reality, and I'm quite serious, I think you should resign from the government and use your talents to win the party over for the future. New Labour will probably win the next election, but it has already lost the argument.

Best, Tariq

Dear Tariq,

Thanks for your email and your solicitations for my future. I will stick with this government and this government will stick by the Afghans in reconstructing their country.

You attack my figures with vague references to challenges from 'all sides'. Name them, I say! You use the fact – which I readily agree with – that there are problems in security. But to suggest what? That we should leave Afghans to another civil war? Perhaps we are the anti-war faction in Afghanistan now.

Like Private Frazer in *Dad's Army* you seem to say: 'We're all doomed!' I accept that we need to tackle the security problem. Some 300 British troops are doing just that, alongside Germans, Canadians and others. Provincial reconstruction teams have recently been established to address the problems of the warlords. For the first time in twenty-three years there is an Afghan government and an army which is representative of all Afghans. We must continue this work.

And it is not just idealism. Ninety per cent of the heroin in Britain originates in

Afghanistan. The security problem means opium production will go up before it comes down, but if we stick with it and eliminate poppy growth by 2013 we will have helped both Afghanistan and Britain. We are funding the Afghans to produce sustainable crops to eat and sell instead of poppies. We cannot create paradise there but we can help reduce the suffering.

By the way, if the Afghans don't want Karzai – the current choice of their traditional parliament, the Loya Jirga – then in 2004 they can vote him out. Votes, not bullets, I say!

Best wishes, Mike O'Brien

Dear Mike,

It will not work. First, because there is no representative government (even in the broadest sense of the term) in the country. And I would urge you not to treat the Loya Jirga as anything but a collection of tribal leaders who are bought in the open market.

The Foreign Office where you sit has all the documentation. The British Empire played the same tricks for over a century. The fact that your chum Karzai is a puppet of Washington is hardly a secret.

The 2004 'elections' will be just like the ones the British Empire pushed through in Iraq during the early colonial period. What that produced according to a subsequent British intelligence assessment was 'an oligarchy of racketeers'.

Idealism, my dear Mike, has nothing to do with any of this. The Afghan adventure was a crude war of revenge. The fact that Europeans are involved doesn't make it any better. If New Labour intends new colonizations then these should be openly discussed and argued. They didn't work before. Why should they now?

As for the figures, just look at the Human Rights Watch reports on refugees and women. They are lying on my desk in London and I'm sending this last one from New York. Or follow the time-honoured Downing Street method: type out Google.com, write 'Afghan Refugees' and then see what hits the fan.

On the crucial question of your own future and that of Karzai, let's continue to talk. I am concerned.

Best, Tariq

Dear Tariq,

You present no alternative policy, merely rhetorical fireworks, sparkling but fleeting. As a minister I have to work out how Britain can help the Afghans to reconstruct their country.

The era of colonialism is dead and any Western leader who does not realize this is a fool. The West cannot run Afghanistan but we must empower the Afghans to run it for themselves, then we must get our troops out. Our best long-term guarantee is a genuine democracy in Afghanistan.

Yes, the Loya Jirga wasn't perfect but it was the best we could do at the time. Next year's election will be better. The measure is whether things are improving, not whether they are perfect.

At least we are looking to give the Afghans all the help they need. Tony Blair promises it and we are delivering. The figures I quoted are real British taxpayers' money flowing to help the Afghans.

The difference remains that my responsibility as a minister is to deliver, while your responsibility as a writer is to criticize. My record will be measured in the improvements in the lives of Afghans, yours in influencing public opinion about Labour.

I still believe government driven by idealism can do good things, you don't. So I will get on with helping the Afghans and you will keep on knocking our policy. Even so, I enjoyed our exchange – a bit of healthy criticism can improve ministerial performance!

Best Wishes, Mike



## 9.

# The Terror Trail

May 2004

Most of those killed during the first two years of the ‘war on terror’ have already been forgotten. An exception is Daniel Pearl, the South Asia bureau chief of the *Wall Street Journal*, who, early in 2002, was lured to a fashionable restaurant in Karachi, kidnapped and then executed by his captors. A video showing Pearl’s throat being slit was distributed to the Western media and a gruesome clip was shown on CBS News.

Invited to the White House to receive condolences from the president-at-war, his secretary of state and his national security adviser, Mariane Pearl told them in some detail how the United States was seen abroad and then, ‘just for the hell of it’, added that ‘my mother was born in Havana and my mother-in-law in Baghdad’. Her father was a gay Dutch Jewish mathematician who had a one-night stand with a woman in Havana. Her mother soon settled in Paris; her father committed suicide when Mariane was nine. Her mother-in-law belonged to an old Baghdad Jewish family which had decamped to Israel, where she married a man named Judea – unhelpful antecedents for a journalist investigating the terror trail in Pakistan.

Mariane Pearl’s affecting memoir of her husband describes a warm-hearted, amusing man (she doesn’t mention how much he teased her over her Buddhism – the bells and mantras which accompanied her everywhere), who was also a tough-minded journalist with a regard for the truth.<sup>1</sup> While he showed little interest in political or social theories or ideologies, he was sensitive to the moral and human costs of their implementation. This applied as much to the ‘humanitarian intervention’ in Kosovo as to clerical misrule in Iran. Some of his best pieces in the *Wall Street Journal* were reasoned and eloquent rejections of state propaganda, including US propaganda about Kosovo, Bosnia and the Sudan.

When his death was announced, I remember thinking that the official US response was rather subdued. What if the victim had been Thomas Friedman of the *New York Times*? Would Pervez Musharraf have been able to describe Friedman at a Washington press conference as ‘too intrusive’, which is what he said about Pearl? It was as if Pearl had connived in his own murder. The brother of Pakistan’s interior minister had been killed by an Islamist group a few weeks before Pearl. When, during a private meeting, the minister muttered something about Pearl bringing it on himself, a friend

Mariane Pearl had brought with her asked him: ‘With all due respect, Mr Minister, would you blame your brother for having been murdered just because he was driving the streets of Karachi?’ Unknown to the public, there had been a plan to assassinate Musharraf himself in the same period.

When the Pearls arrived in Islamabad from their home in Bombay, they probably had little idea of the tension inside the military establishment. In opening the country to a US military presence, and backing the war in Afghanistan, the high command was undoing its one military achievement: the capture of Kabul by the Taliban, which would not have been possible without the active involvement of the Pakistan army. Later, one wing of the Taliban leadership developed ideas of its own, or rather adopted those of Osama bin Laden and his Wahhabi sidekicks. Their loyalty was to Islamic universalism, not to the Pakistani state. Despite this, the Pakistan–Taliban axis continued to function.

The Pakistani generals were faced with a difficult choice after 11 September 2001. If they did not agree to US demands, Washington might follow the Israeli example and make an anti-Muslim pact with the religious extremists ruling India. But if they kowtowed, the results could be catastrophic, given that Pakistani intelligence (ISI) had been funding fundamentalist groups in Pakistan since the Zia years (1978–88). Musharraf, backed by most of his generals, decided to withdraw from Kabul, to try to persuade his supporters in the Taliban not to resist US occupation, and to open up Pakistan’s military and airforce bases to the US. It was from these bases that the US-led assault on Afghanistan was mounted.

The *Wall Street Journal* dispatched its South Asia bureau chief to the new war zone. The Pearls intended to spend a few weeks in Pakistan and then return to Paris where the pregnant Mariane was determined her child would be born. Contrary to stories that were circulated later, Daniel Pearl was a very cautious journalist. His wife details the memos he sent to his paper, arguing that they should train and protect journalists reporting from danger zones. They were ignored. Pearl refused to go to Afghanistan – the situation was too insecure – but he also knew that the real story was in Pakistan. He decided to investigate the links between Richard Reid, the shoe-bomber who mercifully lost his nerve, and Islamist groups in Pakistan. This was what Musharraf thought ‘too intrusive’. Pakistani officials more than once told Mariane that if he had behaved like other foreign journalists, the tragedy might have been averted. Neither she nor the FBI experts who flew to Pakistan have been able to decipher Pearl’s notes written in code and describing, one assumes, what he found out.

I was in Lahore a few weeks after Pearl’s death. Everyone I met told me that people had been moved by Mariane’s dignified television appeal, offering herself and her unborn child to the kidnappers in lieu of her husband. The revelation in a leading daily newspaper that Daniel Pearl was a Jew and hints that he was connected to Mossad were designed to counter this sympathy, but failed. There was little support for the killers. Mariane Pearl describes the senior Pakistani intelligence officer (‘Captain’) assigned to

help her as friendly and sympathetic. No doubt he was, but he was also doing his job, which was to show her, the FBI and the US consul in Karachi that the intelligence services were doing their best to locate Pearl – as some of them were.

Washington's need for Pakistan's support had led to a reconciliation between the Pakistan army and the Pentagon, and a lifting of the sanctions imposed in 1998 to punish the generals for developing and testing WMD. The kidnapping of Daniel Pearl was designed to deter other intrusive journalists and simultaneously to embarrass Washington and the GHQ in Rawalpindi.

Circumstantial evidence suggested the involvement of the ISI, as I wrote at the time. There was no direct proof, but it was no secret in Pakistan that Omar Saeed Sheikh, the psychopath who set up the kidnapping, had intelligence connections. In 1994, ISI-spawned Islamist groups had infiltrated him into Kashmir. A specialist in kidnapping foreigners and keeping them as hostages, he masterminded an action of this kind in Delhi to secure the release from Tihar jail of Masood Azhar, leader of an Islamist group. The kidnapping succeeded, but so did Indian intelligence: after a shoot-out, Sheikh was captured. He slapped the senior police officer who arrested him and was beaten up in return. Five years later, in December 1999, his colleagues hijacked an Indian airliner on its way to Kandahar and threatened to kill everyone on board unless Sheikh and other 'liberation fighters' were freed. They were.

What drove a Sylvester Stallone fan, born in East London in 1973, to become a religious fanatic? His parents had emigrated to Britain in 1968, with enough capital to establish a small garment business. Perfect Fashions did well enough for Omar to be sent to prep school. But his fondness for drink and thuggery worried his parents, who sent him back to the Land of the Pure. He didn't last long at Aitchison College, a top private school in Lahore: after a couple of years, he was expelled for 'bullying'. A contemporary described him to me as having had 'strong psychopathic tendencies ... even then', and said he was always threatening to kill other boys. He returned to London and was sent to school in Snaresbrook, where he was a contemporary of Nasser Hussain, the future England cricket captain. He was a keen chess player and arm-wrestler, ever eager to demonstrate the latter skill in local pubs.

He did well in Snaresbrook and went to study statistics at the London School of Economics. There were a number of active Islamist groups on campus and Bosnia became their cause. The involvement of Western intellectuals in Bosnia has been well documented, often by themselves. Less well documented is the fact that remnants of the Afghan mujahideen, including some of Osama's men, had been taken in US transport planes to fight the holy war in the Balkans. In 1993, Sheikh went to Bosnia as part of a group of Muslim students from the LSE taking medicines and supplies to victims of the civil war. It was here that he first established contact with the armed-struggle Islamist groups who converted him to their version of jihad. By January 2002 he was in Islamabad promising Daniel Pearl a much-sought-after interview with the clerical

godfather of the shoe-bomber.

Many questions about Pearl's death remain unanswered. Western journalists visiting Pakistan have always been closely watched and followed. It's impossible to believe that Pearl, burrowing away on his own, establishing contacts with members of extremist groups, was not being monitored by the secret services.

The group that kidnapped and killed Pearl supposedly called itself the National Movement for the Restoration of Pakistani Sovereignty. One of its demands – the release of the Guantanamo prisoners – was obvious, but the second was extraordinary: the delivery of F16s, paid for but not delivered, to Pakistan. A jihadi group which supposedly regards the Musharraf regime as traitorous for selling out the Taliban, endorsing a twenty-year-old demand of the military and state bureaucracy? Impossible.

Then there is the strange episode involving Ghulam Hasnain, a stringer for *Time* magazine in Karachi. He was handed a video of Pearl's killing by an unknown person (probably Sheikh) and told to leak it to the media. At the time, nobody knew Pearl was dead. Before Hasnain could do anything, he was lifted by an ISI van and disappeared for several days. On his release he refused to discuss the episode.

Sheikh surrendered to the provincial home secretary (a former ISI officer) in Lahore on 5 February 2002. Officially, he was arrested in Lahore a week later. None of these matters was raised at his trial in a closed court in Hyderabad in July 2002. He was sentenced to death, his fellow conspirators to life imprisonment. Both sides appealed, Sheikh against the death sentence, the state against the sentence of life imprisonment – rather than hanging – for the other three. Sheikh wrote a statement that was read out by his lawyer: 'We'll see who will die first, me or the authorities who have arranged the death sentence for me. Musharraf should know that Almighty Allah is there and can get his revenge.' The three attempts on Musharraf's life, two of which took place within a week and one of which came close to success, indicated that Sheikh wasn't making an empty boast.

After her husband's death, Mariane Pearl returned to France, where she was feted by Chirac. Back in the US, she describes a private visit to her apartment by Laura Bush who confided that 'sometimes in our culture it seems as if we've digested so much we can't seem to absorb something that is complex any more'. Then 'the door flies open and a gorgeous blonde girl in her early twenties joins us. It is Jenna, one of the Bushes' twin daughters. She grabs a chair and sits across from us, and the conversation turns to the political apathy of American youth and the US military strikes in Afghanistan. "I have always been against the bombings," Jenna says.'

On this issue at least, Jenna Bush is well to the left of much of the liberal intelligentsia. In December 2001, at the Berlin Literature Festival, Bernard-Henri Lévy and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, the German Green MEP, berated the New York poet Elio Weinberger and myself for opposing the bombing and occupation of Afghanistan. Lévy

had told the Berlin audience that he was a bit jetlagged since he had just returned from Kabul, where he had met with the implanted leader Hamid Karzai and launched a new magazine. ‘What’s it called?’ I inquired. ‘Nouvelle Kaboul,’ he replied. The audience tittered. Perhaps they, too, suddenly saw him as Tintin in Afghanistan. At the Ecole Normale Supérieure in the mid-1960s Lévy was one of Althusser’s star pupils. He then became a leading intellectual of the French Communist Party and the editor of its cultural magazine, *Lettres françaises*. A decade later he discovered the gulags. Why did it take him so long? Whatever the reason, he was part of a group of left-wing French intellectuals – the nouveaux philosophes – who generated a great deal of publicity by denouncing both their own past and the gulags, which by then had been dismantled. The Pol Pot interregnum in Kampuchea undoubtedly speeded them on their journey rightwards. They all obtained gainful employment, but Lévy, who could have rivalled Gérard Dépardieu, preferred to become an official intellectual, close to the French state. It worked well for him, especially after the Berlin Wall came down and the humanitarian wars began.

Now he has written a strange hybrid of a book about his adventures in Pakistan, a country whose language he doesn’t speak and whose people he seems to hate, despite the last-page invocation of a ‘gentle Islam’, firmly placed in the medieval period and counterposed to the ‘madmen of Peshawar’.<sup>2</sup> Mariane Pearl understands the diversity of opinions in the country, but Lévy sees only stereotypes. Half fiction, a quarter speculation, one-eighth film script (with BHL as himself?) and one-eighth regurgitated newspaper articles, this book gives narcissism a bad name. Is there anything of value in it? I searched in vain, hoping that his ‘diplomatic connections’ might have helped out with some previously unknown facts. Nothing. Given the absence of real content, style becomes all; and it is pure pastiche. At times, ‘my dear Sartre’ is invoked for no apparent reason, except to make it clear that Lévy is the only true heir. At another point, he is reminded of his old tutor at the Ecole Normale:

Latent homosexuality. Or, if not, perhaps no sexuality at all, pleasure is a sin, the purpose of relations with a woman is to procreate. Omar ... has probably never slept with a woman ... he is a 29-year-old virgin. Is this the key to the psychology of Omar? ... Asexuality, and the will to purity that goes with it, as possible sources of the moral standards of the religion of fundamentalist crime? ... But I remember, I cannot help but remember, a great French philosopher, Louis Althusser, still a virgin at 30 and who ... No. Out of bounds, precisely. Because truly blasphemous. And too flattering to Omar.

If Omar had been a drunken, frazzled, dissolute believer (they exist), would that have made it any better?

Who knows whether the whole truth about the Daniel Pearl affair will ever be revealed? Was he killed by Yemenis, supervised by an al-Qaeda leader in revenge for the bombing of Afghanistan? Or was he investigating links that needed to be kept secret at a critical moment for the Pakistani regime? And if so, was he eliminated by a hard-

line faction within military intelligence? Possibly. On this, Lévy and I are agreed, but there is no concrete evidence. The person who knows is Omar Saeed Sheikh: could it be that he has written an account whose publication would embarrass someone? Is that why the death sentence has not been carried out?

## 10.

# A Doomed Mission

February 2007

It is year six of the UN-backed NATO occupation of Afghanistan, a joint US/EU mission. On 27 February there was what some claim to be an attempted assassination of Dick Cheney by Taliban suicide bombers while he was visiting the 'secure' US airbase at Bagram (once an equally secure Soviet airbase during an earlier conflict). Two US soldiers and a mercenary ('contractor') died in the attack, as did twenty other people working at the base. This episode alone should have concentrated the US vice-president's mind on the scale of the Afghan debacle. In 2006 the casualty rates rose substantially and NATO troops lost forty-six soldiers in clashes with the Islamic resistance or in shot-down helicopters.

The insurgents now control at least twenty districts in the Kandahar, Helmand, Uruzgan provinces where NATO troops have replaced US soldiers. And it is hardly a secret that many officials in these zones are closet supporters of the guerrilla fighters. The situation is out of control. At the beginning of this war Mrs Bush and Mrs Blair appeared on numerous TV and radio shows claiming that the aim of the war was to liberate Afghan women. Try repeating that today and the women will spit in your face.

Who is responsible for this disaster? Why is the country still subjugated? What are Washington's strategic goals in the region? What is the function of NATO? And how long can any country remain occupied against the will of a majority of its people?

Few tears were shed in Afghanistan and elsewhere when the Taliban fell, the hopes aroused by Western demagoguery did not last too long. It soon became clear that the new transplanted elite would cream off a bulk of the foreign aid and create its own criminal networks of graft and patronage. The people suffered. A mud cottage with a thatched roof to house a family of homeless refugees costs fewer than \$5,000. How many have been built? Hardly any. There are reports each year of hundreds of shelterless Afghans freezing to death each winter. Instead, a quick-fix election was organized at high cost by Western PR firms and essentially for the benefit of Western public opinion. The results failed to bolster support for NATO inside the country. Hamid Karzai the puppet president, symbolized his own isolation and instinct for self-preservation by refusing to be guarded by a security detail from his own ethnic Pashtun base. He wanted tough, Terminator look-alike US marines and was granted them.

Might Afghanistan have been made more secure by a limited Marshall Plan-style intervention? It is, of course, possible that the construction of free schools and hospitals, subsidized homes for the poor and the rebuilding of the social infrastructure that was destroyed after the withdrawal of Soviet troops in 1989 could have stabilized the country. It would also have needed state help to agriculture and cottage industries to reduce the dependence on poppy farming. UN estimates suggest that heroin accounts for 52 per cent of the impoverished country's gross domestic product and the opium sector of agriculture continues to grow apace. All this would have required a strong state and a different world order. Only a slightly crazed utopian could have expected NATO countries, busy privatizing and deregulating their own countries, to embark on enlightened social experiments abroad.

And so elite corruption grew like an untreated tumour. Western funds designed to aid some reconstruction were siphoned off to build fancy homes for their native enforcers. In year two of the occupation there was a gigantic housing scandal. Cabinet ministers awarded themselves and favoured cronies prime real estate in Kabul where land prices reached a high point after the occupation since the occupiers and their camp followers had to live in the style to which they had become accustomed. Karzai's colleagues built their large villas, protected by NATO troops and in full view of the poor.

Add to this that Karzai's younger brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, has become one of the largest drug barons in the country. At a recent meeting with Pakistan's president, when Karzai was bleating on about Pakistan's inability to stop cross-border smuggling, General Musharraf suggested that perhaps Karzai should set an example by bringing his sibling under control.

While economic conditions failed to improve, NATO military strikes often targeted innocent civilians leading to violent anti-American protests in the Afghan capital last year. What was initially viewed by some locals as a necessary police action against al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks is now perceived by a growing majority in the entire region as a fully fledged imperial occupation. The Taliban is growing and creating new alliances not because its sectarian religious practices have become popular, but because it is the only available umbrella for national liberation. As the British and Russians discovered to their cost in the preceding two centuries, Afghans never liked being occupied.

There is no way NATO can win this war now. Sending more troops will lead to more deaths. And full-scale battles will destabilize neighbouring Pakistan. Musharraf has already taken the rap for an air raid on a Muslim school in Pakistan. Dozens of children were killed and the Islamists in Pakistan organized mass street protests. Insiders suggest that the 'pre-emptive' raid was, in fact, carried out by US warplanes who were supposedly targeting a terrorist base, but the Pakistan government thought it better they took the responsibility to avoid an explosion of anti-American anger.



NATO's failure cannot be blamed on the Pakistan government. If anything, the war in Afghanistan has created a critical situation in two Pakistani provinces. The Pashtun majority in Afghanistan has always had close links to its fellow Pashtuns in Pakistan. The border was an imposition by the British Empire and it has always been porous. Attired in Pashtun clothes I crossed it myself in 1973 without any restrictions. It is virtually impossible to build a Texan fence or an Israeli wall across the mountainous and largely unmarked 2,500-kilometre border that separates the two countries. The solution is political, not military.

Washington's strategic aims in Afghanistan appear to be non-existent unless they need the conflict to discipline European allies who betrayed them on Iraq. True, the al-Qaeda leaders are still at large, but their capture will be the result of effective police work, not war and occupation. What will be the result of a NATO withdrawal? Here Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian states will be vital in guaranteeing a confederal constitution that respects ethnic and religious diversity. The NATO occupation has not made this task easy. Its failure has revived the Taliban and increasingly the Pashtuns are uniting behind it.

The lesson here, as in Iraq, is a basic one. It is much better for regime change to come from below even if this means a long wait as in South Africa, Indonesia or Chile. Occupations disrupt the possibilities of organic change and create a much bigger mess than existed before. Afghanistan is but one example.

The Italian foreign minister's statement that this is a just war because it is legal, ie sanctioned by the UN security council (UNSC), is a weak argument. The UNSC is not elected or accountable to the general assembly. It is under the iron-fisted domination of five states who are the victors of the Second World War. Its decisions do not reflect the views of most continents. If the US had arm-twisted the UNSC to back the imperial adventure in Iraq, would Massimo D'Alema have then been in favour of occupying that country? The only question that needs to be asked is whether European soldiers should be sent to kill and be killed in the interests of preserving the hegemony of the American Empire?

## 11.

# A Favourite Attack Dog in the Imperial Kennel

May 2007

The departure, too, was spun in classic New Labour, Dear Leader fashion. A carefully selected audience, a self-serving speech, the quivering lip and soon the dramaturgy was over. He had arrived at No. 10 with a carefully orchestrated display of union flags. Patriotic fervour was also on show yesterday, with references to ‘this blessed country ... the greatest country in the world’ – no mention of the McDonald’s, Starbucks, Benetton that adorn every high street – nor of how Britain under his watch came to be seen in the rest of the world: a favourite attack dog in the imperial kennel.

Tony Blair’s principal success was in winning three general elections in a row. A second-rate actor, he turned out to be a crafty and avaricious politician. Bereft of ideas, he eagerly grasped and tried to improve on Margaret Thatcher’s legacy. But though in many ways Blair’s programme has been a euphemistic, if bloodier, version of Thatcher’s, the style of their departures is very different. Thatcher’s overthrow by her fellow Conservatives was a matter of high drama. Blair makes his unwilling exit against a backdrop of car bombs and carnage in Iraq, with hundreds of thousands left dead or maimed from his policies, and London a prime target for terrorist attack. Thatcher’s supporters described themselves afterwards as horror-struck by what they had done. Even some of Blair’s greatest sycophants in the media confess to a sense of relief as he finally quits.

Blair was always loyal to the occupants of the White House. In Europe he preferred Aznar to Zapatero, Merkel to Schröder, was seriously impressed by Berlusconi and most recently, made no secret of his support for Sarkozy. He understood that privatization and deregulation at home were part of the same mechanism as wars abroad.

If this judgment seems unduly harsh, let me quote Rodric Braithwaite, a former senior adviser to Blair, writing in the *Financial Times* on 2 August 2006:

A spectre is stalking British television, a frayed and waxy zombie straight from Madame Tussaud’s. This one, unusually, seems to live and breathe. Perhaps it comes from the CIA’s box of technical tricks, programmed to spout the language of the White House in an artificial English accent ... Mr Blair has done more damage to British interests in the Middle East than Anthony Eden, who led the UK to disaster in Suez fifty years ago. In

the past 100 years we have bombed and occupied Egypt and Iraq, put down an Arab uprising in Palestine and overthrown governments in Iran, Iraq and the Gulf. We can no longer do these things on our own, so we do them with the Americans. Mr Blair's total identification with the White House has destroyed his influence in Washington, Europe and the Middle East itself: who bothers with the monkey if he can go straight to the organ-grinder?

This, too, is mild compared to what is privately said in the Foreign Office and MoD. Senior diplomats have told me it would not upset them too much if Blair were tried as a war criminal. But while neither Blair nor any of those who launched a war of aggression and occupation in Iraq have been held to account, a civil servant and MP's researcher were yesterday shamefully jailed for exposing some of the dealings between Bush and Blair that lay behind the war.

What this reveals is anger and impotence. There is no mechanism to get rid of a prime minister unless their party loses confidence. The Conservative leadership decided Thatcher had to go because of her negative attitude to Europe. Labour tends to be more sentimental towards its leaders, and in this case they owed so much to Blair that nobody wanted to be cast in the role of Brutus. In the end he decided to go himself. The disaster in Iraq had made him hated and support began to ebb. One reason for the slowness was that the country is without a serious opposition. In parliament, the Conservatives simply followed Blair. The Lib Dems were ineffective. Blair had summed up Britain's attitude to Europe at Nice in 2000: 'It is possible, in our judgment, to fight Britain's corner, get the best out of Europe for Britain, and exercise real authority and influence in Europe. That is as it should be. Britain is a world power.'

This grotesque fantasy that 'Britain is a world power' is meant to justify that it will always be EU-UK. The real union is with Washington. France and Germany are seen as rivals for Washington's affections, not potential allies in an independent EU. The French decision to reintegrate themselves into NATO and pose as the most vigorous US ally was a structural shift which weakened Europe. Britain responded by encouraging a fragmented political order in Europe through expansion, and insisted on a permanent US presence there.

Blair's half-anointed successor, Gordon Brown, is more intelligent but politically no different. It is a grim prospect: an alternative politics – anti-war, anti-Trident, pro-public services – is confined to the nationalist parties in Scotland and Wales. Its absence nationally fuels the anger felt by substantial sections of the population, reflected in voting against those in power, or not voting at all.

## 12.

# Mirage of the Good War

April 2008

Rarely has there been such an enthusiastic display of international unity as that which greeted the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001. Support for the war was universal in the chanceries of the West, even before its aims and parameters had been declared. NATO governments rushed to assert themselves ‘all for one’. Blair jetted round the world, proselytizing the ‘doctrine of the international community’ and the opportunities for peace-keeping and nation-building in the Hindu Kush. Putin welcomed the extension of American bases along Russia’s southern borders. Every mainstream Western party endorsed the war; every media network – with BBC World and CNN in the lead – became its megaphone. For the German Greens, as for Laura Bush and Cherie Blair, it was a war for the liberation of the women of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup> For the White House, a fight for civilization. For Iran, the impending defeat of the Wahhabi enemy.

Three years later, as the chaos in Iraq deepened, Afghanistan became the ‘good war’ by comparison. It had been legitimized by the UN – even if the resolution was not passed until after the bombs had finished falling – and backed by NATO. If tactical differences had sharpened over Iraq, they could be resolved in Afghanistan. First Zapatero, then Prodi, then Rudd, compensated for pulling troops out of Iraq by dispatching them to Kabul.<sup>2</sup> France and Germany could extol their peace-keeping or civilizing roles there.

As suicide bombings increased in Baghdad, Afghanistan was now – for American Democrats keen to prove their ‘security’ credentials – the ‘real front’ of the war on terror, supported by every US presidential candidate in the run-up to the 2008 elections, with Senator Obama pressuring the White House to violate Pakistani sovereignty whenever necessary. On 15 March 2007, for instance, Obama told NBC,

If you look at what’s happening in Afghanistan now, you are seeing the Taliban resurgent, you are seeing al-Qaeda strengthen itself. We have not followed through on the good starts we made in Afghanistan, partly because we took so many resources out and put them in Iraq. I think it is very important for us to begin a planned redeployment from Iraq, including targeting Afghanistan.

A few months later on 1 August, with the Stars and Stripes providing a suitable backdrop, he addressed the Woodrow Wilson Center in Washington and made it clear

that if necessary he would authorize US troops to enter Pakistan on search-and-destroy missions:

Let me make this clear. There are terrorists holed up in those mountains who murdered three thousand Americans. They are plotting to strike again. It was a terrible mistake to fail to act when we had a chance to take out an al-Qaeda leadership meeting in 2005. If we have actionable intelligence about high-value terrorist targets and President Musharraf won't act, we will.

His embittered rival, Senator Hillary Clinton, was not going to let him get away with this too easily. One of her staunchest supporters, Senator Chris Dodd of Connecticut, rebuked Obama the same day (as did the White House) and said, 'It is dangerous and irresponsible to leave even the impression that the United States would needlessly and publicly provoke a nuclear power.' A week later, during a Democratic presidential debate, Hillary Clinton rapped her rival on the knuckles while raising the spectre of a jihadi finger on Pakistan's nuclear trigger:

Well, I do not believe people running for president should engage in hypotheticals, and it may well be that the strategy we have to pursue on the basis of actionable intelligence – but remember, we've had some real difficult experience with actionable intelligence ... But I think it is a very big mistake to telegraph that and to destabilize the Musharraf regime, which is fighting for its life against Islamic extremists, who are in bed with al-Qaeda and Taliban. And remember, Pakistan has nuclear weapons. The last thing we want is to have al-Qaeda-like followers in charge of Pakistan and having access to nuclear weapons. So, you can think big, but remember, you shouldn't always say everything you think if you're running for president because it can have consequences across the world, and we don't need that right now.

With varying degrees of firmness, the occupation of Afghanistan was also supported by China, Iran and Russia; though in the case of the latter, there was always a strong element of *Schadenfreude*. Soviet veterans of the Afghan war were amazed to see their mistakes now being repeated by the United States in a war even more inhumane than its predecessor.

Meanwhile, the number of Afghan civilians killed has exceeded many tens of times over the 2,746 who died in Manhattan. Unemployment is around 60 per cent and maternal, infant and child mortality levels are now among the highest in the world. Opium harvests have soared, and the 'Neo-Taliban' is growing stronger year by year. By common consent, Karzai's government does not even control its own capital, let alone provide an example of 'good governance'. Reconstruction funds vanish into cronies' pockets or go to pay short-contract Western consultants. Police are predators rather than protectors. The social crisis is deepening. Increasingly, Western commentators have evoked the spectre of failure – usually in order to spur *encore un effort*. A *Guardian* leader summarizes: 'Defeat looks possible, with all the terrible consequences that will bring.'<sup>3</sup>

Two principal arguments, often overlapping, are put forward as to 'what went wrong' in Afghanistan. For liberal imperialists, the answer can be summarized in two words: 'not enough'. The invasion organized by Bush, Cheney and Rumsfeld was done

on the cheap. The ‘light footprint’ demanded by the Pentagon meant that there were too few troops on the ground in 2001–02. Financial commitment to ‘state-building’ was insufficient. Though it may now be too late, the answer is to pour in more troops, more money – ‘multiple billions’ over ‘multiple years’, according to the US ambassador in Kabul.<sup>4</sup> The second answer – advanced by Karzai and the White House, but propagated by the Western media generally – can be summed up in one word: Pakistan. Neither of these arguments holds water.

True, there was a sense of relief in Kabul when the Taliban’s Wahhabite Emirate was overthrown. Though rape and heroin production had been curtailed under their rule, warlords kept at bay and order largely restored in a country that had been racked by foreign and civil wars since 1979, the end result had been a ruthless social dictatorship with a level of control over the everyday lives of ordinary people that made the clerical regime in Iran appear an island of enlightenment. The Taliban government fell without a serious struggle. Islamabad, officially committed to the US cause, forbade any frontal confrontation.<sup>5</sup> Some Taliban zealots crossed the border into Pakistan, while a more independent faction loyal to Mullah Omar decamped to the mountains to fight another day. Kabul was undefended; the BBC war correspondent entered the capital before the Northern Alliance. What many Afghans now expected from a successor government was a similar level of order, minus the repression and social restrictions, and a freeing of the country’s spirit. What they were instead presented with was a melancholy spectacle that blasted all their hopes.

The problem was not lack of funds but the Western state-building project itself, by its nature an exogenous process – aiming to construct an army able to suppress its own population but incapable of defending the nation from outside powers; a civil administration with no control over planning or social infrastructure, which are in the hands of Western NGOs; and a government whose foreign policy marches in step with Washington’s. It bore no relation to the realities on the ground. After the fall of the Taliban government, four major armed groups re-emerged as strong regional players. In the gas-rich and more industrialized north, bordering the Central Asian republics of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, the Uzbek warlord Rashid Dostum was in charge with his capital in Mazar-i-Sharif. Allied first to the Communists, later the Taliban and most recently NATO, General Dostum had demonstrated his latest loyalty by massacring 2,000–3,000 Taliban and Arab prisoners under the approving gaze of US intelligence personnel in December 2001.

Not too far from Dostum, in the mountainous northeast of the country, a region rich in emeralds, lapis lazuli and opium, the late Ahmed Shah Massoud had built a fighting organization of Tajiks, who regularly ambushed troops on the Salang Highway that linked Kabul to Tashkent during the Soviet occupation. Massoud had been the leader of the armed wing of Burhanuddin Rabbani’s Jamaat-i-Islami, which operated in tandem

with an allied Islamist leader, Abd al-Rabb Sayyaf (both men were lecturers in *sharia* at the law faculty of Kabul University in 1973, where these movements were incubated). Until 1993 they were funded by Saudi Arabia, after which the latter gradually shifted its support to the Taliban. Massoud maintained a semi-independence during the Taliban period, up to his death on 9 September 2001.<sup>6</sup> Massoud's supporters are currently in the government, but are not considered 100 per cent reliable as far as NATO is concerned.

To the west, sheltered by neighbouring Iran, lies the ancient city of Herat, once a centre of learning and culture where poets, artists and scholars flourished. Among the important works illustrated here over the course of three centuries was a fifteenth-century version of the classic *Miraj-nameh*, an early medieval account of the Prophet's ascent to heaven from the Dome of the Rock and the punishments he observed as he passed through hell.<sup>7</sup> In modern Herat, the Shia warlord Ismail Khan holds sway. A former army captain inspired by the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ismail achieved instant fame by leading a garrison revolt against the pro-Moscow regime in 1979. Backed by Teheran he built up a strong force that united all the Shia groups and were to trouble the Russians throughout their stay. Tens of thousands of refugees from this region (where a Persian dialect is the spoken language) were given work, shelter and training in Iran. From 1992–95, the province was run on authoritarian lines. It was a harsh regime: Ismail Khan's half-witted effrontery soon began to alienate his allies, while his high-tax and forced conscription policies angered peasant families. By the time the Taliban took power in Kabul in 1996, support had already drained away from the warlord. Herat fell without a struggle, and Ismail was imprisoned by the Taliban, only escaping in March 2000. His supporters meanwhile crossed the border to Iran where they bided their time, to return in October 2001 under NATO cover.

The south was another story again. The Pashtun villages bore the brunt of the fighting during the 1980s and '90s.<sup>8</sup> Rapid population growth, coupled with the disruptions of war and the resulting loss of livestock, hastened the collapse of the subsistence economy. In many districts this was replaced by poppy cultivation and the rule of local bandits and strongmen. By the early 1990s, three militant Sunni groups had acquired dominance in the region: the Taliban, the group led by Ahmed Shah Masoud from the Panjsher province, and the followers of Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, once Pakistan's favourite, who had been groomed by the Saudis as the new leader. The jihad was long over, and now the jihadis were at each other's throats, with control of the drug trade the major stake in a brutal power struggle. Under Benazir Bhutto's second premiership, Pakistan's military backing for the Taliban proved decisive. But the overthrow of the Mullah Omar government in the winter of 2001 saw the re-emergence of many of the local gangsters whose predations it had partly checked.

## Anointment of Karzai

Washington assigned the task of assembling a new government to Zalmay Khalilzad, its Afghan-American pro-consul in Kabul. The capital was occupied by competing militias, united only by opposition to the toppled Taliban, and their representatives had to be accommodated on every level. The Northern Alliance candidate for president, Abdul Haq of Jalalabad, had conveniently been captured and executed in October 2001 by the Taliban when he entered the country with a small group from Pakistan. (His supporters alleged betrayal by the CIA and the ISI, who were unhappy about his links to Russia and Iran, and tipped off Mullah Omar.) Another obvious anti-Taliban candidate was Ahmed Shah Masoud; but he had also been killed – by a suicide bomber of unknown provenance – two days before 9/11. Masoud would no doubt have been the EU choice for Afghan president, had he lived; the French government issued a postage stamp with his portrait, and Kabul airport bears his name. Whether he would have proved as reliable a client as Khalilzad's transplanted protégé, Hamid Karzai, must now remain an open question.

Aware that the US could not run the country without the Northern Alliance and its backers in Teheran and Moscow, Khalilzad toned down the emancipatory rhetoric and concentrated on the serious business of occupation. The coalition he constructed resembled a blind octopus, with mainly Tajik limbs and Karzai as its unseeing eye. The Afghan president comes from the Durrani tribe of Pashtuns from Kandahar. His father had served in a junior capacity in Zahir Shah's government. Young Karzai backed the mujahideen against Russia and later supported the Taliban, though he turned down their offer to become Afghanistan's ambassador to the UN, preferring to relocate and work for Unocal. Here he backed up Khalilzad, who was then representing CentGas in their bid to construct a pipeline that would take gas from Turkmenistan across Afghanistan to Pakistan and India.<sup>9</sup>

After his appointment as interim president, the Saudi daily *Al-Watan* published a revealing profile of Karzai, stating that he had been a CIA pawn since the eighties, with his status on the Afghan chessboard enhanced every few years:

Since then, Karzai's ties with the Americans have not been interrupted. At the same time, he established ties with the British and other European and international sides, especially after he became deputy foreign minister in 1992 in the wake of the Afghan mujaheddin's assumption of power and the overthrow of the pro-Moscow Najibullah regime. Karzai found no contradiction between his ties with the Americans and his support for the Taliban movement as of 1994, when the Americans had – secretly and through the Pakistanis – supported the Taliban's assumption of power to put an end to the civil war and the actual partition of Afghanistan due to the failure of Burhanuddin Rabbani's experience in ruling the country.<sup>10</sup>

Karzai was duly installed in December 2001, but intimacy with US intelligence networks failed to translate into authority or legitimacy at home. Karzai harboured no



illusions about his popularity in the country. He knew his biological and political life was heavily dependent on the occupation and demanded a bodyguard of US marines or American mercenaries, rather than a security detail from his own ethnic Pashtun base.<sup>11</sup> There were at least three coup attempts against him in 2002–03 by his Northern Alliance allies; these were fought off by the ISAF, which was largely tied down in assuring Karzai's security – while also providing a vivid illustration of where his support lay.<sup>12</sup> A quick-fix presidential contest organized at great expense by Western PR firms in October 2004 – just in time for the US elections – failed to bolster support for the puppet president inside the country. Karzai's habit of parachuting his relatives and protégés into provincial governor or police chief jobs has driven many local communities into alliance with the Taliban, as the main anti-government force. In Zabul, Helmand and elsewhere, all the insurgents had to do was 'approach the victims of the pro-Karzai strongmen and promise them protection and support. Attempts by local elders to seek protection in Kabul routinely ended nowhere, as the wrongdoers enjoyed either direct US support or Karzai's sympathy.'<sup>13</sup>

Nor is it any secret that Karzai's younger brother, Ahmad Wali Karzai, has now become one of the richest drug barons in the country. At a meeting with Pakistan's president in 2005, when Karzai was bleating about Pakistan's inability to stop cross-border smuggling, Musharraf suggested that perhaps Karzai should set an example by bringing his sibling under control. (The hatred for each other of these two close allies of Washington is well known in the region.)

Also feeding the resentment is the behaviour of a new elite clustered around Karzai and the occupying forces, which has specialized in creaming off foreign aid to create its own criminal networks of graft and patronage. The corruptions of this layer grow each month like an untreated tumour. Western funds are siphoned off to build fancy homes for the native enforcers. Housing scandals erupted as early as 2002, when cabinet ministers awarded themselves and favoured cronies prime real estate in Kabul where land prices were rocketing, since the occupiers and their camp followers had to live in the style to which they were accustomed. Karzai's colleagues, protected by ISAF troops, built their large villas in full view of the mud-brick hovels of the poor. The burgeoning slum settlements of Kabul, where the population has now swollen to an estimated 3 million, are a measure of the social crisis that has engulfed the country.

The ancient city has suffered cruelly over the past thirty years. Jade Maiwand, the modernized 'Oxford Street' cut through the centre in the 1970s, was reduced to rubble during the warfare of 1992–96. An American-Afghan architect describes how Kabul has been relentlessly transformed:

from a modern capital, to the military and political headquarters of an invading army, to the besieged seat of power of a puppet regime, to the front lines of factional conflict resulting in the destruction of two-thirds of its urban mass, to the testing fields of religious fanaticism which erased from the city the final layers of urban life,

to the target of an international war on terrorism.<sup>14</sup>

Yet never have such gaping inequalities featured on this scale before. Little of the supposed \$19 billion ‘aid and reconstruction’ money has reached the majority of Afghans. The mains electricity supply is worse now than five years ago, and while the rich can use private generators to power their air conditioners, hot-water heaters, computers and satellite TVs, average Kabulis ‘suffered a summer without fans and face a winter without heaters’.<sup>15</sup> As a result, hundreds of shelterless Afghans are literally freezing to death each winter.

Then there are the NGOs who descended on the country like locusts after the occupation. As one observer reports:

A reputed 10,000 NGO staff have turned Kabul into the Klondike during the gold rush, building office blocks, driving up rents, cruising about in armoured jeeps and spending stupefying sums of other people’s money, essentially on themselves. They take orders only from some distant agency, but then the same goes for the American army, NATO, the UN, the EU and the supposedly sovereign Afghan government.<sup>16</sup>

Even supporters of the occupation have lost patience with these bodies, and some of the most successful candidates in the 2005 National Assembly elections made an attack on them a centrepiece of their campaigns. Worse, according to one US specialist, ‘their well-funded activities highlighted the poverty and ineffectiveness of the civil administration and discredited its local representatives in the eyes of the local populace.’<sup>17</sup> Unsurprisingly, NGO employees began to be targeted by the insurgents, including in the north, and had to hire mercenary protection.

In sum: even in the estimate of the West’s own specialists and institutions, ‘nation-building’ in Afghanistan has been flawed in its very conception. It has so far produced a puppet president dependent for his survival on foreign mercenaries, a corrupt and abusive police force, a ‘non-functioning’ judiciary, a thriving criminal layer and a deepening social and economic crisis. It beggars belief to argue that ‘more of this’ will be the answer to Afghanistan’s problems.

## An Afghan surge?

The argument that more NATO troops are the solution is equally unsustainable. All the evidence suggests that the brutality of the occupying forces has been one of the main sources of recruits for the Taliban. American air power, lovingly referred to as ‘Big Daddy’ by frightened US soldiers on unwelcome terrain, is far from paternal when it comes to targeting Pashtun villages. There is widespread fury among Afghans at the number of civilian casualties, many of them children. There have been numerous incidents of rape and rough treatment of women by ISAF soldiers, as well as

indiscriminate bombing of villages and house-to-house search-and-arrest missions. The behaviour of the foreign mercenaries backing up the NATO forces is just as bad. Even sympathetic observers admit that ‘their alcohol consumption and patronage of a growing number of brothels in Kabul ... is arousing public anger and resentment’.<sup>18</sup> To this could be added the deaths by torture at the US-run Bagram prison and the resuscitation of a Soviet-era security law under which detainees are being sentenced to twenty-year jail terms on the basis of summary allegations by US military authorities.

All this creates a thirst for dignity that can only be assuaged by genuine independence.

Talk of ‘victory’ sounds increasingly hollow to Afghan ears. Many who detest the Taliban are so angered by the failures of NATO and the behaviour of its troops that they are pleased there is some opposition. What was initially viewed by some locals as a necessary police action against al-Qaeda following the 9/11 attacks is now perceived by a growing majority in the region as a fully fledged imperial occupation. Successive recent reports have suggested that the unpopularity of the government and the ‘disrespectful’ behaviour of the occupying troops have had the effect of creating nostalgia for the time when the Taliban were in power. The repression leaves people with no option but to back those trying to resist, especially in a part of the world where the culture of revenge is strong. When a whole community feels threatened it reinforces solidarity, regardless of the character or weakness of those who fight back. This does not just apply to the countryside. The mass protests in Kabul, when civilians were killed by an American military vehicle, signalled the obvious targets:

Rioters chanted slogans against the United States and President Karzai and attacked the Parliament building, the offices of media outlets and nongovernmental organizations, diplomatic residences, brothels, and hotels and restaurants that purportedly served alcohol. The police, many of whom disappeared, proved incompetent, and the vulnerability of the government to mass violence became clear.<sup>19</sup>

As the British and Russians discovered to their cost in the preceding two centuries, Afghans do not like being occupied. If a second-generation Taliban is now growing and creating new alliances it is not because its sectarian religious practices have become popular, but because it is the only available umbrella for national liberation. Initially, the middle-cadre Taliban who fled across the border in November 2001 and started low-level guerrilla activity the following year attracted only a trickle of new recruits from madrassahs and refugee camps. From 2004 onwards, increasing numbers of young Waziris were radicalized by Pakistani military and police incursions in the tribal areas, as well as devastating attacks on villages by unmanned US ‘drones’. At the same time, the movement was starting to win active support from village mullahs in Zabul, Helmand, Ghazni, Paktika and Kandahar provinces, and then in the towns. By 2006 there were reports of Kabul mullahs who had previously supported Karzai’s allies but were now railing against the foreigners and the government; calls for jihad against the

occupiers were heard in the north-east border provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan.

The largest pool for new Taliban recruits, according to a well-informed recent estimate, has been ‘communities antagonized by the local authorities and security forces’. In Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan, Karzai’s cronies – district and provincial governors, security bosses, police chiefs – are quite prepared to tip off US troops against their local rivals, as well as subjecting the latter to harassment and extortion. In these circumstances, the Taliban are the only available defence. (According to the same report, the Taliban themselves have claimed that families driven into refugee camps by indiscriminate US airpower attacks on their villages have been their major source of recruits.) By 2006 the movement was winning the support of traders and businessmen in Kandahar, and led a mini ‘Tet offensive’ there that year. One reason suggested for their increasing support in towns is that the new-model Taliban have relaxed their religious strictures, for males at least – no longer demanding beards or banning music – and improved their propaganda: producing cassette tapes and CDs of popular singers, and DVDs of US and Israeli atrocities in Iraq, Lebanon and Palestine.<sup>20</sup>

The re-emergence of the Taliban cannot therefore simply be blamed on Islamabad’s failure to police the border, or cut ‘command and control’ links, as the Americans claim. While the ISI played a crucial role in bringing the Taliban to power in 1996 and in the retreat of 2001, they no longer have the same degree of control over a more diffuse and widespread movement, for which the occupation itself has been the main recruiting sergeant. It is a traditional colonial ploy to blame ‘outsiders’ for internal problems: Karzai specializes in this approach. If anything, the destabilization functions in the other direction: the war in Afghanistan has created a critical situation in two Pakistani frontier provinces, and the use of the Pakistan army by Centcom has resulted in suicide terrorism in Lahore, where the Federal Investigation Agency and the Naval War College have been targeted by supporters of the Afghan insurgents. The Pashtun majority in Afghanistan has always had close links to its fellow Pashtuns in Pakistan. The present border was an imposition by the British Empire, but it has always remained porous. It is virtually impossible to build a Texan fence or an Israeli wall across the mountainous and largely unmarked 1,500-mile frontier that separates the two countries.

## Older models

The current occupation of Afghanistan naturally recalls colonial operations in the region, not just to Afghans but to some Western myth-makers – usually British, but with a few subcontinental mimics – who try to draw lessons from the older model; the implication being that the British were ‘good imperialists’ who have a great deal to teach the brutish, impatient Americans. The British administrators were, for the most part, racist to the core, and their self-proclaimed ‘competence’ involved the efficient

imposition of social apartheid in every colony they controlled. They could be equally brutal in Africa, the Middle East and India. Though a promise of civilizational uplift was required as ideological justification, then as now, the facts of the colonial legacy speak for themselves. In 1947, the year the British left India, the overwhelming majority of midnight's children were illiterate, and 85 per cent of the economy was rural.<sup>21</sup>

Not bad intentions or botched initiatives, but the imperial presence itself was the problem. Kipling is much quoted today by editorialists urging a bigger Western 'footprint' in Afghanistan, but even he was fully aware of the hatred felt by the Pashtuns for the British, and wrote as much in one of his last dispatches from Peshawar in April 1885 to the *Civil and Military Gazette* in Lahore:

Pathans, Afridis, Logas, Kohistanis, Turcomans and a hundred other varieties of the turbulent Afghan race, are gathered in the vast human menagerie between the Edwardes Gate and the Ghor Khutri. As an Englishman passes, they will turn to scowl on him, and in many cases to spit fluently on the ground after he has passed. One burly, big-paunched ruffian, with shaven head and a neck creased and dimpled with rolls of fat, is specially zealous in this religious rite – contenting himself with no perfunctory performance, but with a whole-souled expectoration, that must be as refreshing to his comrades as it is disgusting to the European.

One reason among many for the Pashtuns' historic resentment was the torching of the famous bazaar in Kabul, a triumph of Mughal architecture. Ali Mardan Khan, a renowned governor, architect and engineer, had built the *chahr-chatta* (four-sided) roofed and arcaded central market in the seventeenth century on the model of those in old Euro-Arabian Muslim cities – Cairo, Damascus, Baghdad, Palermo or Córdoba. It was regarded as unique in the region; nothing on the same scale was built in Lahore or Delhi. The bazaar was deliberately destroyed in 1842 by General Pollock's 'Army of Retribution', remembered as among the worst killers, looters and marauders ever to arrive in Afghanistan, a contest in which competition remains strong. Defeated in a number of cities and forced to evacuate Kabul, the British punished its citizens by removing the market from the map. What will remain of Kabul when the current occupiers finally withdraw is yet to be seen, but its spreading mass of deeply impoverished squatter settlements suggest that it is set to be one of the major new capitals of the 'planet of slums'.<sup>22</sup>

The Western occupation of Afghanistan is now confronted with five seemingly intractable, interrelated problems. The systemic failures of its nation-building strategy, the corruption of its local agents, the growing alienation of large sectors of the population and the strengthening of armed resistance are all compounded by the distortions wrought by the opium-heroin industry on the country's economy. According to UN estimates, narcotics account for 53 per cent of the country's gross domestic product, and the poppy fields continue to spread. Some 90 per cent of the world opium supply emanates from Afghanistan. Since 2003 the NATO mission has made no serious attempt to bring about a reduction in this lucrative trade. Karzai's own supporters

would rapidly desert if their activities in this sphere were disrupted, and the amount of state help needed over many years to boost agriculture and cottage industries and reduce dependence on poppy farming would require an entirely different set of priorities. Only a surreal utopian could expect NATO countries, busy privatizing and deregulating their own economies, to embark upon full-scale national-development projects abroad.

## NATO's goals

It need hardly be added that the bombardment and occupation of Afghanistan has been a disastrous – and predictable – failure in capturing the perpetrators of 9/11. This could only have been the result of effective police work; not of international war and military occupation. Everything that has happened in Afghanistan since 2001 – not to mention Iraq, Palestine and Lebanon – has had the opposite effect, as the West's own intelligence reports have repeatedly confirmed. According to the official 9/11 Commission report, Mullah Omar's initial response to Washington's demands that Osama bin Laden be handed over and al-Qaeda deprived of a safe haven was 'not negative'; he himself had opposed any al-Qaeda attack on US targets.<sup>23</sup> But while the Mullah was playing for time, the White House closed down negotiations. It required a swift war of revenge. Afghanistan had been denominated the first port of call in the 'global war on terror', with Iraq already the Administration's main target. The shock-and-awe six-week aerial onslaught that followed was merely a drum roll for the forthcoming intervention in Iraq, with no military rationale in Afghanistan. Predictably, it only gave al-Qaeda leaders the chance to vanish into the hills. To portray the invasion as a 'war of self-defence' for NATO makes a mockery of international law, which was perverted to twist a flukishly successful attack by a tiny, terrorist Arab groupuscule into an excuse for an open-ended American military thrust into the Middle East and Central Eurasia.

Herein lie the reasons for the near-unanimity among Western opinion-makers that the occupation must not only continue but expand – 'many billions over many years'. They are to be sought not in the mountain fastnesses of Afghanistan, but in Washington and Brussels. As the *Economist* summarizes, 'Defeat would be a body blow not only to the Afghans, but' – and more importantly, of course – 'to the NATO alliance.'<sup>24</sup> As ever, geopolitics prevails over Afghan interests in the calculus of the big powers. The basing agreement signed by the US with its appointee in Kabul in May 2005 gives the Pentagon the right to maintain a massive military presence in Afghanistan in perpetuity, potentially including nuclear missiles. That Washington is not seeking permanent bases in this fraught and inhospitable terrain simply for the sake of 'democratization and good governance' was made clear by NATO's secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffer at the Brookings Institution in February 2008: a permanent NATO presence in a country

that borders the ex-Soviet republics, China, Iran and Pakistan was too good to miss.<sup>25</sup>

More strategically, Afghanistan has become a central theatre for reconstituting, and extending, the West's power-political grip on the world order. It provides, first, an opportunity for the US to shrug off problems in persuading its allies to play a broader role in Iraq. As Obama and Clinton have stressed, America and its allies 'have greater unity of purpose in Afghanistan. The ultimate outcome of NATO's effort to stabilize Afghanistan and US leadership of that effort may well affect the cohesiveness of the alliance and Washington's ability to shape NATO's future.'<sup>26</sup> Beyond this, it is the rise of China that has prompted NATO strategists to propose a vastly expanded role for the Western military alliance. Once focused on the Euro-Atlantic area, a recent essay in *NATO Review* suggests, 'in the twenty-first century NATO must become an alliance *founded* on the Euro-Atlantic area, designed to project systemic stability beyond its borders':

The centre of gravity of power on this planet is moving inexorably eastward ... The Asia-Pacific region brings much that is dynamic and positive to this world, but as yet the rapid change therein is neither stable nor embedded in stable institutions. Until this is achieved, it is the strategic responsibility of Europeans and North Americans, and the institutions they have built, to lead the way ... security effectiveness in such a world is impossible without both legitimacy and capability.<sup>27</sup>

The only way to protect the international system the West has built, the author continues, is to 're-energize' the transatlantic relationship: 'There can be no systemic security without Asian security, and there will be no Asian security without a strong role for the West therein.'

These ambitions have yet to be realized. In Afghanistan there were angry street demonstrations against Karzai's signing of the US bases agreement – a clear indication, if one was still needed, that NATO will have to take Karzai with them if they withdraw. Uzbekistan responded by asking the United States to withdraw its base and personnel from their country. The Russians and Chinese are reported to have protested strongly in private, and subsequently conducted joint military operations on each other's territory for the first time: 'concern over apparent US plans for permanent bases in Afghanistan and Central Asia' was an important cause of their rapprochement.<sup>28</sup> More limply, Iran responded by increasing export duties, bringing construction in Herat to a halt.<sup>29</sup>

There are at least two routes out of the Khyber impasse. The first and worst would be to Balkanize the country. This appears to be the dominant pattern of imperial hegemony at the moment, but whereas the Kurds in Iraq and the Kosovars and others in the former Yugoslavia were willing client-nationalists, the likelihood of Tajiks or Hazaras playing this role effectively is more remote in Afghanistan. Some US intelligence officers have been informally discussing the creation of a Pashtun state that unites the tribes and dissolves the Durand Line, but this would destabilize Pakistan and Afghanistan to such a degree that the consequences would be unpredictable. In any event

there appear to be no takers in either country at the moment.

The alternative would require a withdrawal of all US forces, either preceded or followed by a regional pact to guarantee Afghan stability for the next ten years. Pakistan, Iran, India, Russia and, possibly, China could guarantee and support a functioning national government, pledged to preserve the ethnic and religious diversity of Afghanistan and create a space in which all its citizens can breathe, think and eat every day. It would need a serious social and economic plan to rebuild the country and provide the basic necessities for its people. This would not only be in the interests of Afghanistan, it would be seen as such by its people – physically, politically and morally exhausted by decades of war and two occupations. Violence, arbitrary or deliberate, has been their fate for too long. They want the nightmare to end and not be replaced with horrors of a different kind. Religious extremists would get short shrift from the people if they disrupted an agreed peace and began a jihad to recreate the Taliban Emirate of Mullah Omar.

The US occupation has not made this task easy. Its predictable failures have revived the Taliban, and increasingly the Pashtuns are uniting behind them. But though the Taliban have been entirely conflated with al-Qaeda in the Western media, most of their supporters are driven by local concerns; their political evolution would be more likely to parallel that of Pakistan's domesticated Islamists if the invaders were to leave. A NATO withdrawal could facilitate a serious peace process. It might also benefit Pakistan, provided its military leaders abandoned foolish notions of 'strategic depth' and viewed India not as an enemy but as a possible partner in creating a cohesive regional framework within which many contentious issues could be resolved. Are Pakistan's military leaders and politicians capable of grasping the nettle and moving their country forward? Will Washington let them? The solution is political, not military. And it lies in the region, not in Washington or Brussels.



13.

## Why a 'Surge' Would Bring Fresh Disasters

November 2008

Afghanistan has been almost continuously at war for thirty years, longer than both World Wars and the American war in Vietnam combined. Each occupation of the country has mimicked its predecessor. A tiny interval between wars saw the imposition of a malignant social order, the Taliban, with the help of the Pakistani military and the late Benazir Bhutto, the prime minister who approved the Taliban takeover in Kabul.

Over the last two years, the US/NATO occupation of that country has run into serious military problems. Given a severe global economic crisis and the election of a new American president – a man separated in style, intellect and temperament from his predecessor – the possibility of a serious discussion about an exit strategy from the Afghan disaster hovers on the horizon. The predicament the US and its allies find themselves in is not an inescapable one, but a change in policy, if it is to matter, cannot be of the cosmetic variety.

Washington's hawks will argue that, while bad, the military situation is, in fact, still salvageable. This may be technically accurate, but it would require the carpet-bombing of southern Afghanistan and parts of Pakistan, the destruction of scores of villages and small towns, the killing of untold numbers of Pashtuns and the dispatch to the region of at least 200,000 more troops with all their attendant equipment, air and logistical support. The political consequences of such a course are so dire that even Dick Cheney, the closest thing to Dr Strangelove that Washington has yet produced, has been uncharacteristically cautious when it comes to suggesting a military solution to the conflict.

It has, by now, become obvious to the Pentagon that Afghan president Hamid Karzai and his family cannot deliver what is required and yet it is probably far too late to replace him with UN ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad. On his part, fighting for his political (and probably physical) existence, Karzai continues to protect his brother Ahmad Wali Karzai, accused of being involved in the country's staggering drug trade, but has belatedly sacked Hamidullah Qadri, his transport minister, for corruption. Qadri was taking massive kickbacks from a company flying pilgrims to Mecca. Is nothing sacred?

Of course, axing one minister is like whistling in the wind, given the levels of corruption reported in Karzai's government, which, in any case, controls little of the country. The Afghan president parries Washington's thrusts by blaming the US military for killing too many civilians from the air. The bombing of the village of Azizabad in Herat province last August, which led to ninety-one civilian deaths (of which sixty were children), was only the most extreme of such recent acts. Karzai's men, hurriedly dispatched to distribute sweets and supplies to the survivors, were stoned by angry villagers. Given the thousands of Afghans killed in recent years, small wonder that support for the neo-Taliban is increasing, even in non-Pashtun areas of the country. Many Afghans hostile to the old Taliban still support the resistance simply to make it clear that they are against the helicopters and missile-armed unmanned aerial drones that destroy homes, and to 'Big Daddy' who wipes out villages, and to the flames that devour children.

Last February, Director of National Intelligence Michael McConnell presented a bleak survey of the situation on the ground to the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence:

Afghan leaders must deal with the endemic corruption and pervasive poppy cultivation and drug trafficking. Ultimately, defeating the insurgency will depend heavily on the government's ability to improve security, deliver services, and expand development for economic opportunity.

Although the international forces and the Afghan National Army continue to score tactical victories over the Taliban, the security situation has deteriorated in some areas in the south and Taliban forces have expanded their operations into previously peaceful areas of the west and around Kabul. The Taliban insurgency has expanded in scope despite operational disruption caused by the ISAF [NATO forces] and Operation Enduring Freedom operations. The death or capture of three top Taliban leaders last year – their first high level losses – does not yet appear to have significantly disrupted insurgent operations.

Since then the situation has only deteriorated further, leading to calls for sending in yet more American and NATO troops – and creating ever deeper divisions inside NATO itself. In recent months, Sir Sherard Cowper-Coles, the British ambassador to Kabul wrote to a French colleague (in a leaked memo) that the war was lost and more troops were not a solution, a view reiterated recently by Air Marshal Sir Jock Stirrup, the British defence chief, who came out in public against a one-for-one transfer of troops withdrawn from Iraq to Kabul. Speaking to the BBC he put it this way:

I think we would all take some persuading that there would have to be a much larger British contingent there. So we also have to get ourselves back into balance; it's crucial that we reduce the operational tempo for our armed forces, so it cannot be, even if the situation demanded it, just a one for one transfer from Iraq to Afghanistan, we have to reduce that tempo.

The Spanish government is considering an Afghan withdrawal and there is serious dissent within the German and Norwegian foreign policy elites. The Canadian foreign minister has already announced that his country will not extend its Afghan commitment beyond 2011. And even if the debates in the Pentagon have not been aired in public, it's

becoming obvious that, in Washington, too, some see the war as unwinnable.

Enter former Iraq commander General David Petraeus, centre stage as the new Centcom commander. Ever since the ‘success’ of ‘the surge’ he oversaw in Iraq (a process designed to create temporary stability in that ravaged land by buying off the opposition and, among other things, the selective use of death squads), Petraeus sounds, and behaves, more and more like Lazarus on returning from the dead – and before his body could be closely inspected.

The situation in Iraq was so dire that even a modest reduction in casualties was seen as a massive leap forward. With increasing outbreaks of violence in Baghdad and elsewhere in Iraq, however, the talk of success sounds ever hollower. To launch a new ‘surge’ in Afghanistan now by sending more troops there will simply not work, not even as a public relations triumph. Perhaps some of the 100 advisers that General Petraeus has just appointed will point this out to him in forceful terms.

Obama would be foolish to imagine that Petraeus can work a miracle cure in Afghanistan. The cancer has spread too far and is affecting US troops as well. If the American media chose to interview active-duty soldiers in Afghanistan (on promise of anonymity), they might get a more accurate picture of what is happening inside the US army there. I learned a great deal from Jules, a twenty-year-old American soldier I met recently in Canada. He became so disenchanted with the war that he decided to go AWOL, proving – at least to himself – that the Afghan situation was not an inescapable predicament. Many of his fellow soldiers, he claims, felt similarly, hating a war that dehumanized both them and the Afghans. ‘We just couldn’t bring ourselves to accept that bombing Afghans was no different from bombing the landscape’ was the way he summed up the situation.

Morale inside the army there is low, he told me. The aggression unleashed against Afghan civilians often hides a deep depression. He does not, however, encourage others to follow in his footsteps. As he sees it, each soldier must make that choice for himself, accepting with it the responsibility that going AWOL permanently entails. Jules was convinced, however, that the war could not be won and did not want to see any more of his friends die. That’s why he was wearing an ‘Obama out of Afghanistan’ T-shirt.

Before he revealed his identity, I mistook this young soldier – a Filipino-American born in southern California – for an Afghan. His features reminded me of the Hazara tribesmen he must have encountered in Kabul. Trained as a mortar gunner and paratrooper from Fort Benning, Georgia, he was later assigned to the 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg. Here is part of the account he offered me:

I deployed to Southeastern Afghanistan in January 2007. We controlled everything from Jalalabad down to the northernmost areas of Kandahar province in Regional Command East. My unit had the job of pacifying the insurgency in Paktika, Paktia, and Khost provinces – areas that had received no aid, but had been devastated during the initial invasion. Operation Anaconda [in 2002] was supposed to have wiped out the Taliban. That was the boast of the military leaders, but ridiculed by everyone else with a brain.

He spoke also of how impossible he found it to treat the Afghans as subhumans:

I swear I could not for a second view these people as anything but human. The best way to fashion a young hard dick like myself – dick being an acronym for ‘dedicated infantry combat killer’ – is simple and the effect of racist indoctrination. Take an empty shell off the streets of LA or Brooklyn, or maybe from some Podunk town in Tennessee, and these days America isn’t in short supply, I was one of those no-child-left-behind products.

Anyway, you take this empty vessel and you scare the living shit out of him, break him down to nothing, cultivate a brotherhood and camaraderie with those he suffers with, and fill his head with racist nonsense like all Arabs, Iraqis, Afghans are Hajj. Hajj hates you. Hajj wants to hurt your family. Hajj children are the worst because they beg all the time. Just some of the most hurtful and ridiculous propaganda, but you’d be amazed at how effective it’s been in fostering my generation of soldiers.

As this young man spoke to me, I felt he should be testifying before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. The effect of the war on those carrying out the orders is leaving scars just as deep as the imprints of previous imperial wars. Change we can believe in must include the end of this, which means, among other things, a withdrawal from Afghanistan.

In my latest book, *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power* (2008), I have written of the necessity of involving Afghanistan’s neighbours in a political solution that ends the war, preserves the peace, and reconstructs the country. Iran, Russia, India and China, as well as Pakistan, need to be engaged in the search for a political solution that would sustain a genuine national government for a decade after the withdrawal of the Americans, NATO and their quisling regime. However, such a solution is not possible within the context of the plans proposed by both present secretary of defense Robert Gates and president-elect Barack Obama, which focus on a new surge of American troops in Afghanistan.

The main task at hand should be to create a social infrastructure and thus preserve the peace, something that the West and its horde of attendant non-governmental organizations have failed to do. School buildings constructed, often for outrageous sums, by foreign companies that lack furniture, teachers and kids are part of the surreal presence of the West, which cannot last. Whether you are a policymaker in the next administration or an AWOL veteran of the Afghan War in Canada, Operation Enduring Freedom of 2001 has visibly become Operation Enduring Disaster. Less clear is whether an Obama administration can truly break from past policy or will just create a military-plus add-on to it. Only a total break from the catastrophe that George W. Bush, Dick Cheney and Donald Rumsfeld created in Afghanistan will offer pathways to a viable future.

For this to happen, both external and domestic pressures will probably be needed. China is known to be completely opposed to a NATO presence on, or near, its borders, but while Beijing has proved willing to exert economic pressure to force policy changes in Washington – as it did when the Bank of China ‘cut its exposure to agency debt last

summer', leaving US Treasury secretary Paulson with little option but to functionally nationalize the mortgage giants – it has yet to use its diplomatic muscle in the region.

But don't think that will last forever. Why wait until then? Another external pressure will certainly prove to be the already evident destabilizing effects of the Afghan war on neighbouring Pakistan, a country in a precarious economic state, with a military facing growing internal tensions. Domestic pressure in the US to pull out of Afghanistan remains weak, but could grow rapidly as the extent of the debacle becomes clearer and NATO allies refuse to supply the shock-troops for the future surge. In the meantime, they're predicting a famine in Afghanistan this winter.

# III

## Af-Pak Is Burning 2008–11

## Next Door to War

July 2008

To recapitulate. After Benazir Bhutto was assassinated last December, her will was read out to the family's assembled political retainers. Her nineteen-year-old son, Bilawal, inherited the Pakistan People's Party, but until he came of age her husband, Asif Zardari, would act as regent. The general election, postponed following her death, took place in February. The immediate impact of the stunning electoral defeat suffered by General Musharraf's political party and his factotums was to dispel the disillusionment of the citizenry. Not for long. Musharraf is still clinging on to the presidency; Zardari is running the government with the help of his old cronies; the judges dismissed by Musharraf have still not been reinstated; the economy is a mess; and the US Air Force has started dropping bombs on the North-West Frontier Province again. Poor Pakistan.

Forty-five per cent of the electorate voted in the election, more than expected, though the figure was much lower in the Frontier Province, where the spillage from the Afghan war discouraged voters from braving the journey to the polling stations. The new army chief, General Ashfaq Kayani, had ordered the ISI not to interfere with the polls and instructed his generals to cease all bilateral contacts with the now civilian president. Musharraf's defeat would have been even worse had it not been for the violence and vote-rigging in Karachi, where his loyal and armed allies from the Muttahida Qaumi Movement (MQM) threatened opposition candidates and their supporters. In at least three cases, armed MQM goons threatened TV journalists with death if the chicanery was reported.

The Pakistan People's Party (PPP) – or BFP (Bhutto Family Party), as some of its own members refer to it in semi-public – emerged as the largest single party in the country, thus propelling the widower Bhutto to power. The Pakistan Muslim League (N), led by the ex-prime minister Nawaz Sharif, came second nationally, but emerged as the largest party in the largest province, the Punjab, where Nawaz's younger brother Shahbaz is now ensconced as chief minister. In the Frontier Province, the secular Awami National Party (ANP) defeated the Islamists, once again contradicting the widespread view that jihadis are either strong or popular in Pakistan. In Sindh the PPI won comfortably and could have governed on its own, but chose to do so with the

MQM. In Baluchistan – largely because of military actions in the province, which borders on Afghanistan, and the killings of nationalist leaders – most local opposition parties boycotted the polls, and it was in this province alone that Musharraf's party won a majority of assembly seats.

Five months on, democratic fervour, or naivety, has turned to anger. Old Corruption is back. The country is in the grip of a food and power crisis. Inflation is approaching 15 per cent. The price of gas (used for cooking in many homes) has risen by 30 per cent and the price of wheat by more than 20 per cent since November 2007. Food and commodity prices are rising all over the world, but there is an additional problem in Pakistan: too much wheat is being smuggled into Afghanistan to feed the NATO armies. According to a recent survey, 86 per cent of Pakistanis find it increasingly difficult to afford flour, for which they blame their new government. Zardari's approval rating has plummeted to 13 per cent. Were an election to be held now, he would lose to Sharif by a substantial margin. That this old rogue is now thought of as a man of principle is an indication of how desperate the situation has become.

Two major issues confronted the victors. The first concerned the judiciary. The chief justice of the Supreme Court, Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry, had been a prisoner of the regime since 3 November 2007, detained in his own house, which was sealed off by barbed-wire barricades with a complement of riot police permanently on guard outside. His landlines had been cut and cell-phones were incapacitated by jamming devices. His colleagues and the lawyers defending him were subjected to similar treatment. In January, he wrote an open letter to Nicolas Sarkozy, Gordon Brown Condoleezza Rice and the president of the European Parliament. The letter, which remains unanswered, explained the real reasons for Musharraf's actions:

At the outset you may be wondering why I have used the words 'claiming to be the head of state'. That is quite deliberate. General Musharraf's constitutional term ended on 15 November 2007. His claim to a further term thereafter is the subject of active controversy before the Supreme Court of Pakistan. It was while this claim was under adjudication before a bench of 11 learned judges of the Supreme Court that the general arrested a majority of those judges in addition to me on 3 November 2007. He thus himself subverted the judicial process which remains frozen at that point. Besides arresting the chief justice and judges (can there have been a greater outrage?) he also purported to suspend the constitution and to purge the entire judiciary (even the high courts) of all independent judges. Now only his hand-picked and compliant judges remain willing to 'validate' whatever he demands. And all this is also contrary to an express and earlier order passed by the Supreme Court on 3 November 2007.

Before the election, Sharif had pledged that his party would restore the chief justice and the other sacked judges to their former positions and remove those who had replaced them. The PPP's position on this issue was ambiguous, but soon after their election triumph the widower Bhutto and Sharif agreed publicly that reinstating the judges would be a priority, and promised that they would be returned to office within thirty days of the new government's formation. Within the month, the judges were released and restrictions on them removed. This was widely, but wrongly, interpreted



as a prelude to their reinstatement. Musharraf and his backers in Washington panicked and the US ambassador summoned Zardari. The message from Washington was clear. The State Department was determined to keep Musharraf in power as long as Bush was in the White House. If the chief justice and his colleagues were to resume office, the under-secretary of state told the new government, there was a possibility that Musharraf would be legally removed from office, and that was unacceptable. His removal would be considered a setback in the War on Terror. The issue brought into the open the differences between the widower and Sharif, which were subsequently aggravated when it was made plain that, unbeknownst to Zardari, Benazir had agreed to work with Musharraf in the War on Terror and to sideline the judges.

Zardari had other worries. A National Reconciliation Ordinance which allowed corrupt politicians to be pardoned had been part of the deal between Benazir and Musharraf. It was much detested and the Supreme Court was due to hear an appeal questioning its legality. Zardari, only too aware of the possibility that the cases against him in European courts might be resurrected, capitulated to the US: the judges would not be reinstated or, at least, not on their own terms. Might the chief justice be interested in a senior position on the International Court of Justice, the US intermediary asked, or perhaps a sinecure at some American university? The chief justice declined.

In May, Zardari and Sharif met in London. Two Muslim League parliamentarians flanked Sharif; two political fixers, Rehman Malik and Husain Haqqani, sat with Zardari. No agreement could be reached on the restoration of the judiciary and, after consulting senior colleagues, Sharif withdrew Muslim League ministers from the government, citing disagreement on this issue. It is extremely rare in Pakistan for a politician to relinquish office on an issue of principle. The ministers who were told to resign were not happy, but they accepted party discipline and Sharif's popularity soared. The widower's failure to support the judges provoked great indignation and a number of senior figures in his own party were clearly unhappy at the public embracing of Musharraf. But they had accepted him as their 'temporary' leader and so rendered themselves powerless. When told that it was really Benazir who had done the deal, they replied that just before her death she was beginning to realize she'd made a mistake. There is no evidence for this, although it helps preserve a few illusions. The trouble is that PPP politicians have grown so accustomed to the Bhutto harness that they can do nothing without it. In the PPP the initiative now lies entirely with Zardari and Malik. They make the key decisions. The prime minister, Yousaf Raza Gillani, seems happy in his role as political eunuch; the PPP cohort in parliament is used as a rubber stamp.

The campaign to defend the judiciary constituted the first nationwide mass movement against military rule since 1969. The Supreme Court decisions challenging the legality of the Musharraf regime had restored the country's self-respect. But the judges were not popular in the United States or Euroland, where elite opinion was obsessed with occupation and war. For defending the civil rights of the poor, the chief

justice was referred to in the *Guardian* as a ‘judicial activist’ and a ‘firebrand’.

The second major problem confronting the government was the NATO occupation of Afghanistan. Washington and its allies regard the war in Afghanistan and Pakistan’s role in relation to it as the central priority. Everything else is a diversion. In March, Admiral Olson, the head of the US Special Operations Command, arrived in Islamabad for consultations with the Pakistan military and surprised locals by demanding a meeting with the country’s elected leaders. Olson asked the politicians how they would respond to the US need to make cross-border incursions into Pakistan. The Pakistanis made their opposition clear. The most senior civil servant in the Frontier Province, Khalid Aziz, told Olson that ‘it would be extremely dangerous. It would increase the number of militants, it would be ... a war of liberation for the Pashtuns. They would say: ‘We are being slaughtered. Our enemy is the United States.’ For Sharif, negotiations with militants in Waziristan and a gradual military withdrawal from the area were essential to deter terrorist attacks in Pakistan’s cities. The PPP was not prepared to go quite so far, but it was not in favour of NATO raids inside Pakistan, at least not in public. The ANP leaders, who had supported the US presence in Afghanistan, now refused to go along with Washington’s demands and called for negotiations with Baitullah Masood, a pro-Taliban militia leader in South Waziristan, accused by the CIA of masterminding Benazir Bhutto’s assassination.

Two ANP leaders, Asfandyar Khan and Afrasiab Khattak, were summoned to Washington for meetings with Stephen Hadley, the national security adviser, and John Negroponte. There was only one issue on the agenda: cross-border raids. Washington was determined to find Pakistani politicians who would defend them. The ANP leaders refused. ‘We told them physical intervention into the tribal areas by the United States would be a blunder,’ Khattak later told the *New York Times*. ‘It would create an atmosphere in which the terrorists would rally popular support.’ Owari Ghani, the governor of the Frontier Province and a Musharraf appointee, agreed: ‘Pakistan will take care of its own problems, you take care of Afghanistan on your side ... Pakistan is a sovereign state. NATO is in Afghanistan; it’s time they did some soldiering.’

Some light is thrown on the Afghan situation by Ahmed Rashid in his new book, *Descent into Chaos*.<sup>1</sup> As a foreign correspondent on the *Far Eastern Economic Review* and subsequently the *Independent* and *Daily Telegraph*, Rashid has been reporting diligently from the region for more than two decades; when the publication of his book on the Taliban coincided with 9/11, he was projected to media stardom in the United States, repeating a pattern that introduced the Iraqi-American writer Kanan Makiya and the *Republic of Fear* to the liberal public during the First Gulf War. Both men became prize-cocks of the US defence establishment and the videosphere. Graciously received by Bush in the Oval Office, Makiya strongly backed the decision to invade Iraq in 2003 and predicted that the US would be greeted as liberators, looking forward to the day his friend Ahmad Chalabi would be running a ‘liberated Iraq’. It didn’t quite happen like

that, but fortune favoured Rashid. The first chapter of *Descent into Chaos* lavishes praise on his friend Hamid Karzai and the book is full of sentences like ‘On 7 December, with Vice President Cheney in attendance, Karzai took oath as Afghanistan’s first legitimate leader for nearly three decades. Many grizzled old Afghan leaders broke down in tears.’

Rashid’s real argument can be summarized as follows: the war after 9/11 should have been fought in Afghanistan and not Iraq, which was a diversion. A heavy armed presence was needed. Bush and his neocon advisers have let the side down badly by trusting Musharraf and the ISI. Karzai, a legitimate leader, was prepared to embark on reforms, sidelining the Northern Alliance, but the Taliban were allowed to regroup and create chaos, helped by the conspiratorial and ‘Bolshevik-like’ al-Qaeda. The real problem is Pakistan, not a Western occupation gone badly wrong, and there is no point being squeamish about what needs to be done. Rashid’s views coincide with those of the Pentagon hawks who have, for the last year, been pressuring Bush and Rice to unleash Special Operations units inside Pakistan on the pretext that al-Qaeda has grown substantially and is preparing new attacks on the West.

Rashid was a firm supporter of the Soviet intervention, although he is coy about this in his book. He shouldn’t be. It reveals a certain consistency. Afghanistan, he thinks, can be transformed only through war and occupation by civilized empires. This line of argument avoids the need to concentrate on an exit strategy. Civilian casualties in Afghanistan are high and in the last two months more US and British soldiers have died here than in Iraq. Jaap Scheffer, NATO’s secretary-general, told the Brookings Institution in February that the continuing occupation had less to do with good governance than with the desire to site permanent military bases (and nuclear missiles?) in a country that borders China, Iran and Central Asia. Contributors to the organization’s house magazine, *Nato Review*, have argued that the preservation of Western hegemony in the Asia-Pacific region requires a permanent military presence. Whatever the justifications or fantasies, the occupation cannot last, since those who live under it feel they have no option but to back those trying to resist, especially in a part of the world where the culture of revenge is strong.

On 14 May a Predator drone hit the village of Damadola in the Bajaur Agency close to the Afghan border, and killed more than a dozen people. The US claimed that they had targeted and killed a ‘significant leader’. Akhundzada Chattan, the local member of parliament and a PPP veteran, called a press conference and denounced the US for ‘killing innocents’. ‘The protest lodged by the Pakistan government against the missile raid is not enough,’ he insisted. ‘The government should also sever diplomatic ties with the US and expel its envoy immediately.’ Chattan saw a pattern: whenever the Pakistan government and local insurgents began to talk to each other and discuss a durable peace, NATO targeted the tribal areas inside Pakistan. He appealed to tribal elders, insurgents, the Pakistan army and the new government to cast aside their

differences and unite against 'foreign aggression'. This could indicate that Zardari's ascendancy is not as secure as he might imagine. It is also a reminder that the decision of successive Pakistan governments to keep the tribal areas formally separate from the rest of the country has become entirely counterproductive. It prevents political parties and other organizations from functioning in the region, leaving political control in the hands of tribal leaders, often with dire results.

In June two F-15 bombers dropped 500-pound bombs in Pakistan killing eleven soldiers and a major from the Frontier Corps. The Pentagon described the action as 'a legitimate strike in self-defence', leading Brian Cloughley, an extremely conservative historian of the Pakistan army (and a former commandant of the Australian Psychological Operations Unit in Vietnam) to write:

One can only regard such utterances with contempt, because those who spoke in such a way, and those who ordered them to say what they did, have no concept of loyalty to a friendly country. Nor, for that matter, do they take the slightest heed of international law and custom. The Pentagon quickly distributed a video showing an attack that was said to be a strike on an 'enemy' position. There was no indication of where it was, when it was, what ordnance was used, or results of the attack. It was a fatuously amateur exercise in attempted damage control. And of course, later, in the inevitable reassessment (for which read: 'We've been found out and had better think up a more believable version of the lies we told'), it was revealed that 'a US Air Force document indicates bombs were dropped on buildings near the border, and Pentagon spokesman Bryan Whitman conceded there may have been another strike that occurred outside the view of the drone's camera.'

Pakistan's ambassador in Washington, Husain Haqqani, merely denied that the air strikes had been intentionally hostile and stressed the 'improving' ... partnership between the two countries. Cloughley's links to GHQ in Islamabad stretch back several decades and it was clear he was giving the view of many senior officers in the Pakistan army, men who fear that such actions and the alliance with Washington will undermine the much-vaunted unity of the military high command, with unpredictable and dangerous consequences.

There are three interrelated power blocs in Pakistan. Of these the US lobby is the most influential, the most public and the most hated. It is currently running the country. The Saudis, who use a combination of wealth and religion to get their way, are second in the pecking order and less unpopular. The Chinese lobby is virtually invisible, never interferes in internal politics and for that reason is immensely respected, especially within the army; but it is also the least powerful outside military circles. In Cold War times, the interests of the three lobbies coincided. Not now. The War on Terror has changed all that.

What is missing is a Pakistan lobby, a strong group within the ruling class that puts the interests and needs of the country and its citizens above all else. A survey carried out in May for the New America Foundation revealed that 28 per cent of Pakistanis favour a military role in politics as compared to 45 per cent in August 2007; that were

elections to be held now, Sharif would sweep the board; that 52 per cent regard the United States as responsible for the violence in Pakistan; that 74 per cent oppose the War on Terror in Afghanistan. A majority favours a negotiated settlement with the Taliban; 80 per cent hold the government and local businessmen responsible for food scarcity; only 11 per cent see India as the main enemy.

Given the political conjuncture in the country, the publication of Shuja Nawaz's *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army and the Wars Within* is timely.<sup>2</sup> He overlooks links between military entrepreneurship and corruption, but nevertheless this is the best researched and most serious history of the Pakistan army. Nawaz, a former IMF staffer who lives in Washington, had unprecedented access to the military archives. Belonging to a military family, he was treated as an insider and interviewed numerous army personnel. His brother Asif Nawaz was the army chief when he died suddenly and mysteriously in January 1993. His widow received letters suggesting murder. Some were anonymous, two were not. One was from a servant at Prime Minister's House. He named senior government officials who, he alleged, had told him to put poison in the food served to the general. It was widely rumoured that Sharif (then the prime minister) had had General Nawaz poisoned because a military operation in Sindh against the MQM had embarrassed the government (then in alliance with the MQM) and Asif Nawaz was obstinately refusing to allow a cover-up and, more important, could not be bought off. Sharif denounced these reports. When traces of arsenic were found in the dead general's hair, Shuja Nawaz fought for a new investigation and the body was exhumed. The military establishment closed ranks and the official inquiry, supported by evidence from US medical experts, upheld the result of the original autopsy: the general had died of a heart attack. Perhaps he did. As with much else in the book the incident is described dispassionately, both sides of the argument are clearly laid out – yet another unsolved mystery involving an illustrious corpse for Pakistan to consider. There might be more of these if the war next door continues.

## The American War Moves to Pakistan

September 2008

The decision to make public a presidential order of last July authorizing American strikes inside Pakistan without seeking the approval of the Pakistani government ends a long debate within, and on the periphery of, the Bush administration.<sup>1</sup> Senator Barack Obama, aware of this ongoing debate during his own long battle with Hillary Clinton, tried to outflank her by supporting a policy of US strikes into Pakistan. Senator John McCain and vice-presidential candidate Sarah Palin have now echoed this view and so it has become, by consensus, official US policy. Its effects on Pakistan could be catastrophic, creating a severe crisis within the army and in the country at large. The overwhelming majority of Pakistanis are opposed to the US presence in the region, viewing it as the most serious threat to peace.

Why, then, has the US decided to destabilize a crucial ally? Within Pakistan, some analysts argue that this is a carefully coordinated move to weaken the Pakistani state yet further by creating a crisis that extends way beyond the badlands on the frontier with Afghanistan. Its ultimate aim, they claim, would be the extraction of the Pakistani military's nuclear fangs. If this were the case, it would imply that Washington was indeed determined to break up the Pakistani state, since the country would very simply not survive a disaster on that scale.

In my view, however, the expansion of the war relates far more to the Bush administration's disastrous occupation in Afghanistan. It is hardly a secret that the regime of President Hamid Karzai is becoming more isolated with each passing day, as Taliban guerrillas move ever closer to Kabul.<sup>2</sup> When in doubt, escalate the war is an old imperial motto. The strikes against Pakistan represent – like the decisions of President Richard Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to bomb and then invade Cambodia (acts that, in the end, empowered Pol Pot and his monsters) – a desperate bid to salvage a war that was never good, but has now gone badly wrong.

It is true that those resisting the NATO occupation cross the Pakistan–Afghan border with ease. However, the US has often engaged in quiet negotiations with them. Several feelers have been put out to the Taliban in Pakistan, while US intelligence experts regularly check into the Serena Hotel in Swat to discuss possibilities with Mullah Fazlullah, a local pro-Taliban leader. The same is true inside Afghanistan. After the US

invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, a whole layer of the Taliban's middle-level leadership crossed the border into Pakistan to regroup and plan for what lay ahead. By 2003, their guerrilla factions were starting to harass the occupying forces in Afghanistan and, during 2004, they began to be joined by a new generation of local recruits, by no means all jihadists, who were being radicalized by the occupation itself.

Though, in the world of the Western media, the Taliban has been entirely conflated with al-Qaeda, most of their supporters are, in fact, driven by quite local concerns. If NATO and the US were to leave Afghanistan, their political evolution would most likely parallel that of Pakistan's domesticated Islamists.<sup>3</sup> The neo-Taliban now control at least twenty Afghan districts in Kandahar, Helmand and Uruzgan provinces. It is hardly a secret that many officials in these zones are closet supporters of the guerrilla fighters. Though often characterized as a rural *jacquerie*, they have won significant support in southern towns and they even led a Tet-style offensive in Kandahar in 2006. Elsewhere, mullahs who had initially supported President Karzai's allies are now railing against the foreigners and the government in Kabul. For the first time, calls for jihad against the occupation are even being heard in the non-Pashtun northeast border provinces of Takhar and Badakhshan.

The neo-Taliban have said that they will not join any government until 'the foreigners' have left their country, which raises the question of the strategic aims of the United States. Is it the case, as NATO secretary-general Jaap de Hoop Scheffe suggested to an audience at the Brookings Institution earlier this year, that the war in Afghanistan has little to do with spreading good governance in Afghanistan or even destroying the remnants of al-Qaeda? Is it part of a master plan, as outlined by a strategist in *NATO Review* in the Winter of 2005, to expand the focus of NATO from the Euro-Atlantic zone, because 'in the twenty-first century NATO must become an alliance designed to project systemic stability beyond its borders'?<sup>4</sup> Such a strategy implies a permanent military presence on the borders of both China and Iran. Given that this is unacceptable to most Pakistanis and Afghans, it will only create a state of permanent mayhem in the region, resulting in ever more violence and terror, as well as heightened support for jihadi extremism, which, in turn, will but further stretch an already over-extended empire.

Globalizers often speak as though US hegemony and the spread of capitalism were the same thing. This was certainly the case during the Cold War, but the twin aims of yesteryear now stand in something closer to an inverse relationship. For, in certain ways, it is the very spread of capitalism that is gradually eroding US hegemony in the world. Russian prime minister Vladimir Putin's triumph in Georgia was a dramatic signal of this fact. The American push into the Greater Middle East in recent years designed to demonstrate Washington's primacy over the Eurasian powers, has descended into remarkable chaos, necessitating support from the very powers it was

meant to put on notice.

Pakistan's new, indirectly elected president, Asif Zardari, the husband of the assassinated Benazir Bhutto and a Pakistani 'godfather' of the first order, indicated his support for US strategy by inviting Afghanistan's Hamid Karzai to attend his inauguration, the only foreign leader to do so. Twinning himself with a discredited satrap in Kabul may have impressed some in Washington, but it only further decreased support for the widower Bhutto in his own country.

The key in Pakistan, as always, is the army. If the already heightened US raids inside the country continue to escalate, the much-vaunted unity of the military High Command might come under real strain. At a meeting of corps commanders in Rawalpindi on 12 September, Pakistani chief of staff General Ashfaq Kayani received unanimous support for his relatively mild public denunciation of the recent US strikes inside Pakistan in which he said the country's borders and sovereignty would be defended 'at all cost'.

Saying, however, that the army will safeguard the country's sovereignty is different from doing so in practice. This is the heart of the contradiction. Perhaps the attacks will cease on 4 November. Perhaps pigs (with or without lipstick) will fly. What is really required in the region is an American/NATO exit strategy from Afghanistan, which should entail a regional solution involving Pakistan, Iran, India and Russia. These four states could guarantee a national government and massive social reconstruction in that country. No matter what, NATO and the Americans have failed abysmally.



16.

## On the North-West Frontier

July 2009

June is never a good month on the plains. It was 46°C in Fortress Islamabad a fortnight ago. The hundreds of security guards manning roadblocks and barriers were wilting, sweat pouring down their faces as they waved cars and motorbikes through. The evening breeze brought no respite. It, too, was unpleasantly warm, and it was difficult not to sympathize with those who, defying the law, jumped into the Rawal Lake, the city's main reservoir, in an attempt to cool down. Further south in Lahore it was even hotter, and there were demonstrations when the generator at Mangla that sporadically supplies the city with electricity collapsed completely.

As far as the political temperature goes there is never a good month in Pakistan. This is a country whose fate is no longer in its own hands. I have never known things so bad. The chief problems are the United States and its requirements, the religious extremists, the military high command, and corruption, not just on the part of President Zardari and his main rivals, but spreading well beyond them.

This is now Obama's war. He campaigned to send more troops into Afghanistan and to extend the war, if necessary, into Pakistan. These pledges are now being fulfilled. On the day he publicly expressed his sadness at the death of a young Iranian woman caught up in the repression in Teheran, US drones killed sixty people in Pakistan. The dead included women and children, whom even the BBC would find it difficult to describe as 'militants'. Their names mean nothing to the world; their images will not be seen on TV networks. Their deaths are in a 'good cause'.

More than 2 million refugees ('internally displaced persons' – IDPs in NGO jargon) have been driven out of the areas of the North-West Frontier Province bordering Afghanistan by the army, and from the Swat Valley both by the brutalities of Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the military response to them. NGOs, knowing this is where Western cash is headed, swarm around the refugee camps like flies. Here, too, corruption is rife, despite the presence of many dedicated volunteers. One of them told me that the only organized and non-corrupt presence was that of the army, which, if true, must be a first. The same volunteer, who worked in a camp near Mardan, proudly showed me pictures of herself on General Nadeem Ahmed's helicopter – he commands the operation to help the IDPs – while informing me that the overwhelming bulk of

refugees blame the United States and the army for their plight, not the ‘terrorists’ in their various guises. Listening to her, I wondered whether Samuel Huntington’s idea of moving peasants into ‘strategic hamlets’ in South Vietnam had been the model for this operation as well: remove the people from war zones and the enemy will have no one to recruit. It’s hardly a secret here that the US is paying the army to build new cantonments in the cleansed zones on the Pak-Afghan frontier. It won’t work, but it sounds good and it’s good for the army’s cashflow. Some in Pakistan seriously believe that a few hundred TTP heads in the basket will solve their problems, and are supportive of the army while distancing themselves from the US use of drones, but the two go together. Others gaze admiringly at the ruthlessness with which the Sri Lankan army rooted out the Tamil Tigers, regardless of the collateral damage.

In May this year, Graham Fuller, a former CIA station chief in Kabul, published an assessment of the crisis in the region in the *Huffington Post*. Ignored by the White House, since he was challenging most of the assumptions on which the escalation of the war was based, Fuller was speaking for many in the intelligence community in his own country as well as in Europe. It’s not often that I can agree with a recently retired CIA man, but not only did Fuller say that Obama was ‘pressing down the same path of failure in Pakistan marked out by George Bush’ and that military force would not win the day, he also explained to readers of the *Huffington Post* that the Taliban are all ethnic Pashtuns, that the Pashtuns ‘are among the most fiercely nationalist, tribalized and xenophobic peoples of the world, united only against the foreign invader’ and ‘in the end probably more Pashtun than they are Islamist’. ‘It is a fantasy,’ he said, ‘to think of ever sealing the Pakistan-Afghanistan border.’<sup>1</sup> And I don’t imagine he is the only retired CIA man to refer back to the days when Cambodia was invaded ‘to save Vietnam’.

I left Islamabad on 1 July, a day before the Independence Day party held by the US ambassador, Anne Patterson. Probably the most heavily guarded event in the global social calendar, this is the modern equivalent of the viceroy’s garden parties in old New Delhi. The leaders of the political, military and economic elite jostle with each other and with favoured journalists for the attention of the ambassador. Observers note that Patterson spent more time talking to X from Baluchistan than to Y from Peshawar. Might this mean that the frontline is going to be shifted to Baluchistan? Less important guests peer over heads and shoulders to see who else is present so that they can determine the pecking order of flattery.

Patterson can be disarmingly frank. Earlier this year, she offered a mid-term assessment to a visiting Eurointelligence chief. While Musharraf had been unreliable, saying one thing in Washington and doing its opposite back home, Zardari was perfect: ‘He does everything we ask.’ What is disturbing here is not Patterson’s candour, but her total lack of judgment. Zardari may be a willing creature of Washington, but the intense hatred for him in Pakistan is not confined to his political opponents. He is despised

principally because of his venality. He has carried on from where he left off as minister of investment in his late wife's second government. Within weeks of occupying President's House, his minions were ringing the country's top businessmen, demanding a share of their profits.

Take the case of Mr X, who owns one of the country's largest banks. He got a call. Apparently the president wanted to know why his bank had sacked a PPP member soon after Benazir Bhutto's fall in the late 1990s. X said he would find out and let them know. It emerged that the sacked clerk had been caught with his fingers literally in the till. President's House was informed. The explanation was rejected. The banker was told that the clerk had been victimized for political reasons. The man had to be reinstated and his salary over the last eighteen years paid in full together with the interest due. The PPP had also to be compensated and would expect a cheque (the sum was specified) soon. Where the president leads, his retainers follow. Many members of the cabinet and their progeny are busy milking businessmen and foreign companies. 'If they can do it, so can we' is a widely expressed view in Karachi, the country's largest city. Muggings, burglaries, murders, many of them part of protection rackets linked to politicians, have made it the Naples of the East.

There is also a widespread feeling that the methods used to manoeuvre Zardari into the presidency after Benazir's assassination were immoral. A documentary shown on the first anniversary of her death on the privately owned GEO TV raised a number of serious questions regarding her security and asked why the man responsible for organizing her protection drove away when her car was held up. When she was hit, he was nowhere to be seen. This man, Rehman Malik, an old Zardari crony and one of the family's principal contacts with Western intelligence agencies when it was in exile, is currently the interior minister.

For several months now, wild and unsubstantiated rumours linking Zardari to his wife's death have swept the country. A woman I know who was once very close to Benazir is convinced that there is some truth in them and is much irritated by my scepticism. She provided me with an account, which, if true, would require Asifa Zardari, the couple's younger daughter, to give evidence in court against her father. The same story has been repeated to me by many others, none of them paranoid or given to thoughts of conspiracy. Stranger things have happened in the country, but I remain unconvinced. What is interesting is not that these tales circulate, but the number of people who believe them – which indicates how the widower is generally regarded.

These rumours came into the open at the end of June, when the head of the Bhutto clan, Mumtaz Ali Bhutto, chairman of the Sind National Front, publicly accused Zardari at a press conference, alleging that 'the killer of Murtaza Bhutto had also murdered Benazir ... Now I am his target. A hefty amount has been paid to mercenaries to kill me.' (Zardari is generally regarded as having ordered his brother-in-law Murtaza's death. Shoaib Suddle, the police chief in Karachi, who organized the operation that led

to Murtaza Bhutto's death, has now been promoted and is head of the Intelligence Bureau.) Mumtaz Bhutto demanded an inquiry into Benazir's assassination and pooh-poohed attempts by Washington and its local satraps to blame the crime on the TTP leader, Baitullah Mahsud. Bhutto predicted that Zardari and his cronies would soon be convicted of corruption or forced to flee the country, but this is wishful thinking, and assumes a great deal, including a shift in US policies.

Mahsud and his followers are specialists in sawing off heads, flogging women and kidnapping people. Grisly videos of informers having their throats cut are circulated by the TTP as a deterrent. Yet, only a few months ago, Mahsud could be seen at wedding receptions and press conferences. Today he has the distinction of being the first Pakistani with a price on his head. The US announced a \$5 million reward, to which the Pakistan government added a miserly \$600,000, for his capture dead or alive. Head money has also been offered for Mahsud's junior commanders: \$182,000 for Faqir Mohammed in Bajaur and \$122,000 each for three others, much less than the Indian Premier League offers Pakistani cricketers. While welcoming back the Pakistan cricket team after their triumph in the Twenty20 championship this summer, the country's token prime minister, Yousaf Gilani, insisted that we must follow the example of our cricket team and defeat the terrorists.

The refugees from the Swat Valley, where the TTP have committed serial atrocities, tell a different story from the Pashtuns displaced by US drones, bomber jets and Pakistani army forays in South Waziristan, near the Afghan frontier. They say they were abandoned for years by the government and left to the mercy of armed fanatics. This is true. And if you ask why the Pakistani state tolerated armed groups that openly challenged its monopoly of violence, the answer is straightforward. These groups were regarded in Islamabad as auxiliaries in the coming battle for Afghanistan. The decision to crush the leadership of the TTP was taken under heavy US pressure, which is why Mahsud and his deputy in Swat, Maulana Fazlollah, regard the assault on their positions as treachery.

Fazlollah's reign of terror antagonized most Pakistanis, including those hostile to the US presence in the region. The public flogging of a Swati woman, captured on video and then shown on TV, generated real anger. For once the TTP was put on the defensive and publicly dissociated itself from the flogging. Making use of this display of weakness the government wheeled one of the country's top religious scholars, Dr Sarfraz Naeemi Al-Azhari, in front of the cameras to declare the TTP an 'anti-Islamic' organization since Islamic tradition forbids suicide and by extension suicide bombings – for that reason often known as 'martyrdom operations'. On 12 June, the TTP dispatched a suicide bomber to take care of Al-Azhari. Both men were 'martyred'. Earlier, the government had bribed, cajoled and bullied one of Mahsud's lieutenants, Qari Zainuddin, to break with his leader and denounce him in public. Qari did as he was asked, though the eventual denunciation was characteristically bizarre. He accused

Mahsud of being a triple agent and claimed he was working for India, America and Israel, as well as other enemies of Pakistan. That is why, Zainuddin said, he was targeting the Pakistan army and its security services. Some actually believed this nonsense and it irritated Mahsud. On 23 June, one of Qari Zainuddin's bodyguards shot him dead. There will almost certainly be more of this in the coming months.

Meanwhile Mahsud's parents have been picked up by the police and are in 'protective custody' – in other words, being used as hostages. On the day this was announced, Owais Ghani, the beleaguered governor of the North-West Frontier Province, warned on TV that if the US/NATO leaders don't develop an exit strategy soon, the indiscriminate repression of Pashtuns on both sides of the Durand Line will lead to an uprising against the foreign troops. Mahsud wasn't the only problem, in other words. The following day Pakistan air-force chiefs were paraded on TV with the Chinese ('our all-weather friends') government company that is building JF-17 Thunder aircraft at the Pakistan Aeronautical Complex. Might some of these be ready in time to track down Mahsud, something that US surveillance and reconnaissance missions have so far failed to do?

The TTP is a product of the recent Afghan wars, Russian, indigenous and American its thinking a poisonous combination of traditional tribal patriarchy and Wahhabi prescriptions. It has been severely criticized by the Afghan groups fighting NATO for not participating in that struggle. Capturing and killing its leaders may make people feel better, but it will solve very little. The bulk of TTP supporters will simply melt away and regroup to fight another day. Attempts to destroy them will lead to even more civilian casualties. Many of Mahsud's supporters are now leaving Swat and linking up with other Pashtun groups in Waziristan to fight the Pakistan army. There are reports that a new organization uniting the previously competing mujahideen groups has been formed. Gul Bahadur, considered a pro-government Pashtun commander because he signed a truce agreement in February 2008, has reneged on the deal and joined the opposition. This new group claimed responsibility for the ambush of a military convoy on 28 June that led to the death of fifteen soldiers in response to air-strikes carried out on villages the week before, in which a number of civilians were killed – their names were not released.

The longer the war continues, the greater the possibility of serious cracks within the army. Not at the level of the high command, but among majors and captains, as well as among the soldiers they command, who are far from happy with the tasks assigned to them. Religious divines have been found to pronounce that a soldier killed in fighting the TTP is a martyr and will go to heaven, but the potential martyrs know that most mullahs believe they will go to hell. Quite a few, no doubt, think they're already there.

## Imperial Diktats

November 2009

It's been a bad autumn for NATO in Afghanistan, with twin disasters on the political and military fronts. First, Kai Eide, the UN headman in Kabul, a well-meaning, but not very bright Norwegian, fell out with his deputy, Peter Galbraith, who as the de facto representative of the US State Department had decreed that President Karzai's election was rigged and went public about it. His superior continued to defend Hamid Karzai's legitimacy. Astonishingly, the UN then fired Galbraith. This caused Hillary Clinton to move into top gear and the UN-supported electoral watchdog now ruled that the elections had indeed been fraudulent and ordered a runoff. Karzai refused to replace the electoral officials who had done such a good job for him the first time and his opponent withdrew. Karzai got the job.

Karzai's legitimacy has never been dependent on elections (which are always faked anyway) but on the US/NATO expeditionary force. So what was all this shadow-boxing about in the first place? It appears to have been designed in order to provide cover for the military surge being plotted by General Stanley McChrystal, the new white hope of a beleaguered White House. McChrystal seems to have inverted the old Clausewitzian maxim: he genuinely believes that politics is a continuation of war by other means. It was thought that if Karzai could be painlessly removed and replaced with his former colleague Abdullah Abdullah, a Tajik from the north, it might create the impression that an unbearably corrupt regime had been peacefully removed, which would help the flagging propaganda war at home and the relaunching of the real war in Afghanistan. For his part, Abdullah wanted a share of the loot that comes with power and has so far been monopolized by the Karzai brothers and their hangers-on, helping them to create a tiny indigenous base of support for the family. Did the revelation that Ahmed Wali Karzai was not simply the richest man in the country as a result of large-scale corruption and the drugs/arms trade, but a CIA agent too come as a huge surprise to anyone? I'm told that in desperation NATO commissars even considered appointing a High Representative on the Balkan model to run the country, making the presidency an even more titular post than it is today. Were this to happen, Galbraith or Tony Blair would be the obvious front-runners.

Citizens of the transatlantic world are becoming more and more restless about the

no-end-in-sight scenario. In Afghanistan the ranks of the resistance are swelling. The war on the ground is getting nowhere: NATO convoys carrying fuel and equipment are repeatedly attacked by insurgents; neo-Taliban control of 80 per cent of the most populous part of the country is recognized by all. Recently Mullah Omar strongly criticized the Pakistani branch of the Taliban: they should, he said, be fighting NATO, not the Pakistan army.

Meanwhile the British military commander, General Sir David Richards, echoing McChrystal, talks of training Afghan security forces ‘much more aggressively’ so that NATO can take on a supporting role. Nothing new here. Eupol (the European Union Police Mission in Afghanistan) declared several years ago that its objective was to ‘contribute to the establishment under Afghan ownership of sustainable and effective civilian policing arrangements, which will ensure appropriate interaction with the wider criminal justice system’. This always sounded far-fetched: the shooting earlier this month of five British soldiers by an Afghan policeman they were training confirms it. The ‘bad apple’ theories with which the British are so besotted should be ignored. The fact is that the insurgents decided some years ago to apply for police and military training and their infiltration – a tactic employed by guerrillas in South America, South-East Asia and the Maghreb during the last century – has been fairly successful.

It’s now obvious to everyone that this is not a ‘good’ war designed to eliminate the opium trade, discrimination against women and everything bad – apart from poverty, of course. So what is NATO doing in Afghanistan? Has this become a war to save NATO as an institution? Or is it more strategic? Whatever the reason, the operation has failed. Most of Obama’s friends in the US media recognize this, and support a planned withdrawal, while worrying that pulling troops out of both Iraq and Afghanistan might result in Obama losing the next election, especially if McChrystal or General Petraeus the supposed hero of the surge in Iraq, stand for the Republicans. Not that the US seems likely to withdraw from Iraq. The only withdrawal being contemplated is from the main cities, restricting the US presence to the huge air-conditioned military bases that have already been constructed in the interior of the country, mimicking the strongholds of the British Empire (minus the air conditioners) during the early decades of the last century.

While Washington decides what do, Af-Pak is burning. Carrying out the imperial diktat has put the Pakistan army under enormous strain. Its recent well-publicized offensive in South Waziristan yielded little. Its intended target disappeared to fight another day. To show good faith the military raided the Shamshatoo refugee camp in Peshawar. On 4 November I received an email from Peshawar:

Thought I’d let you know that I just got a call from a former Gitmo prisoner who lives in Shamshatoo camp and he told me that this morning at around 10 a.m. some cops and military men came and raided several homes and shops and arrested many people. They also killed three innocent schoolchildren. Their *jinaza* [funeral] is tonight. Several people took footage of the raid from their cell-phones which I can try to get a hold of. The funeral of the three children is happening as I’m typing.

How could this end well?



18.

## A War Gone Badly Wrong

June 2010

General Stanley McChrystal's kamikaze interview had the desired effect.<sup>1</sup> He was sacked and replaced by his boss General David Petraeus. But behind the drama in Washington is a war gone badly wrong and no amount of sweet talk can hide this fact. The loathing for Holbrooke (a Clinton creature) goes deep not because of his personal defects, of which there are many, but because his attempt to dump Karzai without a serious replacement angered the generals. Aware that the war is unwinnable, they were not prepared to see Karzai fall: without a Pashtun point man in the country the collapse might reach Saigon proportions. All the generals are aware that the stalemate is not easy to break, but desirous of building reputations and careers and experimenting with new weapons and new strategies (real war games are always appealing to the military provided the risks are small) they have obeyed orders despite disagreements with each other and the politicians.

Obama's surge was always supported by Stan and Dave but not by General Eikenberry, the ex-boss of both men and currently ambassador in Kabul. His view has been vindicated by the stalemate and the price being paid. All the media-hyped advances are illusory. US and NATO casualties are rising each week; most Europeans and many North American citizens are opposed to the war and favour withdrawal; different factions of the Taliban are preparing to take power; Iran has been alienated by the sanctions and will not play ball any more; the Northern Alliance is a busted flush, its leaders busy, like the Karzai brothers, making money. And lithium reserves notwithstanding, it is becoming more and more difficult to sustain a NATO presence in the country. Pakistan's military is in permanent talks with the Taliban leadership and a desperate Karzai has asked the US to remove Mullah Omar and the old Taliban leaders from the list of 'terrorists' so they can travel freely and participate in the life of the country. Eikenberry's response: we are prepared to consider each request on its merits but no blanket amnesty. That too will come.

In the US the mid-term elections loom ahead and Netanyahu is expected soon at the White House to help shore up AIPAC support for the beleaguered Democrats. The talk in Washington is that losses will lead Obama to get rid of Gates at the Pentagon and Rahm at the White House. What nobody appears to have noticed is that McChrystal

wears a lean and hungry look. Would he be willing to go for the Republican nomination?

19.

## It's No Secret What Pakistan's Been Doing with the Taliban

July 2010

David Cameron's post-WikiLeaks remarks on Pakistan helping the enemy in the Hindu Kush shouldn't be taken too seriously.<sup>1</sup> The carefully orchestrated 'outburst' in India was designed to please his hosts and seal a few business deals (Cameron and Cable are fagging for the British arms industry). It's all part of the schmoozing. Pakistan's official response was equally disingenuous. Since it's impossible for Islamabad to attack the organ grinder, it went for the monkey.

Meanwhile, all sides know full well what the Pakistan army has been doing with various Taliban factions since Afghanistan was occupied nearly nine years ago. Three years ago a US intelligence agent was shot dead by a Pakistani soldier at such talks – as reported in the Pakistani press. A source close to the Pakistani military told me last year in Islamabad that US intelligence agents were present at recent talks between the ISI and the insurgents. No reason for anybody to be surprised. The cause, too, is clear. The war cannot be won.

It's hardly a secret that Pakistan never totally abandoned the Taliban after 9/11. How could they? It was Islamabad that had organized the Taliban's retreat from Kabul so that the US and its allies could take the country without a fight. The Pakistani generals advised their Afghan friends to bide their time. As the war in Afghanistan deteriorated, the insurgency grew. It was the social chaos and the political corruption of Hamid Karzai's outfit that made a foreign occupation even worse in the eyes of many Afghans, bringing a new generation of Pashtuns into battle – young men who had not been part of the displaced regime. It is this neo-Taliban that has effectively organized the spread of resistance, which as the IED diagram revealed by WikiLeaks showed extends to virtually every part of the country.

Matthew Hoh, a former marine captain serving as a political officer in Afghanistan, resigned from the service in September 2009. His explanation was clear:

The Pashtun insurgency, which is composed of multiple, seemingly infinite, local groups, is fed by what is perceived by the Pashtun people as a continued and sustained assault, going back centuries, on Pashtun land, culture, traditions and religion by internal and external enemies ... I have observed that the bulk of the insurgency fights not for the white banner of the Taliban, but rather against the presence of foreign soldiers

and taxes imposed by an unrepresentative government in Kabul.<sup>2</sup>

In 2007, the US attempted to wean a section of the insurgents away from Mullah Omar, the Taliban leader, by offering them government positions. The neo-Taliban leaders refused to join a government while there were foreign troops in the country. But in order to make the contacts in the first place, the Pakistan army was critically important. This army, used as cover by the US on several occasions, was now forced to shed its Islamist skin (necessary for the jihad against the Soviet Union). This angered many within its ranks, and there were three attempts on General Musharraf's life. The ISI, whose autonomy was always overrated, was brought under almost total control, and General Ashfaq Kayani (who replaced Musharraf as chief of army staff) reorganized it from top to bottom. A few rogue elements revealed themselves when they approved the attack on the Indian embassy in Kabul in 2008; they were immediately disciplined and removed. Today, attacking the ISI has become convenient for the West, who need General Kayani and so cannot attack him directly. There is no way the ISI or any other wing of the military could help the insurgents without Kayani's knowledge – and Kayani knows full well that in order to preserve contacts the insurgents fighting NATO have to be offered a few carrots.

Karzai was so desperate a few months ago to woo the Taliban that he requested General Eikenberry, the doveish US ambassador in Kabul, to remove the entire Taliban leadership, including Omar, from the most wanted list. Eikenberry did not refuse but suggested each case be considered on its merits. What better indication that the war is lost.

WikiLeaks appear to have revived Karzai temporarily. 'It is a different question whether Afghanistan has the ability to tackle this,' he said in response to a question about Pakistan support for the Taliban, '... but our allies have this capability. The question now is, why they are not taking action?' But they are. And have been since Barack Obama became president. The drone attacks were intended to burn out support for the insurgents across the border. Instead, they have resulted in destabilizing Pakistan. Last year, the army forcibly removed 250,000 people from the Orakzai district on the Afghan border and put them in refugee camps. Many swore revenge, and militant groups have targeted the ISI and other military centres. On 8 June this year, militants bearing grenades and mortars attacked a NATO convoy in Rawalpindi. Fifty NATO vehicles were burnt and more than a dozen soldiers were reported dead.

This can only get worse. Time for Obama to abandon all pretences used to justify a war that can only lead to more deaths but no solution. An exit strategy is now desperately needed.

20.

## 'Why Kill the Goose?'

May 2011

A US Special Forces operation in Pakistan has taken out Osama bin Laden and a few others. Americans celebrate. And functionaries of the George W. Bush period tell us that what it proves is torture at Guantanamo worked, after all. Europe applauds. Vassals elsewhere (including Pakistan's president) congratulate the US on mission accomplished.

This is slightly bizarre, given that Bin Laden had apparently been in a safe house near the Pakistan military academy for six years. Nobody believes this could have happened without the knowledge of senior intelligence officials. The event took me back to a conversation I had a few years ago. In 2006 on my way back from Lahore I encountered an acquaintance from my youth. Shamefacedly he confessed that he was a senior intelligence officer on his way to a European conference to discuss better ways of combating terrorism. The following conversation ensued:

'Is OBL still alive?' He didn't reply.

'When you don't reply,' I said, 'I'll assume the answer is yes.' I repeated the question. He didn't reply.

'Do you know where he is?'

He burst out laughing.

'I don't, and even if I did, do you think I'd tell you?'

'No, but I thought I'd ask anyway. Does anyone else know where he is?'

He shrugged his shoulders.

I insisted: 'Nothing in our wonderful country [Pakistan] is ever a secret. Someone must know.'

'Three people know. Possibly four. You can guess who they are.'

I could.

'And Washington?'

'They don't want him alive.'

'And your boys can't kill him?'

'Listen, friend, why should we kill the goose that lays the golden eggs?'

Golden eggs: a reference to the billions in aid and weaponry being supplied to the army. At the time I wasn't sure whether my informant was fantasizing to amuse or misinform me; he was obviously telling the truth. Now the Americans have killed the goose themselves.

Pakistan is in the grip of a fierce debate, its politico-military establishment damned

whatever the case. If they admit they were in the know, they stand condemned within their own ranks. There is a great deal of dissension among junior officers and soldiers unhappy about border missions in which they are forced to target their own people. If it turns out that the US didn't even bother to inform the Pakistanis that helicopters were on the way to clip Bin Laden, they stand exposed as leaders who permit the country's sovereignty to be violated at will. The departing CIA chief Leon Panetta has said the decision was made early not to tell Pakistan so as not to compromise the operation. But stories are changing rapidly, and nothing can be taken at face value. As WikiLeaks revealed, there was a US–Pakistan agreement, that while the latter would tolerate drone attacks they would be forced to denounce them because of public anger. On the other hand, given that within the CIA the ISI is referred to as a terrorist organization, there may have been anxiety about leaks. The helicopters that entered Pakistan airspace would have been cleared as part of routine reconnaissance, though in the past Pakistani radar has been jammed to facilitate raids. This time it was not.

Reliable sources in Pakistan are insistent that the army had no prior knowledge of this raid. Since there is absolutely no way Pakistan could have come out of this looking good, the ISI, had it known, would undoubtedly have attempted a pre-emptive move as this event will almost certainly affect future US aid. If the Pakistani army or intelligence were involved they could have easily moved the final showdown to a less embarrassing location – the mountains in Waziristan, for instance. Furthermore it has handed both India and Afghanistan a major opportunity to settle scores in the propaganda wars.

In reality, Bin Laden's death changes nothing, except perhaps to ensure that, economy permitting, Barack Obama is re-elected. The occupation of Iraq, the Af-Pal war and NATO's Libyan adventure look set to continue. Israel–Palestine is stalemated, though the despotisms in the Arab world that Obama has denounced are under pressure – except the worst of them all, Saudi Arabia.

In Afghanistan, the Taliban leaders will be relieved that they can no longer be tarred with the Bin Laden brush, but his killing does not change the situation there one bit. The insurgents might not be in a position to take Kabul (they never could even during the Russian occupation) but elsewhere they control a great deal. The US cannot win this war. The sooner it gets out, the better. Until it does, it will remain dependent on Pakistan, the ally Americans love to hate.

## 21.

# The Abbottabad Incident

2011

Antigone: Death yearns for equal law for the dead.  
Creon: Not that the good and bad draw equal shares.  
Antigone: Who knows that this is holiness below?  
Creon: Never the enemy, even in death, a friend.  
Antigone: I cannot share in hatred, but in love.  
Creon: Then go down there, if you must love, and love  
the dead. No woman rules me while I live.

*Antigone*, Sophocles, 441 BCE

U-S-A. U-S-A.  
Obama got Osama. Obama Got Osama.  
You can't beat us (clap-clap-clap-clap-clap-clap).  
You can't beat us. Fuck bin La-den. Fuck bin La-den.

*n+1* blog, chants heard at Ground Zero, New York, May 2011

Contrary to what many liberals imagined in November 2008, the debasement of American political culture continues apace. Instead of reversing the trend, the lawyer-president and his team have deliberately accelerated the process. There have been more deportations of immigrants than under Bush; fewer prisoners held without trial have been released from Gitmo, an institution that the lawyer-president had promised to close down; the Patriot Act with its defining premises of what constitutes friends and enemies has been renewed and a new war begun in Libya without the approval of Congress on the flimsy basis that the bombing of a sovereign state should not be construed as a hostile act; whistleblowers are being vigorously prosecuted and so on – the list growing longer by the day. Politics and power override all else. Liberals who still believe that the Bush administration transcended the law while the Democrats are exemplars of a normative approach are blinded by political tribalism. Apart from Obama's windy rhetoric, little now divides this administration from its predecessor.

Nothing illustrates this debasement so well as the incident at Abbottabad. Ignore, for a moment, the power of politicians and propagandists to enforce their taboos and prejudices on American society as a whole, a power often used ruthlessly and vindictively to silence opposition from all quarters – Bradley Manning, Thomas Drake Julian Assange, Stephen Kim, currently being treated as criminals and public enemies,

know this better than most – and examine, in its bare essentials, what took place.

To pull himself out of a slump, the president ordered an execution. Bush and posse had launched the Afghan war after 9/11 as a straightforward exercise in revenge with the stated objective of capturing Bin Laden, ‘dead or alive’. Subsequently, or so one is told, the Republican leaders only wanted him dead. To take him alive would have meant locking him in Guantanamo till he died. Better to kill him when the time was right. Finally he was tracked down by US special agents in the field and an execution ordered. That is the official version. The truth is probably much more complicated and might never be revealed unless, in the months ahead, a friendly hacker does the decent thing. Without a well-placed network of collaborators in Pakistan (including some in high places) the operation would have been very difficult, SEALs or no SEALs.

Obama obliged and some of his young supporters, numbering several hundreds rather than thousands, came out to cheer. The enemy was dead. Rejoice, rejoice was the liberal motto of the hour and they did. Maureen Dowd in the *New York Times* and Jon Stewart on *The Daily Show*, regarded by many liberals as the ultimate in political wisdom, were cheered up by the assassination of Osama bin Laden. Their boy, whom they sometimes mocked, had scored a rare hit. Nor were they alone. Leaders of tributary and vassal states (including Pakistan) queued on the phone to congratulate Obama, whose lean and hungry look on the screen as he watched the Navy SEALs in action suggested he was already thinking of his next term. European leaders repeated the same mantra: ‘His death makes the world a safer place.’

I want to leave them alone, mired in their own economic crises, blinded by their addiction to money and power and incapable of understanding that they preside over a political-economic system in decline. I am far more interested in the generation of young Americans, still at school or college, between the ages of sixteen and twenty-one, an intellectually formative period in one’s life: this generation has seen its country permanently engaged in war and conflict of one variety or another. What does it mean to be young and a citizen of the most powerful empire in world history? What impact did the Abbotabad killing have on them? The majority are confronted with the problems of everyday life: unemployment, poverty, semi-employment, social deprivation, volunteering for the armed forces or incarceration and its corollary (the loss of the right to vote). I wonder how many of them cheered the Navy SEALs? For others, including those who can afford to pay for higher education and see their futures tied to the ideological and military successes of the empire it matters a great deal. The number of young people who felt compelled to rush to Ground Zero or the White House was no large but the social composition was interesting. Mostly they were the offspring of liberal arts colleges and universities who – like liberal columnists and liberal TV anchors – saw this as an Obama triumph with which they could identify.

Public celebrations were largely confined to campuses. In the East: Ohio State, Penn State, Yale, George Washington University, Holy Cross, University of Massachusetts,



Boston College, University of Maryland, Binghamton University, Delaware; in the Midwest: Iowa State, University of Missouri, Bentley, Illinois State, South Louisiana State, University of West Virginia; on the West coast: Stanford, UC Davis. On other campuses the demonstrations were more individual in character, largely confined to frat houses and dorm corridors, with predominantly male students, usually in a state of advanced inebriety, draped in emblematic togas, the stars and stripes covering their nakedness as they cheered the result of the war game in Abbottabad. They were a minority, but who were they? A 'miscellaneous rabble' who, bringing to mind Milton's *Samson Agonistes*, 'extol things vulgar, praise and admire they know not what and know not whom, but as one leads the other ... of whom to be dispraised was no small praise'.

What if Bush had deployed the jungle law sometimes referred to, in this post-legal world, as the doctrine of necessity and ordered the Bin Laden execution? The composition of the rabble might have been different, but the chants would probably have remained the same. Might we have been spared Voldemort? Who can tell? What we do know is that the United States has been continuously at war since the campus rejoicers were born: the 'peace dividend' discussed briefly after the collapse of Communism, while they were being conceived, has always remained an abstract notion. For some the very idea of peace in a world where evil exists is an obscenity. If it is true that the costume of each dominant imperial 'civilization' is mimicked globally, fashion gurus should be hard at work designing camouflage combat jackets with hooks for laser goggles. The bomber jets of the Republic, bolstered by and bolstering a thriving arms industry, have now taken war to almost every continent. But utilizing military strength abroad to override economic and political decay at home is a sign of weakness rather than strength.

## Precedents

Let's start with the decision to target and kill hostiles without any recourse to the law. Surely even a person regarded as a heartless, cold-blooded, dehumanized Wahabbi Muslim, deserves a trial. After all, the German leaders of the Third Reich still seen as among the worst war criminals in recent history (and, for some, since history began) were tried for their crimes and sentenced. Others were pardoned and employed directly by the United States (Wernher Von Braun the most notorious and immortalized in the Tom Lehrer song) or the post-Nazi West German state, which was instructed to re-employ General Gehlen as its spymaster so that Nazi spies in Europe could remain active in service to the new Federal Republic. The emperor of Japan, who ordered the attack on Pearl Harbor, was not only spared a trial and execution, but was also rewarded: he was kept on the throne. Innocents were nuked in Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

The perpetrators of that violence could, of course, never be tried. They were only obeying orders. There is, thus, no fixed pattern in the US treatment of 'hostiles'. In recent years US warlords have admired plucky little Israel for regularly targeting and killing Palestinian leaders and intellectuals for resisting its occupation of their lands. Approving a crime often paves the way for committing one.

What determines the punishment is the conjunctural needs of the imperial state. In the coded messages preceding the attack on the Bin Laden compound in Pakistan, the Saudi Arabian Islamo-anarchist was referred to as 'Geronimo', the Apache guerrilla leader who fought against both Mexico and the United States and was regarded as 'the worst Indian that ever lived'. The genocide of native Americans has been well documented. Geronimo himself was tracked down and captured by US soldiers. He surrendered. His punishment was to live on a reservation and be exhibited at numerous fairs. Till his dying day, he regretted that he had ever surrendered. But unlike Osama and most native Americans, he was given a choice. The killer helicopter named the Apache was bad enough. Which Pentagon bureaucrat had pandered to his subconscious and devised the codename?

Islam-anarchist? My description of al-Qaeda after 9/11 offended many anarchists and, no doubt, hardcore Islamists as well. But I stuck to the term. After all, 9/11 was little more than violent propaganda. Why should the spectacular outrages carried out by Islamist terrorists be dehistoricized? Why should we forget the anarchist assaults during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in both Europe and South Asia? Or the hits that they scored by targeting and killing President Carnot of France (1894) and following it up three years later by assassinating the Spanish prime minister, followed next year by killing Empress Elizabeth of Austria. They celebrated the new century by executing King Umberto of Italy in 1900 and President William McKinley in 1901. Then they paused for a period of reflection and in 1912 resumed their work by wasting another Spanish prime minister. There were failures too as a result of which the Spanish King Alfonso and Kaiser Wilhelm I survived. More random attacks were carried out in Paris to increase class-consciousness and cafes were bombed. A French anarchist ditty of the time boasted:

It will come, it will come  
Every bourgeois will have his bomb

The function of what the anarchist thinkers referred to as 'the propaganda of the deed' was designed to attack the oppressors of the poor and the lack of any real democracy. During the late sixties and early seventies of the last century some of this tradition was reclaimed by terrorist groups of one variety or another – motivated largely by the horrors of the US war in Vietnam – in Germany, Italy, Japan and the United States. The difference with al-Qaeda is essentially on the basis of ideology. The anarchists believed in radical social change. Al-Qaeda acts in the name of Allah. The

arguments used in the nineteenth century to justify the death of innocents are not so different from those deployed by al-Qaeda: all are complicit in the deeds of their governments. In his 1891 political novel *El Filibusterismo*, the great Filipino novelist and anti-imperialist José Rizal exposed the bare bones of the debate by putting the following words in the mouth of his anarchist anti-hero, Simoun, who wants the dynamite to destroy all who refuse to take up arms. All?

‘All,’ Simoun repeated ruthlessly, ‘all natives, half-breeds, Chinese, Spaniards, all those who show themselves to be without courage, without resolution ... What, you shudder? You tremble and fear to kill ... The most timid of rulers, to satisfy a whim, a fancy, his vanity, does not hesitate to proclaim a law which will lead to the ruin and the slow agony of thousands and thousands of his subjects, prosperous till then, hardworking, happy perchance. And do you shudder because in one night the moral sufferings of so many slaves will end forever, because a corrupt and paralytic people will die to make way for a new one, young, active, full of energy?’

With an unrelenting and pitiless sophistry, Simoun is trying to convince a sceptical Basilio, himself a victim of state atrocities, that this is the only way forward; but the latter, in the words of the narrator-novelist, ‘weakened by more than three months in prison and blinded by the thirst for vengeance, was not prepared to analyse their moral foundations’. Rizal is in no doubt as to how Basilio should have responded:

He should have replied that the most evil or cowardly of men is still something more than a vegetable because he has a soul and a mind that, no matter how corrupt and brutalized, can be redeemed; that no man has a right to decide to cut short the life of anyone else no matter for whose benefit, and that the right to life is inherent in every man like the right to liberty and enlightenment.

Rizal’s argument applies not only to anarchists but also to powerful states. Obama, it seems, was desperate for a symbolic victory and for several weeks following the incident, he and the killer SEALs basked in the glory of the global videosphere and its regulars. Few, very few, questioned the dumping of the body in the ocean. Bin Laden’s sons, in a moving appeal, explained why they felt the body should have been handed over to them. They did not agree with their father’s views or actions, but were taken aback by the barbarism. Nor is the question of the body related solely to Islam. The debate goes back to pagan times, as highlighted in Sophocles’ play *Antigone*. And Homer, too, in the *Iliad* paints a pathetic scene when Priam of Troy comes in person to plead for the body of his slain son Hector with Achilles, who has had the body dragged in the mud in anger and revenge for Hector’s slaying of Patrocles (Achilles’ friend and lover). Achilles relents but has the body washed and cleaned before he returns it to the father. Western civilization has not yet reached that time.

## More Cover-Up than Self-Criticism

July 2013

After the US helicopter assault on Osama bin Laden's quarters in Abbottabad and his assassination by Navy SEALs in 2011, a shaken Pakistani government set up a commission of inquiry, presided over by a retired judge, Javed Iqbal. Its findings, a part of which was leaked to al-Jazeera this week, reveal the country's intelligence agencies at loggerheads and in a general state of confusion.

The evidence of General Pasha, the former chief of the Pakistani intelligence agency ISI, is particularly interesting, with its account of Bin Laden's travels in Pakistan following the war on Afghanistan, and explanation of how one of his aides used his Pakistani identity card to buy a plot of land not far from the Pakistan military academy. Many of these details are fascinating and the tone of the report may strike many as honest and self-critical. Yet it is worth clarifying that the overall thrust of the report is to exonerate the intelligence agencies by effectively accepting the official version that the ISI and the Federal Investigation Agency were unaware of Bin Laden's presence in the country.

The notion that Bin Laden, family and bodyguards left Afghanistan and entered Pakistan in 2002 without the knowledge and help of the ISI is risible. The report is weak on background. For example, it fails to explain that the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan was made possible only by heavy Pakistani involvement on every level: the operation was viewed by Pakistan's general headquarters as a total success, the first in its entire history. The control of Kabul and the southern part of the country supposedly provided Islamabad with 'strategic depth'.

The links between the ISI and the Taliban regime were intimate. There were differences on some issues but treated by the senior partner as little more than lovers' tiffs. After 9/11, the Pakistani military were instructed by Washington to facilitate the NATO occupation. General Musharraf, then president of Pakistan, asked for more time and was given two weeks. An American general warned that if Pakistan did not help, it would be bombed to extinction. Musharraf caved in. This resulted in enormous tensions within the army, which was now being asked to reverse its only military triumph and help topple a government it had created. The high command held firm, but military dissidents organized three attempts on Musharraf's life and the jihadi groups funded by

the ISI went rogue.

This was the political atmosphere in which Bin Laden arrived in the country. Whatever the ISI's failings on the political level, there is little doubt that it is an extremely effective intelligence outfit. Its surveillance techniques are obviously not on the level of the NSA or GCHQ, but its network of well-trained agents do the business as some of their victims have testified. There is no way that Bin Laden could have slipped into the country unnoticed. He was provided with help at the highest levels in an operation that was regarded as top secret and his whereabouts were known only to three or four people, heads of the intelligence agencies.

I was informed of all this some years ago by a source in the intelligence services who had no idea where Bin Laden was but confirmed that he was in a safe house somewhere in the country. According to this source, Pakistan would hand him over if necessary, but the problem was that George W. Bush only wanted his dead body and the Pakistanis were not prepared to kill 'the golden goose'.<sup>1</sup> Obviously, nobody within the establishment (retired or not) is going to admit as much to a commission of inquiry, and Justice Iqbal could only pronounce on the basis of the evidence he was able to hear. The resulting report, as self-critical as it may sound, is therefore still a partial cover-up, as it had to be.

As far as the Navy SEALs are concerned, the question considered was whether the Pakistani military had any advance notification. The report suggests not and is extremely critical of the government for 'dereliction of duty', concluding that 'political, military intelligence and bureaucratic leadership cannot be absolved of their responsibility for the state of governance, policy planning and policy implementation that eventually rendered this national failure almost inevitable'. Perhaps. On the other hand, as General Pasha informed the inquiry, a US spy (whether CIA or DIA was not made clear) had told him contemptuously that 'we can buy anyone in your country'. Anyone? In which case why should one exclude the possibility that a bought person in the military helped with logistics? The details provided in this report offer a number of clues that need further exploration.

## 23.

# 'Breaches of Sovereignty'

November 2011

The NATO assault on a Pakistani checkpoint close to the Afghan border which killed twenty-four soldiers on Saturday must have been deliberate. NATO commanders have long been supplied with maps marking these checkpoints by the Pakistani military. They knew that the target was a military outpost. The explanation that they were fired on first rings false and has been ferociously denied by Islamabad. Previous such attacks were pronounced 'accidental' and apologies were given and accepted. This time it seems more serious. It has come too soon after other 'breaches of sovereignty', in the words of the local press, but Pakistani sovereignty is a fiction. The military high command and the country's political leaders willingly surrendered their sovereignty many decades ago. That it is now being violated openly and brutally is the real cause for concern.

In retaliation, Pakistan has halted NATO convoys to Afghanistan (49 per cent of which go through the country) and asked the US to vacate the Shamsi base that they built to launch drones against targets in both Afghanistan and Pakistan with the permission of the country's rulers. Islamabad was allowed a legal fig leaf: in official documents the base was officially leased by the UAE – whose 'sovereignty' is even more flexible than Pakistan's.

Motives for the attacks remain a mystery but their impact is not. It will create further divisions within the military, further weaken the venal Zardari regime, strengthen religious militants and make the US even more hated than it already is in Pakistan. So why do it? Was it intended as a provocation? Is Obama seriously thinking of unleashing a civil war in an already battered country? Some commentators in Islamabad are arguing this, but it's unlikely that NATO troops will occupy Pakistan. Such an irrational turn would be difficult to justify in terms of any imperial interests. Perhaps it was simply a tit-for-tat to punish the Pakistani military for dispatching the Haqqani network to bomb the US embassy and NATO HQ in Kabul's 'Green Zone' a few months back.<sup>1</sup>

The NATO attack comes on the heels of another crisis. One of Zardari and his late wife's trusted bagmen in Washington, Husain Haqqani, whose links to the US intelligence agencies since the 1970s made him a useful intermediary and whom Zardari appointed as Pakistan's ambassador to Washington, has been forced to resign. Haqqani, often referred to as the US ambassador to Pakistan, appears to have been caught red-

handed: he allegedly asked Mansoor Ijaz, a multi-millionaire close to the US defence establishment, to carry a message to Admiral Mike Mullen pleading for help against the Pakistani military and offering in return to disband the Haqqani network and the ISI and carry out all US instructions.

Mullen denied that he had received any message. A military underling contradicted him. Mullen changed his story and said a message had been received and ignored. When the ISI discovered this 'act of treachery', Haqqani, instead of saying that he was acting under orders from Zardari, denied the entire story. Unfortunately for him, the ISI boss General Pasha, had met up with Ijaz and been given the Blackberry with the messages and instructions. Haqqani had no option but to resign. Demands for his trial and hanging (the two often go together when the military is involved) are proliferating. Zardari is standing by his man. The military wants his head. And now NATO has entered the fray. This story is not yet over.

# IV

## Impending Defeat 2012–2021



24.

## Obama's Only Way out of Afghanistan Is to Talk

January 2012

This week Afghan guerrillas carried out yet another raid on the Kandahar airbase. General John Allen, the American commander of the NATO-led International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), issued an odd statement: 'Mullah Omar has lost all control over Taliban insurgents, otherwise he would immediately denounce these attacks and order his "forces" to stop attacking innocent Afghan civilians.' The same Mullah Omar who has been on the most wanted list since 9/11? Remarkable only if one wasn't aware that the Omar faction of the Taliban has been conducting on-and-off negotiations with the US for several years. None have so far resulted in an agreement.

The Kandahar attack may have been carried out by another faction, one that is hostile to the very idea of talking to the occupier, but it could just as easily be another shot across the bows of a tired empire, just to hurry things along. All the media-hyped advances in Afghanistan were illusory. Hence the need to negotiate with the insurgents and further isolate the Karzai regime. Different factions of the neo-Taliban have been preparing to take power for the last two years. Their assaults on security installations, intelligence outposts and helicopters carrying NATO intelligence top brass indicate the extent to which they have infiltrated ISAF's 'loyal Afghan' networks. The form of guerrilla warfare, if not the ideology of its proponents, is not dissimilar to resistance movements in the Second World War and the Vietnamese, Chinese and Cuban experiences, codified by Giap, Mao and Che Guevara.

Several months after his inauguration, Obama pushed through an arrogant escalation of the war, backed by the EU vassal states, but resisted by some of his own generals including Karl Eikenberry, the ambassador in Kabul.<sup>1</sup> Obama's reasoning went thus:

If the Afghan government falls to the Taliban – or allows al-Qaeda to go unchallenged – that country will again be a base for terrorists who want to kill as many of our people as they possibly can ... For the Afghan people, a return to Taliban rule would condemn their country to brutal governance, international isolation, a paralysed economy, and the denial of basic human rights to the Afghan people – especially women and girls. The return in force of al-Qaeda terrorists who would accompany the core Taliban leadership would cast Afghanistan under the shadow of perpetual violence.

But many of these vices exist already (including the condition of women). More

importantly, the reckless assaults on villages and ‘targeted’ enemies upped the civilian casualty rate, providing easy recruits for the insurgents.<sup>2</sup> Add to this the fact that those regional forces that had supported – reluctantly in the case of Pakistan’s intelligence agency, the ISI – the toppling of Omar’s regime are no longer onside. Iran has been alienated by the sanctions and US–EU hostility (itself the result of unremitting Israel pressure); the Northern Alliance is a busted flush, its leaders busy making money like the Karzai family; and the Pakistani military never broke off contact with the Taliban.

So, lithium reserves notwithstanding, it has become more and more difficult to sustain the NATO presence in the country.<sup>3</sup> The forty-two countries engaged in the occupation can no longer help the embarrassing marionette in Kabul to dance a good show. And a quick-fix election organized at high cost by Western PR firms, essentially for the benefit of Western public opinion, no longer does the trick. In essence both sides confront a stalemate. The insurgents cannot win militarily, but they have made a NATO victory impossible. The US could only win the ‘just war’ by destroying the country and wiping out a million or two Afghans – but that is politically unfeasible. Negotiations are the only possible route to a settlement and US withdrawal from the country.

What we are witnessing is the end of a disastrous occupation that achieved even less than the Russian version did during the 1980s. Within the United States, realist critics of imperial adventures have been warning of hubris for some time. John Mearsheimer, avoiding euphemisms of every sort, pointed out acutely in *The Tragedy of Great Power Politics* (2001) that the foreign policy of his country was devoted not to good governance or liberal values, let alone peace – but to the defence of US interests against those of other states. And it was this fact that would determine the politics of the twenty-first century.

A version of this message from the maverick libertarian, Ron Paul, is currently being repeated on US television in its coverage of the Republican primaries. Paul is the only figure in national politics to demand the dismantling of the American Empire. Interestingly, he wins more support from military families than all his rivals.

25.

## The Not-So-Lone Gunman

March 2012

In most colonial wars people are arrested, tortured at random and killed. Not even a façade of legality is considered necessary. The ‘lone’ American gunman who butchered innocents in Afghanistan in the early hours of Sunday morning was far from being an exception.<sup>1</sup> For this is not the act of a deranged maniac killing schoolchildren in an American city. The ‘lone’ killer is a sergeant in the US army. He’s not the first and won’t be the last to kill like this.

The French did the same in Algeria, the Belgians in the Congo, the British in Kenya and Aden, the Germans in South West Africa, the Boers in South Africa, the Israelis in Palestine, the US in Korea, Vietnam and Central America; and their surrogates have behaved similarly against their own populations throughout South America and much of Asia.

The Russian occupation of Afghanistan also witnessed ‘lone gunmen’ behaving in this fashion, but better educated than many of their US counterparts they would write about the whys and wherefores in anguished diaries after they had been withdrawn. Rodric Braithwaite’s *Afgantsy* cites chapter and verse.<sup>2</sup> There is no such thing as a ‘humanitarian’ war. The sooner this fact is accepted by the citizens of the occupying countries the easier it might become to mobilize support to oppose neocolonial adventures and the attendant atrocities.

It’s hardly a secret that most Afghans are opposed to the occupation of their country. Occupying soldiers are well aware of the fact. The ‘enemy’ is not hidden. It is the public. So wiping out women and children is part of the war. Helicopter gunships, bomber jets and drones are more effective killers than ‘lone’ gunmen. The situation in Afghanistan today is so dire that the occupying forces have no way of telling whether Afghans working with them are actually on their side or not. Some of the recent attacks on US and NATO soldiers have come from Afghans wearing police and military uniforms tailored by NATO. So everyone is now the enemy – even the puppet president Karzai, who knows his days are numbered though he, at least, has a few safe havens and numbered bank accounts waiting for him. For the US, the contradictions are implacable. The Afghans want them out and the war has become unwinnable.

So what is to be done? Get out now. These wars that dehumanize the ‘enemy’ also

dehumanize the citizens of warmongering nations. We are made to live in a state of ignorance, but by our apathy contribute to making sure that such a state continues indefinitely. The individual gunman will soon disappear from our thoughts and we can then settle down to the routine killings that take place every day, carried out collectively on the orders of politicians that we elect.

26.

## Pakistan's Future Is Tied to the Taliban

February 2014

Twelve years ago, a few weeks into the occupation of Afghanistan, I suggested (in these pages) that the euphoria aroused by an easy conquest was misplaced.<sup>1</sup> It would be a long war and one of its side effects would be to seriously destabilize Pakistan. Unfortunately, events have not contradicted the analysis. The spillover into Pakistan has been creating havoc for years. The view that this has nothing to do with Afghanistan is too shallow to deserve serious consideration.

It's no secret that, since 9/11, successive governments – Musharraf, Zardari and now the Sharif brothers – have agreed to US drone attacks and been aware of covert CIA operations being carried out in Pakistan. Opinion polls, however, reveal that a large majority of Pakistani citizens are opposed to US policies. The capitulation of liberal secular parties to Washington left the field wide open to armed groups of religious fundamentalists, who began to challenge the state's monopoly of legitimate violence, presenting themselves as defenders of both Islam and the victimized Pashtuns in Pakistan. Their claims are false.

Last year alone the TTP (Pakistani Taliban Movement), the largest of the armed fundamentalist groups, carried out hundreds of attacks in different parts of the country, massacring several hundred innocents and half that number of security and military personnel. Who were the dead? Christians in Peshawar, Shias in other parts of the country, naval ratings in Karachi, intelligence operatives, and policemen and soldiers everywhere.

Attempts by the military over the years to clear them out from certain areas they occupied (Swat being the best example) failed for two reasons: the military steamroller is clumsy and reckless, often achieving the exact opposite of what it has set out to do before having to withdraw; and, second, once the soldiers return to barracks, the civilian infrastructure is far too weak to resist armed intrusions by the militants. The pattern is repeated and nothing changes.

A few weeks ago the TTP targeted military headquarters in Rawalpindi, killing soldiers and civilians. As the prime minister, Nawaz Sharif, arrived to visit the

wounded in a local hospital, crowds of angry citizens chanted the choicest Punjabi abuse against the TTP and demanded action. A shaken Sharif authorized one of his closest ministers to virtually declare war: the Pakistani air force was dispatched to target TTP headquarters. The TTP leaders were shocked, and suggested immediate talks with the government. They asked Imran Khan, leader of the PTI – the provincial government in Pakhtunkhwa province, which borders Afghanistan – to be part of their delegation. Embarrassed by the request, he refused. But others have been found, including Sami-ul-Haq, the creepy cleric touted as the ‘father of the Taliban’. Nawaz Sharif has decided to back off from military action, and talks are expected to start very soon. They may produce a temporary ceasefire, but not much more.

However horrific the spate of recent bombings, the heart of the problem remains Afghanistan. It is not the case that the TTP and related networks are so powerful that their leaders cannot be found, captured, charged and punished. The fact is that, with the impending withdrawal of the US from Afghanistan, Pakistan’s intelligence service, the ISI, and its bosses in Pakistan cannot afford to offend the TTP too much. Islamabad has developed the theory of ‘strategic depth’: keeping Afghanistan out of the hands of India’s allies as a defensive strategy against India. This was always slightly absurd, given that both India and Pakistan are nuclear powers and any serious conflict would be a disaster for both countries.

Also, the Pashtuns in Afghanistan have always resented the British division of their lands and quite a few in Pakistan feel closer to their Afghan brethren than the regimes in Islamabad. The Taliban veil has masked this hostility and given it religious colours, but, underneath it all, the national question remains strong. If a section of the ISI supports the armed networks, it is difficult for other wings of the ISI to close it down.

A lasting solution, which may well not be the one favoured by many Pakistanis, will come after the US and its auxiliaries have left the country. The puppet president, Hamid Karzai, is aware of all this, which is why he has declared: ‘The Taliban are our brothers,’ and denounced the British presence in Helmand. He will probably try to promote Pashtun nationalism to weaken Islamabad. The stakes are high for all sides.

## Twenty Years after 9/11

September 2021

A year prior to the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001 targeting the Twin Towers and the Pentagon, Chalmers Johnson, the West Coast historian, onetime supporter of the Korean and Vietnam wars, and a CIA consultant to boot, published a prescient book entitled *Blowback*. The book, which became a bestseller, was virtually ignored at first. Johnson warned:

*Blowback* is shorthand for saying that a nation reaps what it sows, even if it does not fully know or understand what it has sown. Given its wealth and power, the United States will be a prime recipient in the foreseeable future of all the more expectable forms of blowback, particularly terrorist attacks against Americans in and out of the armed forces anywhere on earth, including within the United States.

Twenty-four hours after the blowback that stunned the world, with sympathy messages pouring in from every capital (including Havana), a cold-blooded Condoleezza Rice suggested at a meeting of the National Security Council that the events should be used to ‘get our way in the world’. In a cabinet meeting at the White House, the recently deceased war-criminal Donald Rumsfeld insisted that recalcitrant states be forced to swallow a poison pill. For him, Iraq should be ‘a principal target of the first round in the war against terrorism’. A week later, the Great Decider (Bush II) greenlighted an all-out war: ‘Let’s hit them hard. We want to signal this is a change from the past. We want to cause other countries like Syria and Iran to change their view.’ Paul Wolfowitz, No. 2 at the Department of Defense, amplified this notion in a conversation with the German foreign minister. When asked if Iraq was in any way connected to the attacks, he responded, ‘I think the president made it very clear today that this is about more than just one organization, it’s about more than just one event ... And I think everyone has got to look at this problem with completely new eyes in a completely new light after what happened last Tuesday.’

Then, the usual minions stepped in. Dennis Ross, the US director of the Israeli-Palestinian ‘peace process’, was not bashful either. Interviewed by David Remnick for the *New Yorker*, the peacemaker was insistent that ‘we can’t just do the usual thing – bomb a few targets, if it turns out to be Osama bin Laden. If we respond the same old way, nothing will change.’ That same week William Safire argued in the *New York Times* that the only way to respond was with a ‘strategy of pre-emptive retaliation’

against the enemies of the United States. A month later and not to be outdone, the neocon Charles Krauthammer defended the invasion of Afghanistan in his regular column in the *Washington Post*: ‘We are fighting because the bastards killed 5,000 [*sic*] of our people, and if we do not kill them, they are going to kill us again. This is a war of revenge and deterrence ... The liberationist talk must therefore be for foreign consumption.’

Notably, these ‘bastards’ and ‘enemies’ did not include Saudi Arabia, the country from which most of the terrorists hailed. The CIA surveillance of Saudi royals revealed not a few princes laughing and enjoying the spectacle. They had, in some cases, grown up with Bin Laden, whose father was a habitué of the palaces and whose construction firm had built some of them. During an early discussion at the National Security Council, an attack on Iraq was considered, but Bush, Rumsfeld and Cheney finally opted for a crude war of revenge against Afghanistan, where Bin Laden and others in the al-Qaeda leadership were lodged, courtesy of a Taliban government that itself had been put in place by the Pakistan army with the approval of the United States, some years after the Soviet decision to withdraw all its troops in February 1989.

The Taliban were quite prepared to hand over their guests to the US. They needed a fig leaf and asked politely for evidence. Some proof of al-Qaeda involvement. The White House was in no mood for legal niceties. A short delay was permitted to enable Pakistan to withdraw its military personnel from Afghanistan. Operation Enduring Freedom commenced in October 2001. The Taliban, on Pakistani military advice, did not resist. Their one-eyed leader Mullah Omar was last reported fleeing Kabul on a motorbike, reminiscent of Steve McQueen in *The Great Escape*. When US troops finally reached al-Qaeda HQ in the Tora Bora caves, the leadership had fled. Both Omar and Osama bin Laden plus his crew found refuge in Pakistan, where the country’s military leaders advised the Taliban to shave their beards and bide their time. The US and all its NATO allies, as well as Russia and China (good friends at the time), backed the war and the occupation of Afghanistan – the Russians, no doubt, with an element of *Schadenfreude*.

## Crimes in Iraq

A year and a half later, on 15 February 2003, knowing what was next and harbouring few illusions about their leaders, 8 million people marched on five continents against any war on Iraq. Sanctions had already crippled the country, and the denial of medicines had led to the deaths of half a million children – a price that Madeleine Albright, Bill Clinton’s secretary of state, had said back in 1996 was ‘worth paying’. The largest demonstrations were in Madrid (2 million), Rome (almost 3 million) and London (over a million), joined by hundreds of thousands in New York and Los Angeles and huge



assemblies in most state capitals. It was a pre-emptive strike for peace before the war had even begun.

The largest gathering for peace ever seen in global history was ignored by Bush, Blair and their cronies. Iraq was pulverized and its leader subjected to a judicial lynching. Torture by US soldiers (both men and women) was widespread as triumphal rape pics were bandied around. For many, this was the face of Western civilization. The casualty figures totalled at least a million Iraqis dead (this tallies with the figure of 5 million orphans revealed by the Iraqi government installed after the occupation). Baghdad's museums were looted, ancient papyrus documents were thrown into the streets, and the social infrastructure of the country devastated by bombing raids. These were war crimes, but they were 'our' war crimes and so ignored, disregarding the judgments at Nuremberg after the Second World War. In the 'war against terror', it was always open season. Shoot to kill, no trials necessary and indefinite imprisonment. Legal and moral values ('our way of life') ceased to exist. Depleted uranium warheads were deployed in Iraq and, later, Syria. The sanctions imposed on Iraq were a war crime on their own. The target was the civilian population. The reasoning was that this might lead to a spontaneous popular uprising. A former senior British civil servant, Carne Ross, testified before a parliamentary select committee in 2006 and admitted:

The weight of evidence clearly indicates that sanctions caused massive human suffering among ordinary Iraqis, in particular children ... We – the US and UK governments who were the primary engineers and defenders of sanctions – were well aware of this evidence at the time, but we largely ignored it or blamed all these effects on the Saddam government ... Sanctions effectively destroyed the Iraqi civilian economy, denying the entire population the means to live, and forcing them into dependence on UN- and government-supplied rations.<sup>1</sup>

Real history moves deep within the memory of a people but is always an obstacle to imperial fantasists. There is now near-universal agreement that the Western occupation of Iraq has turned out to be an unmitigated disaster; first for the people of Iraq, second for the soldiers sent by scoundrel politicians to die in a foreign land. The grammar of deceit utilized by Bush, Blair and sundry neocon/neolib apologists to justify the war has lost all credibility. Despite the embedded journalists and non-stop propaganda, the bloody images refused to go away: the immediate withdrawal of all foreign troops was the only meaningful solution. While the US has now supposedly withdrawn, its planes are used occasionally to bomb the country. A ghoulish reminder that if the Iraqi government misbehaves, punishments will be forthcoming.

## Lies over Libya

Libya, despite its vast oil wealth, was another story. Unlike the Iraqi and Syrian Baath

parties, Muammar Gaddafi had balked at constructing a proper social infrastructure, which would have gone a long way to dissolve tribal loyalties. He had given up on his nuclear programme in return for Western recognition. He was feted in Western capitals. In return for a generous donation, the London School of Economics ‘helped’ his son get a PhD. He provided funds for Nicolas Sarkozy’s presidential campaign in France.

Gaddafi’s vices, eccentricities and more serious failings were on display in February 2011 during an Arab Spring–linked uprising. He thought his new friends in the West would back him. The opposite was the case. They had decided to get rid of him and the opportunity offered itself. But the story told by military humanitarians to justify US intervention – that Gaddafi was bent on massacring his people – was based in large part on an Al Jazeera report that the Libyan air force was strafing demonstrators. This turned out to be a fiction, according to congressional testimony by Defense Secretary Gates and Admiral Mullen. Nor were there any massacres in Misrata, Zawiya or Ajdabiya, when government forces retook them. Gaddafi’s warning on 17 March that his forces would show ‘no mercy’ explicitly referred to rebels in arms in Benghazi but offered an amnesty and an escape route over the Egyptian border to those who laid down their weapons. Brutal though Gaddafi’s regime was, there is scant evidence that NATO bombardment was ‘preventing genocide’, ‘another Rwanda’ or, as Obama put it, that ‘if we waited one more day, Benghazi could suffer a massacre that would have reverberated across the region and stained the conscience of the world’.

It’s likely that between 1,000 and 2,000 people had died before the NATO airstrikes began. According to the most conservative estimates, the six-month bombardment killed 8,000–10,000 people, with NATO planes not only failing to protect civilians as they targeted Gaddafi’s forces but also strafing those tribes who had been shocked by the Western intervention. A more likely casualty figure would be anything between 20,000 and 30,000 people. Gaddafi was captured, tortured and mob-lynched. Ever sensitive, Hillary Clinton remarked: ‘We came. We saw. He died.’ Pity. In other circumstances he might well have funded the Clinton Foundation.

After the collapse of an absurdist pro-business neoliberal government led by a Libyan exile in Texas, post-Gaddafi Libya was taken over by three rival jihadi factions, including al-Qaeda. The sovereign state had collapsed as in Iraq, and a civil war commenced. Black African immigrants were expelled in large numbers and returned to their countries. Mali’s capital Timbuktu and much of the Sahel was taken over by these ‘refugee militias’. The French sent in troops.

Meanwhile, there were more terrorist attacks: in London, in Paris, in Bombay and Islamabad. The ‘war on terror’ had failed on every single level. Those attacks continued both abroad as well as at home despite – or more likely because of – that failed war. A war against civil liberties masked as a defence against terror. In the face of terror attacks, one particular mantra was repeated: ‘We shall not permit these attacks to change our way of life.’ But they did. And they do. ‘Oh, may no more a foreign

master's rage / With wrongs yet legal, curse a future age!' wrote Alexander Pope. Three centuries later, we had Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Britain's own state security prison, Belmarsh, in which some of those held indefinitely without trial were driven mad and transferred to Broadmoor, a high-security psychiatric hospital. Whistle-blowers who revealed the crimes in Iraq and elsewhere were severely punished. Chelsea Manning was pardoned, but Edward Snowden, who revealed the scale of the surveillance carried out by the National Security Agency, had to flee the country. And Julian Assange remains in Belmarsh prison, wondering whether the British judicial system will send him to be entombed in a US security prison on the basis of tainted evidence linked to conspiracy charges, themselves manufactured to aid a corrupt legal process in Britain.<sup>2</sup>

The day after Baghdad fell in 2003, the Israeli ambassador was quoted in the *New York Times* congratulating the United States but asking the president not to stop. Forward to Damascus and Teheran. Those two capitals remain safe, though Syria is broken and Iran sanctioned. Where would freedom and democracy strike next? Today the grim, bloody, balance sheet of 'responding differently' speaks for itself. Six wars: Afghanistan, Iraq, Somalia, Libya, Syria, Yemen. Millions killed, trillions wasted, and a plague of suffering and traumas inflicted on innocents in the Muslim world, accelerating a tidal wave of refugees that has created panic in the European Union and resulted in a huge increase of votes for far-right parties – a phenomenon that has pushed an already extreme political centre further to the right. Islamophobia, promoted by politicians of every stripe in the West, is now embedded in Western culture.

## Humiliation in Afghanistan

In Afghanistan, Washington ultimately had to admit defeat with the full realization that the Taliban would soon be back in power. It has been a huge politico-military catastrophe for the US and its NATO camp followers. 'Freedom' did not endure. The Taliban's triumphant march through provincial capitals moved in near tandem with the US withdrawal. Puppet Afghan troops proved to be precisely that and no more. What does the future hold? Replicating the model developed for Iraq and Syria, the US has announced a permanent special military unit, staffed by 2,500 troops, to be stationed at a Kuwaiti base, ready to fly to Afghanistan and bomb, kill and maim should it become necessary. The US prefers these days to exercise direct control via drones and bombing raids, as they did a day after confirming their Afghan withdrawal. But air strikes to defend those whom it's leaving behind will simply lead to more death and destruction without solving anything.

The key players in Afghanistan now are China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan (the last of which has undoubtedly provided strategic assistance to the Taliban, and for whom this

is a huge politico-military triumph). None of them wants a new civil war, in polar contrast to the US and its allies after the Soviet withdrawal. In July this year, a senior Taliban delegation visited China pledging that their country would never again be used as a launch pad for attacks on other states. Cordial discussions were held with the Chinese foreign minister, reportedly covering trade and economic ties.



Taliban delegation in Tianjin with Wang Yi, Chinese foreign minister, 28 July 2021

The photograph above, released by Beijing, is symbolic in many ways, reflecting both shifts in the world order and continuity in Afghanistan. I can recall similar images of the Afghan mujahideen leaders with Ronald Reagan in the White House and Margare Thatcher in 10 Downing Street during the 1980s, with the same Wahhabi costume and regulation beard-cuts. Have no doubt, Beijing will replace Washington as the capital of importance for Afghanistan. Since China enjoys warm relations with Iran, we can hope that they will discourage Hazara–Pashtun rivalries that might lead to bloodshed. Russia, for its part, will use its influence with other minorities to avoid any new outbreak of civil war as happened after the Soviet withdrawal in 1989 when Kabul was almost destroyed.

Much emphasis has been placed on the average age in Afghanistan: eighteen, in a population of 40 million. On its own this means nothing. But there is hope that young

Afghans will strive for a better life after the forty-year conflict. For Afghan women the struggle is by no means over, even if only a single enemy remains. In Britain and elsewhere, all those who want to fight on must shift their focus to the refugees who will soon be knocking on NATO's door. At the very least, refuge is what the West owes them: a minor reparation for an unnecessary war.

# Appendix

## Russian Lessons

### The Suicide of the Afghan Left (1983)

As we have seen, on 17 July 1973 a palace coup organized by Prince Daud had led to the overthrow of his uncle, King Zahir Shah, and the proclamation of a Republic. Daud pledged substantial reform of the political structures, winning the support of the *Parcham* (Flag) faction of Afghan communists. However, four years after Daud's coup, the level of illiteracy remained 90 per cent for men and 98 per cent for women; 5 per cent of landowners (in many cases also tribal chiefs) held 45 per cent of cultivable land; and Afghanistan possessed the lowest per capita income of any Asian country. In July 1977, *Parcham* reunited its forces with the other main communist faction (*Khalq* – the People), withdrew all support from the Daud regime and formed the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan.<sup>1</sup>

The Shah of Iran showed a keen interest in Afghanistan, and SAVAK agents were provided to help Daud deal with the left and with dissent in general. The Shah pressed Daud on both the internal and the external front: inside the country, the Iranian dictator favoured institutionalized repression on the Iranian model; externally, he wanted Daud to ease links with the USSR and 'tilt' towards the West. The first result of the Shah's influence was the assassination of a popular PDPA leader, on 18 April 1978. Mir Akbar Khyber was a university professor respected by both wings of the reunited PDPA. His funeral turned into a mass demonstration, and Daud embarked on full-scale repression. SAVAK advisers recommended that the PDPA leadership be physically eliminated. Arrests of PDPA leaders did not provoke any great urban unrest, but the organization implemented plans to utilize its base in the armed forces to topple the Daud dictatorship. This was achieved with remarkable ease on 27 April. Daud was executed. The mass celebrations that took place in Kabul the following day indicated that the coup was popular. Contrary to later Western mythology, the Soviet Union was caught completely unawares, as was Washington. This was hardly surprising, since the objective basis for the coup had been prepared by Teheran rather than Moscow.<sup>2</sup>

The two factions of Afghan communism comprising the PDPA were subsequently to falsify their own history. Noor Mohammed Taraki, who became Chairman of the Revolutionary Council, was to claim 50,000 members for the party. The real figure was

more like 4,000, and consisted exclusively of the urban petty bourgeoisie: teachers, lawyers, government servants and army officers constituted the vast majority of members. Taraki and foreign minister Hafizullah Amin represented the *Khalq* faction, while vice-president Babrak Karmal) was the main leader of *Parcham*. The central problem confronting the new regime was a consequence of the method whereby the PDPA had seized power. Bonapartism has long been regarded as a crime in the Marxist classics; yet what the PDPA insisted on christening the Saur (April) Revolution was nothing but a glorified military coup. A necessary defensive act against those plotting massive repression, certainly; a revolution, by no means. All social revolutions are the extreme manifestations of social and class conflicts, regardless of whether those who push them through are aware of the fact or not. Social classes provide the motor force for every revolution, even though the actions of political parties or movements at the head of these classes may determine its success. In refusing to acknowledge this basic fact, the *Khalq* faction which organized the coup deliberately sought to shield itself from reality. What was particularly repulsive was its attempt to portray a defensive military coup as a model for other backward countries. Amin's vanity reached absurd levels:

Prior to our revolution, the working class everywhere wanted to follow the footprints of the Great October Revolution. However, after the Great Saur Revolution the toilers should know that there does exist a short-cut which can transfer the power from the feudal class to the working class – and our revolution proved it.<sup>3</sup>

The first six months of the new regime did arouse the hopes and expectations of the people in both town and countryside. The rhetoric of the Revolutionary Council was couched in radical-democratic reformist phraseology. Taraki's insistence that the official media use the languages of the minority nationalities did much to offset the grey jargon contained in the *Kabul Times*. The political formation and ideological training of the PDPA, however, soon emerged as a tremendous obstacle. The *Khalq* refused to tolerate the rival *Parcham* faction, and a ferocious inner-party struggle resulted in a giant purge. Babrak Karmal and his associates were removed from all government positions and sent off as ambassadors to various Eastern European states (Karmal himself was posted to Prague). The coup makers who had overthrown Daud had promised democracy and reforms to the people. The purge inside the PDPA, however, was a sorry symbol of the monolithism that was to envelop the entire country.

In our opinion, reforms were only possible within the framework of political democracy, with all allowances made for local conditions. It had been argued that the PDPA's use of brutality within its ranks was a reflection of Afghan backwardness and the predominance of a tribal culture.<sup>4</sup> This is at least partly true. But communists or Marxists form political organizations precisely in order to challenge existing reality, on every level. The reasons for the failure were more complex: it was a combination of Stalinist ideology and Afghan backwardness which produced the *Khalq* mutation. A distinguishing hallmark of Stalinism is its substitutionist equation of party and class,

which leads to an equation of the central committee with the party, and subsequently of the general secretary with the central committee. The common people are essentially viewed as objects to be manipulated: their role is to be the active and willing instruments of authoritarian party decisions. Monolithism is, therefore, not an irrationality, but a necessary concomitant of Stalinist political practice.

The crucial weakness in the PDPA armoury was its total lack of equipment on the question of democratic institutions and democratic rights. The regime lacked popular legitimacy, since it was the product not of a revolution, but of a coup d'état. Its first task was therefore on the political plane. It needed a Constituent Assembly elected on the basis of universal adult suffrage to prepare a new Constitution. It should have permitted the flowering of different political ideas and currents, and utilized this period for taking its plan for rural reforms to the overwhelming majority of the population in the countryside. The one political leader and theoretician within classical Marxism whose writings had discussed such problems was Trotsky; but he, of course, had been anathematized within the official communist movement. Trotsky had written some comments on China which were, in fact, more applicable to contemporary Afghanistan:

The stage of democracy has a great importance in the evolution of the masses. Under definite conditions, the revolution can allow the proletariat to pass beyond this stage. But it is precisely to facilitate this future development, which is not at all easy and not at all guaranteed to be successful in advance, that it is necessary to utilize to the fullest the inter revolutionary period to exhaust the democratic resources of the bourgeoisie. This can be done by developing democracy before the broad masses and by compelling the bourgeoisie to place itself in contradiction to them at each step.<sup>5</sup>

Afghanistan was in some ways fortunate. It did not possess an indigenous or comprador bourgeoisie comparable to those of either India or China. Reaction, as in Amanullah's time, was concentrated in the complex inter related structures of tribalism and nomadism. A patient, protracted *political* struggle was required to win over the masses. Such a struggle necessitated an elected assembly. This would have provided both an approximation of the relationship of social forces, and an arena within which political debates could be conducted. Of course, there was every possibility that the clergy and tribal chiefs (many of whom doubled as landlords) would have resisted all attempts to establish an electoral register and organize an election. But in these circumstances the PDPA regime would have been much better placed to wage an armed struggle.

The *Khalq* leaders, however, gave no thought to this question. They pushed through a series of radical land reforms *without* any serious infrastructure to ensure local support (as was to be admitted by a strong partisan of the PDPA, after the fall of Amin<sup>6</sup>). Instead of a political strategy designed to awaken the rural masses and permit the urban dwellers to speak for themselves, Hafizullah Amin, the *Khalq* strongman, who became prime minister in March 1979, devised a plan which achieved the exact



opposite. The slogan which defined the *Khalq*'s political orientation was simple: '98 per cent support our reforms, but 2 per cent [the exploiters] oppose them.' The solution was equally simple: the 2 per cent had to be physically eliminated. The method and manner of implementing reforms from above was thus bound to provoke an explosion from below.

It is true that the tribal leaders and clerics opposed to the reforms were receiving aid from Pakistan, China and Egypt. However, such aid was not decisive; hardly of the sort that could have tipped the internal balance in Afghanistan, in any event. What was crucial for Afghani reaction was the fact that it could depend on a growing pool of mass support in *both* town and countryside. In other words, the majority of Afghanistan's population refused to accept that it had any stake whatsoever in the reforms proposed by the PDPA regime. This, by itself, constituted an incredible indictment of a regime which claimed to have made a revolution. The Cuban Revolution has demonstrated that outside intervention, economic blockades or assassination attempts against leaders can impede advance, but they cannot topple a popular leadership. Cuba was also disadvantaged in that its geographical location placed it off the shores of its mortal enemy, the United States of America. Despite all this, the regime of Castro could not be overthrown. Ever more strikingly, half a million American soldiers backed by horrendous firepower failed to defeat the Vietnamese communists. The Afghan PDPA leaders had come to office through unorthodox methods, without a real popular base; but it was their unwillingness even to recognize this fact which made it so difficult for them to overcome their weaknesses and win mass support.

Amin's repression was felt first by the rival *Parcham* supporters, then by the Afghan people as a whole, and finally – as the situation worsened in early 1979, with mutinies inside the army and risings in a number of towns – by opponents within his own faction. A shoot-out at the presidential palace in September 1979 resulted in the elimination of President Taraki,<sup>7</sup> and the consolidation of Amin's position now as a virtual dictator. There can be little doubt that the Taraki–Amin shoot-out was provoked by a Soviet attempt to get rid of the latter. There were over 5,000 Soviet 'advisers' in Afghanistan at this stage, fighting with the Afghan army against the diverse insurgent forces, since Kabul itself was clearly incapable (politically or militarily) of defeating the rebellion. Soviet pilots assisted in often indiscriminate raids on numerous villages, in an attempt to demoralize and weaken the base of the opposition; but senior Soviet advisers undoubtedly recognized that the situation was hopeless on virtually every front. The decision to overthrow Amin was intended to reverse the process of repression and rebellion in Afghanistan: the plan, however, obviously backfired.

Amin was not unaware of Soviet machinations. He had a number of grudges against the Brezhnev leadership. Moscow had given asylum to Babrak Karmal, his main rival following the *Parcham* leader's peremptory dismissal as Afghan ambassador in Prague. Amin had criticized the Soviet Union obliquely in May 1979 for giving 'shelter to the

enemies of the working class in its territory'. He had refused to visit Moscow for direct talks, and had demanded that Moscow withdraw its ambassador, Alexander Puzanov, from Kabul.<sup>8</sup> It is possible that he was actually considering a break with Moscow, via a deal with China – and thus indirectly with the United States and the West. In fact, he had few alternatives, given that he was at the head of a hated and isolated regime internally and now also on the hit-list of the Soviet Politburo. Amin's only base was among a rapidly diminishing group of PDPA *Khalqi* cadres, and in the armed forces. His secret service was not as powerful as he had thought, since its personnel were adept at shifting allegiances (a characteristic of many intelligence agencies in the colonial and semi-colonial world).

### 'Initiatives from Moscow Are Needed' (1985)

*The speech excerpted below was delivered in Tashkent, USSR, during the last week of April 1985, at a conference on 'Peace and Security in Asia' jointly organized by the United Nations University in Tokyo and the Soviet Academy of Sciences. Such events are not new, but the special interest of this gathering lay in its location and the composition of the delegates. In addition to 'experts' from North and South Korea, the People's Republic of China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, the Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, Japan, India, the United States and New Left Review, a large and authoritative delegation from the Soviet Union was headed by Academicians Fedoseyev and Primakov. The former is a member of the Central Committee of the CPSU, out of favour during the last decade of Brezhnevism for suggesting that there were 'contradictions within socialist countries', and the latter is a key adviser on strategy in the Third World.*

*On Afghanistan Academician Primakov stated very firmly that the USSR had no interest whatsoever in prolonging its military presence, and that a comprehensive agreement with Islamabad had been repeatedly sabotaged by the United States, mainly throughout the pouring in of money and weaponry to the military junta. What was rejected as unrealistic, however, was my suggestion that a unilateral move by the USSR was necessary to regain the initiative on Afghanistan. With regard to Sino-Soviet relations, a general impression was confirmed that both sides are moving towards some form of 'normalization' – though without a reversion to the status quo ante. Contrary to Cold War stereotypes and related prejudices, it is quite clear that the official intelligentsia of the USSR (members and aspirants of the Academy of Sciences) cannot be dismissed wholesale as crude apparatchiks. It is undeniable that much published material on contemporary politics has an instrumental function largely serving diplomatic needs, but I found that knowledge and research on the West and the Third World – if not, ironically, on Eastern Europe – is often very*

*impressive. The fact that much of this does not find its way into official publications is a grim reminder of the jealously guarded bureaucratic monopoly of information and knowledge, which irritates many established intellectuals and which they expect Gorbachev to modify or abolish altogether as part of a cultural and intellectual relaxation. Private conversations with Academy members were often highly stimulating and instructive.*

A tense situation prevails in South-West Asia. This war too has global repercussions. I refer to the tragedy of Afghanistan. Unfortunately no one can say that the story here is a simple and straightforward variant of events in Indochina, Central America or Southern Africa. It is, and this is an understatement, a complex conflict. For those who do not accept the officially stated Soviet position on the causes or solutions of the war in Afghanistan, it is essential to spell out, however briefly and schematically, the main elements of the situation there.

In April 1978 a group of radical officers, many of them members of the PDPA, carried out what was in effect a defensive coup d'état, and overthrew the regime of the hated Daud. The officers had acted to pre-empt a wave of repression which Daud was planning in collaboration with the Shah of Iran. The coup was a popular affair and was greeted with widespread support in Kabul. The new regime promised land reforms and *democracy*, and pledged to end all the dictatorial practices associated with the old order. The Soviet Union was clearly taken by surprise at this turn of events, a fact admitted by the more sophisticated commentators in the Western press.<sup>9</sup> Its advice to the new government was to move slowly. The new leaders were, however, far too 'dizzy with success'. They equated a defensive and necessary military coup with a revolution. Real social revolutions are extreme manifestations of social and class conflicts: it is the social classes at the lower end of the existing order who provide their motor force. The Afghan PDPA leaders concealed these realities from themselves. Hafizullah Amin, the strongman of the party, boasted that the Saur 'revolution' in Afghanistan had replaced October 1917 as a model for the international working class, since there was now available 'a short-cut which can transfer power from the feudal class to the working class – and our revolution proved it'. Such was the braggadocio of a monolithic regime which attempted to stifle all dissent in the country.

Ill-conceived and bureaucratic reforms failed to mobilize the villagers who comprise the bulk of the population. The ensuing repression and large-scale arrests scarcely proved more popular, and the growing discontent below was soon reflected within the upper reaches of the PDPA (in itself a tiny political organization based largely in the towns). Amin settled differences within the party in the same way. Taraki, a genuinely popular leader, was killed in a shoot-out, and Afghan reaction, taking advantage of these heaven-sent opportunities, began to win growing support. The Sino-American alliance utilized the military dictatorship in Pakistan to provide bases for

training Afghan guerrillas in order to topple the Amin regime. These developments caused acute preoccupation in Moscow. The USSR had just been confronted with the NATO rearmament programme in Brussels, which made it clear that the Americans were determined to place Cruise and Pershing missiles in their satellite states in Western Europe. China was patronizing the Afghan insurgency on its other flank. The Soviet leadership now decided that the only way to stabilize the situation in Afghanistan was to remove Amin and replace him with a more pliant and moderate ruler. In December 1979, units of the Red Army entered Kabul. Amin and his closest colleagues were killed and Babrak Karmal was placed in power. Since then, civil war has raged in Afghanistan.

Throughout all this, a mythological rendering of the events of April 1978 has been a major obstacle to any self-understanding on the part of the PDPA. The fact is that the present regime is deeply unpopular in much of the countryside and has only a limited social base of support in the towns. Otherwise it is impossible to understand why the continuing military role of Soviet troops is necessary. Imperialism is only successful in ousting progressive regimes when these lack a genuinely popular mass basis. A comparison with Nicaragua is telling in this connection. Here we have seen an authentic social revolution which destroyed a hated dictatorship. The FSLN has debated in public the future of the Nicaraguan revolution. Differences can find political expression. Right-wing parties have not been banned. Bourgeois newspapers were and are allowed. Meanwhile, the United States has set the CIA to work to destabilize and overthrow the Sandinista regime. A counter-revolution has been trained and armed, from bases in Honduras, while its paymasters in the White House have hypocritically demanded elections in Nicaragua. The Sandinistas obliged, and – before international observers – won an overwhelming popular mandate, establishing for themselves a dual legitimacy without precedent in a post-revolutionary state. The FSLN has not needed Cuban troops to help defeat the counter-revolution. This is the model that needs to be popularized throughout the world.

To say this is not to imply that the USSR is uninterested in a peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. The main barrier to such a solution is the Pentagon, which would like to keep Soviet troops bogged down in Afghanistan for as long as possible, and does its best to increase the casualty rates there. To thwart these designs, unilateral initiatives from Moscow are needed to expose and outflank Washington. The continuing Soviet presence in Afghanistan, against the will of major sections of the population, does not aid the construction of a ‘new, democratic and genuinely free Afghan society’ – the laudable aim recently stated by the Soviet ambassador to Pakistan.

*Postscript:* During the lunch break, I was surrounded by Soviet delegates, who dragged me off to their table. One of them asked: ‘Are you aware that we have a new party leader?’ It was April 1985 and Mikhail Gorbachev had just been made the First

Secretary. I nodded. ‘Well,’ continued my interlocutor, ‘some of us here, as comrade Primakov will tell you in more detail, were at a cadre discussion on Afghanistan, where comrade Gorbachev made a speech that was more-or-less the same as your remarks this morning.’ I was astonished, but they informed me that he was responding to growing unrest on this issue within the party and army. Soviet casualty figures were unacceptable. It would take them another four years to withdraw.

## A Bitter and Brutal War (2011)

Late one night in 1897, a Pashtun tribe (with whom the British wrongly assumed they were not in dispute), launched a stealth attack on the British encampment. Winston Churchill, an eager twenty-something subaltern on his first visit to the turbulent North-West Frontier, was outraged by the ‘treachery’. The guerrilla attack cost the British Indian army forty officers and men as well as many horses and pack animals. To the young Churchill’s delight, the commander of the operation, Sir Bindon Blood ordered an immediate retaliation. The new recruit joined General Jeffreys in the punitive expedition to ‘chastise the truculent assailants’. The exciting encounter between the flashing swords of the Pashtuns and English rifles was all in a day’s work, as he later wrote in *My Early Life*, but what afforded young Winston the greatest pleasure was the disciplined accomplishment of a colonial mission:

The chastisement was to take the form of marching up their valley, which is a *cul de sac*, to its extreme point, destroying all the crops, breaking the reservoirs of water, blowing up as many forts as time permitted, and shooting anyone who obstructed the process.

Who can blame the Afghans in subsequent centuries for believing that in every new intrusion they’re once again seeing the first in a different guise? What has changed is the technology and the rhetoric: helicopter gunships and drones instead of bayoneted rifles; ‘humanitarian’ explanations and lies instead of Churchill’s straightforwardness.

Soviet academicians (and their Tsarist predecessors) specializing in Central Asia were close students of the disastrous Anglo-Afghan wars of the nineteenth century. Nor could Soviet leaders forget the basmachi (bandit) rebellion, as they called it, led by Muslim nationalists in Central Asia from 1918 onwards against the new Soviet authority. The guerrilla resistance was fierce, fearless and brutal, accompanied by tribal punishments: enemy testicles were often filleted and pocketed. The rebellion lasted for over a decade. An independent-minded Kirghiz intelligentsia, that otherwise might have been won en bloc to modernization, was treated with suspicion by Moscow: later deported, imprisoned, killed and replaced with loyal apparatchiks. The rebellion left an abiding memory in literature and later, the less-gifted Soviet film directors mimicked Hollywood Westerns with the basmachi taking the place of the Indians. Red Army

officers sent to ‘pacify’ the locals shuddered when they recalled the conflict. Despite all this the new generations born in the Central Asian Republics of the USSR received the same education as the rest of the country, similar social welfare systems and were modernized on the Soviet pattern with all its shortcomings and advantages. Women, in particular, benefited greatly.

Knowing all this, what possessed the Politburo of old men in Moscow, which had first, repeatedly and unanimously, rejected the option, to succumb to the siren voices in Kabul and send in the specially created Soviet 40th Army to occupy Afghanistan in December 1979? Opinions varied. The United States and its allies, taken by surprise unanimously condemned the intervention as a violation of Afghan sovereignty. Those were days when the independence (however nominal) of states outside the Yalta system played an important part in Cold War debates. Western ideologues of the woodenheaded variety saw the move as part of a grand Soviet design to gain access to warm-water ports. A majority of the Non-Aligned movement and China denounced the intervention, speaking respectively of ‘great-power chauvinism’ and Soviet ‘social-imperialism’. Rodric Braithwaite argues convincingly that it was neither.

Illusions of every sort accompanied what was soon to become a bitter and brutal war, a disaster on virtually every level. If the invasion of Prague in August 1968 was the first nail in the coffin of the Soviet Union (Solzhenitsyn later wrote that it was this disaster that finally convinced him that the system could not be reformed), the attempt, two decades later, to pacify Afghanistan would be the last. Soviet troops were forced to pull out in 1989: two years later, the country itself had ceased to exist. A visionless gerontocracy had ruled the Soviet Union for far too long and virtually ensured that this would happen anyway. The fall-out from Afghanistan merely speeded the process.

Braithwaite, a highly respected Foreign Office mandarin, ambassador to the Soviet Union (1988–92) and author of two previous books on that country, was in Moscow when Soviet troops crossed the Oxus/Amu Darya. He has produced a fascinating account of the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, based almost exclusively on Russian sources: interviews with participants, careful monitoring of the websites of individual veterans and their organizations and access to some of the old archives, if not those of the GRU or the KGB, most of which remain sealed.<sup>10</sup> Each page reads like a warning to the current occupiers of the country. Artemy Kalinovsky, an LSE academic attached to the Department of Cold War Studies has utilized the same archives in Moscow and, as a result, the two books complement each other.<sup>11</sup>

Braithwaite expressed his public opposition to the Iraq war and his disgust at the atmosphere of fear created by New Labour propaganda in two devastating critiques published by the *Financial Times*. The tone was that of cold anger. His stance encouraged many *refuseniks* still working in the Foreign Office during the Iraq war. Subsequently the outfit underwent a political cleansing. *Afgantsy* is written in a very

different register to the *FT* commentaries. The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan – reluctant, confused, semi-coherent – is viewed as a terrible tragedy for both the Russians (his affection for the country and its people manifest throughout the book) and the Afghans, who hate being occupied. Braithwaite writes of Soviet soldiers lacking in knowledge and experience, short on training dispatched across the historic river to shore up a failing regime that Moscow never wanted in the first place.

The principal aim of Soviet foreign policy since Lenin's time was to preserve Afghanistan as a neutral state. Even if offered a choice of instituting a social transformation from above, the founder of the Soviet Union was too orthodox a Marxist to believe that tribesmen and shepherds could make a sudden leap forward to socialism and had mocked all such notions: 'Herdsmen can't be transformed into a proletarian mass.'

His successors, likewise, were not at all pleased when, in 1973, a royal cousin, Daud, toppled King Zahir Shah in a palace coup and proclaimed a republic. Moscow had enjoyed warm relations with the king, a genial old buffer who presided over the tribal confederation that constituted the Afghan state. As Braithwaite documents, the Soviet leaders were even less pleased when a few years later in April 1978 a group of Communist officers in the army and air force organized a coup, together with a few supportive demonstrations in Kabul – 90 per cent of Afghans lived in the countryside – and tagged these events as a revolution. *Parcham* (Flag) and *Khalq* (People), two rival communist factions, consisting largely of university graduates, urban intellectuals, and several dozen officers and their fellow clansmen in the armed services, had in July 1977 with great reluctance, united their forces in the People's Democratic Party of Afghanistan (PDPA), a misnomer except for the name of the country. Noor Mohammed Taraki, a *Khalqi*, was appointed the general secretary, with Babrak Karmal (*Parcham*) as his deputy. Hafizullah Amin, another leading *Khalqi* was elected to the Politburo but only after a struggle. His *Parcham* opponents claimed he was a CIA agent, recruited during his spell as a student at Columbia University.

Accusations of this sort, without any basis whatsoever, were not uncommon on the South Asian left to discredit political opponents and were usually ignored. Amin's response, however, was not an outright denial. According to Braithwaite (referencing a Russian work based on Afghan transcripts of the meeting) Amin replied 'that he was short of money and that he had been merely stringing the CIA along'. Heard that one before? Whatever the real truth, it should be acknowledged that in the two years that followed, no in-house CIA agent could have done a better job than Amin in isolating and destroying the Afghan left and effectively offering the country on a platter to the enemies of light. The PDPA claimed a joint membership of 15,000. *Parcham*, the orthodox pro-Soviet group with 1,500 members was in a permanent minority. Both figures were exaggerations and even the narrow base of political support in Kabul evaporated rapidly, forcing the *Khalq* leaders to rely increasingly on tribal cronyism

inside the army, while its *Parcham* rivals depended on support from the Soviet embassy.

The KGB preferred *Parcham*; the GRU [Soviet Military Intelligence] had direct relations and accordingly more confidence in the *Khalq*, which controlled the military. One of the self-serving myths peddled by PDPA apologists was that the regime was popular and had it not been for Western support to the mujahideen, the PDPA would have held on with the aid of Soviet troops, consolidated power and modernized the country. It's a farcical notion as this book reveals. Braithwaite is sympathetic to the Soviet developmental model – mainly on the health and housing fronts and education, especially that of women – and contrasts it favourably to subsequent Anglo-American efforts in the region and elsewhere.

The country in which two Communist *groupuscules* had seized power was one of the most backward in the world. Its antiquated social structure harked back many centuries. The Pashtun tribes dominated the landscape and each unit maintained a semi-sovereignty over its territory, especially land, water and grazing grounds; but common property had long disappeared and the *khans* or chiefs had become landowners, employing clansmen as tenant farmers and others as virtual serfs. Each tribe had its own band of armed men. Land ownership created a huge gulf between the khans and the peasant-serfs. Of the country's surface area of 63 million hectares only one-seventh was arable and a shortage of water prevented crop rotation throughout the year.

A king ruled this confederacy of tribes, but till the late 1930s, monarchs were regularly assassinated or exiled after revolts within their camp or tribal rebellions. A previous attempt to modernize the country by King Amanullah (1919–29) had failed. Amanullah favoured a secular state on the Turkish pattern: import substitution through the creation of light industries, reorganization of the tax structure, formation of a national bank and the development of roads and a communications network. This was not to be. British political agents organized a tribal revolt against the reforms and their progenitor. Amanullah and Soraya, his pro-feminist consort, went into exile in 1929 on the Italian Riviera and died there in 1960.

Had the PDPA simply revived this programme in 1978 together with rationally considered land reforms, they might have won more support, but their *Khalqi* leaders, in particular, were fantasists. Hafizullah Amin boasted that they were going to teach the Russians the meaning of revolution: 'after our great revolution the toilers should know that there does exist a short-cut from the feudal class to the working class and our revolution proved it.' The proposed land reforms were intended to leap from landlordism to collectivization, without any mediating force in the countryside. It was lunacy. The peasants were scared to act on their own and the landed proprietors denounced the communists as atheists and infidels. Amin's statement that '98 per cent support the reforms, only 2 per cent oppose them' and his pledge to physically exterminate the 2 per cent did not go down well in a region dominated by clans.



The more experienced Soviet leaders, Yuri Andropov (head of the KGB) and veteran foreign minister Andrei Gromyko, were contemptuous of any notion that what had taken place in Kabul was a revolution. Andropov, in particular, excelled his contemporaries in the sharpness of his intellect and an instinctive and instantaneous ability to understand causes and their consequences. His experience as Soviet ambassador in Hungary during the 1956 uprising had scarred him, but he had learnt a few lessons. Backed by Gromyko, Kosygin and the defence minister General Ustinov he correctly analysed the changes in Kabul. It was a coup d'état, carried out in a hurry by a relatively small communist faction embedded in the armed forces. Unlike the South Yemeni revolution of the same period it had limited mass support. That was a huge problem. Sending in the Red Army would be totally counterproductive.

The Afghan leaders, faced with an army mutiny in Herat and expressions of discontent elsewhere, kept up the pressure for ground troops. Moscow's first response was forceful. Yuri Andropov was particularly sharp and warned the Politburo that given the character of the Afghan regime, Soviet troops, if sent in, would appear as aggressors and would be compelled from the very start to fight the ordinary people. He was strongly backed by Prime Minister Kosygin and Defence Minister Ustinov. Kosygin on the phone to Taraki in Kabul, Braithwaite informs us, 'naively argued from Marxist first principles' by suggesting that the Kabul regime,

should arm the workers, the petty-bourgeoisie and the white-collars workers in Herat. They should emulate the Iranians, who had thrown out the Americans with no outside help. Could the Afghan government not raise, say, fifty thousand students, peasants and workers in Kabul and arm them with the weapon supplied by Moscow.

I don't think this was so much an expression of naivety as a polite way of pointing out that the regime lacked a social base. A bemused Taraki, failing to detect the irony, responded by pointing out that even in Kabul the workers constituted a tiny minority, thus confirming that the vulgarized Marxist categories employed by his propaganda ministry were useless, a crude device to shield themselves from reality. The Kosygin-Taraki exchange lay at the heart of the problem: A regime without support at home dependent for its survival on the arrival of military support of an outside power. Kosygin might have pointed out the example of Cuba. Despite an ill-fated invasion, numerous attempts to bump off Castro and an economic blockade (partially neutralized by Soviet economic aid), the United States had failed to institute regime change on an offshore island with 2 million inhabitants. The reasons were obvious. It was a real revolution. It maintained mass support.

The PDPA's lack of a social base was a huge problem, which could not be surmounted. The attempt to transcend this reality by imposing a repressive regime on the people could only make the situation worse. When Politburo member Kryuchkov visited Kabul in early 1979 for an on-the-spot survey he was horrified to hear Taraki boasting

that in a few years the mosques would be empty. There were more political prisoners and executions in the first two years of PDPA rule than in the preceding fifty years of the country's history. When Puzanov, the Soviet ambassador, protested the scale of the repression to Amin, he was told that they were merely following the example of the early Soviet Union. Had not comrade Stalin's purges and forced collectivizations created the foundations of a strong state? The problem, according to the Afghan leaders, was the unwillingness of the Soviet Union to commit ground troops and defend 'the revolution'.

Having failed to convince the Russians, the Afghan communists now turned on each other. It was this brutal settling of factional and inter-factional scores within the party that ultimately provoked the Soviet intervention. The dominant *Khalq* faction led by Noor Mohammed Taraki and Hafizullah Amin purged their *Parcham* rivals from the government and three cabinet ministers sought refuge in the Soviet embassy. They were hidden in containers, taken to the Bagram airbase and flown out of the country. Braithwaite reports that their leader, Babrak Karmal, was regarded by the Russians as 'emotional, inclined to abstraction to the detriment of concrete analysis', but invaders can never be choosers. They have to make do with the human material on offer (or bring their own baggage). The *Parcham* leadership was put in mothballs till it was needed, which was sooner than anyone had thought.

Amin decided to get rid of Taraki and organized a classic Stalinist pretext to do so: a fake assassination attempt on his own life, in which one of his bodyguards was killed, which he then blamed on Taraki. Kalinovsky, whose book in most other respects confirms much of what Braithwaite has written, differs on this crucial episode. He speculates that Amin was indeed the intended victim, but produces not a shred of evidence. Everything suggests the opposite. The power-hungry Amin, whose Pol Pot tendencies were never hidden, wanted total control. He imagined that his grip on the army was sufficient to ensure his elevation and would be accepted by the Russians as a *fait accompli*. His troops surrounded the presidential palace and arrested Taraki. In Moscow the old men were annoyed but, as Amin had calculated, prepared to accept the new leader. Amin now made a deadly mistake. He proceeded to organize Taraki's murder. Three intelligence officers from the presidential guard were deputed to kill and bury the leader they had sworn to protect.

'Taraki was in his dressing gown when the three men came for him,' writes Braithwaite.

Lieutenant Ruzi said, 'We've come to take you to another place.' Taraki gave him some money and jewellery to pass on to his wife ... The party went downstairs to another small room, in which there was a dilapidated bed. Taraki handed over his party card and his watch, which he asked should be given to Amin. Ruzi told Eqbal to bind Taraki's hands with a sheet and ordered Taraki to lie down on his bed. Taraki did so without protest ... Ruzi then covered Taraki's head with a pillow and when he removed it Taraki was dead. The whole business lasted fifteen minutes. Not bothering with the cotton shroud, they rolled Taraki's body in a blanket and took him in their Land Rover to the cemetery, where they buried him. They were in tears when

they reported back to (their boss) Jandad.

Next morning, the *Kabul Times* reported the sudden and tragic death of ‘a genius, a great and much-loved leader’ but nobody was deceived.

It was this event that triggered the Soviet intervention. Moscow, in the person of the general secretary, had promised to protect Taraki. Brezhnev was livid. ‘What a bastard, Amin, to murder the man with whom he made the revolution,’ he said to Andropov, conveniently forgetting the early history of his own country. ‘Who will now believe my promises, if my promises of protection are shown to be no more than empty words.’ Andropov, head of the KGB and till now the staunchest opponent of intervention, was shaken by the failure of the KGB to predict and pre-empt the killing of Taraki. He changed his mind on intervention. Amin had to be removed at all costs to limit the damage. The stage was now set for the direct entry of Soviet troops, after a lengthy discussion that had lasted well over a year and is carefully documented in both books.

For its part, the military high command was still not convinced of the need to replace Amin. The senior most Soviet military adviser in Kabul, General Gorelov described him as ‘a man of strong will, a very hard worker, an exceptional organizer and a self-proclaimed friend of the Soviet Union. He was, it was true, cunning, deceitful, and ruthlessly repressive’ but they could still do business with him. Few agreed with this assessment. The KGB in particular were convinced that Amin, a man who could not work with people on his own side, was unsuitable because he was incapable of creating a popular coalition that could resist the mujahideen. The *Parcham* leaders were more likely to do so and in any case they could be fine-tuned by their Soviet advisers. Nobody seemed to have realized that it was already too late. The horrendous events in Kabul had alienated most of the country.

Braithwaite and Kalinovsky explain in gory detail how the intervention turned out to be a military and political disaster. Even with the tame *Parcham* back in power, the Russians could not prevent the revenge victimizations of *Khalq* cadres. Many of them were purged, others imprisoned and some killed. Babrak Karmal, the new president, explained that they were merely punishing those who had carried out the repression against ‘innocent’ Afghans, but the method chosen was neither transparent nor convincing. This communist faction, too, found it difficult to garner support from those caught in the middle of the conflict.

The Soviet 40th Army had been created in conditions of maximum secrecy to fight in Afghanistan. A bulk of the recruits were drawn from the poor in town and countryside, a quarter from ‘broken families’ and none from the children of the party-bureaucracy-military elite. Braithwaite quotes the military historian, General Krivoshev suggesting ironically that perhaps the time had come to reinstitute ‘the old romantic name of the armed forces – the Workers and Peasants Red Army’. This hurriedly assembled, but well-stocked strike force was faced with an impossible task.

‘Never before in the history of the Soviet armed forces,’ remarked its last commanding officer, General Gromov, ‘had an army had its own air force. It was particularly well supplied with special forces units – eight battalions in all, alongside the highly trained air assault and reconnaissance units.’ But it had never had to confront a counter-insurgency in a foreign country against the will of a large majority of its people. When compelled to do so, it resorted to the time-honoured tactics utilized by occupying armies – Napoleon during the Peninsular War, the Americans in the Philippines, Korea and Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan – as outlined by Churchill. Interestingly, the fear that Soviet soldiers from Central Asian Muslim backgrounds would desert in droves to the enemy was disproved on the battlefields. In fact, there were relatively few desertions and they were not confined to Central Asians.

The Afghan guerrillas – ‘freedom-fighters’ in the Western lexicon at that time – were brutal. So were the Washington-requested ‘international brigades’ dispatched by Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Algeria and which included the late Osama bin Laden. Before killing them, the Afghans tortured, mutilated and, occasionally, skinned alive the Russians they captured. Braithwaite details a particularly horrific incident in Kunar province (where American soldiers were ambushed a few years ago) where the mujahideen surprised a Russian group. Several soldiers committed suicide rather than surrender. The others were disemboweled and burnt alive. The sole survivor never recovered his sanity. The 40th responded in kind. A veteran wrote:

The thirst for blood ... is a terrible desire. It's so strong you can't resist it. I saw for myself how the battalion opened a hail of fire on a group that was descending towards our column. And they were OUR (Afghan) soldiers, a detachment from the reconnaissance company who had been guarding us on the flank. They were only two hundred metres away and we were 90 percent sure they were our people. And nevertheless – the thirst for blood, the desire to kill at all costs. Dozens of times I saw with my own eyes how the new recruits would shout and cry with joy after killing their first Afghan, pointing in the direction of the dead man, clapping one another on the back, and firing off a whole magazine into the corpse ‘just to make sure’ ... Not everyone can master this feeling, this instinct, and stifle the monster in his soul.

Another soldier, Vanya Kosogovski from Odessa, described how, after lobbing a grenade in a village house, he went in to inspect the results. He had killed an old woman and a few children. A younger woman and other children were still moving. He shot them dead, hurling another grenade afterwards, just to make sure.

There were no illusions in Moscow on any front. The late Yuri Andropov's fears had all been justified. They knew the war was going badly wrong and was unwinnable; that the US and its allies were, via Pakistan's ISI, arming the mujahideen with the latest weaponry, including the deadly Stinger missiles (which soon became black market bestsellers in Pakistan) to down helicopters. Above all they were aware that their own people running the government in Kabul were mostly useless. They began to discuss an exit strategy.

In April 1985, Mikhail Gorbachev became the general secretary of the CPSU and

the new leader of the country. As Kalinovsky points out, it took three years before Gorbachev could even circulate a letter within the CPSU in which the Soviet leader confided to party members that 'by the beginning of May 1988, we lost 13,310 troops [dead] in Afghanistan; 35,478 Soviet officers and soldiers were wounded, many of whom became disabled; 301 are missing in action ... Afghan losses, naturally, were much heavier, including the losses among the civilian population'. In February 1989 the 40th Army left Afghanistan, humbled and defeated in its mission. General Gromov, ever a drama queen, was the last Soviet soldier to march across the bridge and return to his country. Many Afghans, encouraged to bid a fond farewell for the cameras by showering the departing troops with flowers were disobliging; some pelted the soldiers with dried camel dung. They left behind a *Parcham* government with the former KHAD (Afghan secret police) chief Najibullah as president in Kabul, a city and regime besieged from within and without.

Some months prior to the departure of the 40th Army, Yevgeni Primakov had met with senior figures from the Pakistan Foreign Office and suggested that it was in everybody's interests to put a national coalition government in place. If Pakistan attempted a takeover its writ could not extend beyond the Pashtun region. If nothing was done, warned the Soviet leader, Najibullah would fall but the mujahideen would be at each other's throats before too long. These views were conveyed to Pakistan's then prime minister, Benazir Bhutto, but rejected on the advice of the United States.

Kabul had been dented, but had survived foreign occupations. During the early nineties it would be destroyed by an intra-mujahideen civil war in which the warring factions gave no quarter to each other or the people who lived in the city. Chaos enveloped the country, with rival tribal combinations controlling different cities. Each of them joined the battle for Kabul like stray dogs fighting over an upturned, flea-ridden cadaver. Who were these mujahideen leaders? Where had they sprung from? They were a mirror-image of the divided left, whose leaders they knew well and against whom they had fought over political space in Kabul University during the sixties, when the cities functioned normally. It was the ferment within the tiny student movement that produced both communists and Islamists. The latter insisting that Islam was a complete code of life that covered all aspects of modernity, the former holding up the Soviet Union and/or China as models to be emulated. The clash of ideas led fifteen years later to a clash of arms.

The Afghan Jamaat-i-Islami was founded by Burhannudin Rabbani (a student of theology and specializing in Islamic law) in 1968 and concentrated its activities on winning cadres and defeating the left on the campus. It won over Gulbuddin Hekmatyar, a sharp-tongued student from the engineering faculty. A nimble operator, like Amin, he wanted his own outfit. He split on spurious grounds from the parent group and set up the Hizb-e-Islam, with support from Islamabad. Five years after the Soviet withdrawal Rabbani had become the president of the country with Ahmad Shah Massoud, a

charismatic Tajik guerrilla leader from the North and the one most respected by the Russians, as his defence minister. Two years later, Hekmatyar, now a highly regarded asset of Pakistan's ISI, linked up with a former pro-Soviet warlord, General Dostun and tried to dislodge his old rivals from power. Over a single year (1994), 25,000 people died in Kabul and half the city was reduced to dust. A new wave of refugees began to pour into Pakistan, destabilizing the country's already fragile social structure.

The Bhutto government, nervous by the growing activities of the Afghan jihadis in Pakistan, decided to arm and train the madrassah matriculates (children of the Afghan refugees who had fled the country in the eighties) back them with armour and Pakistani 'volunteers' and take the country. It was the most successful operation in the history of the Pakistan Army. The Taliban took Kabul and ended the disorder by imposing a clerical dictatorship on the country: women in burqas, thieves amputated, rapists executed, poppy fields destroyed, etc. Gradually Mullah Omar's government acquired autonomy from its patrons in Islamabad and was engaged in friendly negotiations with US oil companies. Their Wahhabi connections proved fatal. The rest we know.

How do the Russians view the Americans in Afghanistan, apart from the obvious *Schadenfreude*? Kalinovsky quotes a *New York Times* op-ed of January 2010, written jointly by General Gromov (currently governor of the Moscow region) and Dmitri Rogozin, (Moscow's ambassador in NATO) in which they express strong neocon-like reservations about a premature withdrawal that will give radical Islam a huge boost. They pledge support: 'We are utterly dissatisfied with the mood of capitulation at NATO headquarters, be it under the cover of a 'humanitarian pacifism' or 'pragmatism'. Not a word about the suffering of the Afghans. Braithwaite reveals how, on another front, the wheel has come full circle. The flourishing market in arms and mercenaries has resulted in a grotesque synthesis in Afghanistan. A Moscow-based commercial company, Vertical-T, is supplying Russian Mi-8 helicopters and experienced pilots to help NATO in Afghanistan: 'When one of these helicopters was shot down in 2008, the Russian ambassador in Kabul contacted the Taliban for the return of the bodies. 'You mean they were Russians?' said the Taliban. 'We thought they were Americans. Of course you can have them back.' With or without their balls?

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This book was completed on the day (15 August 2021) that Kabul fell and the ‘president of Afghanistan’, complete with booty, fled to Oman. The US ambassador followed suit. My thanks for the swiftness of the compilation are due first to Verso and its staff. My editor, Tom Hazeldine, filleted the best pieces from a lump of material with all the skills of a Michelin-starred chef. John Merrick found some essays that I had forgotten. Mark Martin and Bob Bhamra ensured a speedy production. Rowan Wilson cut through the red tape and entered into the spirit of producing a rapid-response book like the Penguin Specials of yore. Sebastien Budgen made sure I was never in short supply for relevant texts on the subject, past and present.

Many thanks also to Alan Rusbridger (former editor of the *Guardian*) and Mary-Kay Wilmers (former editor and still dowager-editor at the *London Review of Books*), who published most of my shorter and longer pieces despite not always agreeing with me (this could well be an understatement). *New Left Review* under the editorships of Perry Anderson, Robin Blackburn and Susan Watkins respectively was demanding, always helpful and insistent that texts keep flowing. Like the LRB, it is a precious space in what has become a conformist world, with media an essential pillar for justifying Western wars. More recently, Oliver Eagleton and Simon Hammond, co-editors of the NLR Blog, *Sidecar*, have been comradely and indulgent, as has Thomas Jones, the editor of the LRB Blog.

# NOTES

## Preface

1 Chris Perez, 'US Troops May Have Committed War Crimes in Afghanistan', *New York Post*, 14 November 2016; Joseph Goldstein, 'US Soldiers Told to Ignore Sexual Abuse of Boys by Afghan Allies', *New York Times*, 20 September 2015.

2 Chris Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers*, (Simon & Schuster, 2021), p. 23.

3 Russ Read, 'In Midst of War, Rumsfeld Didn't Know Who the "Bad Guys" Were in Afghanistan and Iraq', *Washington Examiner*, 9 December 2019.

4 Confirming what I had argued in a forceful debate with a Blairite government minister at the time: see below Chapter 8. Whitlock, *The Afghanistan Papers*, p. 186.

5 Craig Whitlock, 'The Afghanistan Papers', *Washington Post*, 9 December 2019.

## Introduction

1 *Selections from the Records of the Government of India (Foreign Department)*, no. XII, Thomas Jones, 'Calcutta Gazette', 1856, pp. 55–6.

2 A decade and a half earlier in 1860, during the Second Opium War, British forces under the command of Lord Elgin had carried out another wanton attack by burning the famed Old Summer Palace (*Yuánmíng Yuán* [Gardens of Perfect Brightness]) built by the Ching emperors during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The palace and its gardens were so huge that the task of destruction took 4,000 British and French soldiers three days to complete. The looted treasures wound their way to forty-seven museums in the civilized Western world.

3 Leon Trotsky, *The Trotsky Papers: 1917–22*, vol. 1, Mouton, 1964, p. 623.

## 2. Between the Hammer and the Anvil

1 Fred Halliday, 'Revolution in Afghanistan', *New Left Review* I/112, November–December 1978.

2 Ernest Mandel, 'Peaceful Co-Existence and World Revolution', in R. Blackburn (ed.) *Revolution and Class Struggle: Reader*, HarperCollins, 1977.

3 *Pravda*, 28 June 1968.

4 Babrak Karmal's speech was released by the Soviet news agency Tass and published in the world press on 28 December 1979.

5 In Angola, a victorious national liberation movement, the MPLA, was confronted by a South African military intervention. The Ethiopian case is less clear, but none the less aid was requested by an established government.

6 At the seventh plenum of the PDPA on 19 December 1981, Karmal reiterated his appeal to the Pukhtoon tribes in the name of *jihad* (holy war), Sunnah (Mohammed's precepts) and Islamic values. This attempt did not produce



any results.

7 The fact that most of these reports are based on hearsay and unsubstantiated bazaar gossip can usually be gauged by phrases such as: ‘A military source reported recently . . .’, ‘According to diplomats in New Delhi . . .’ ‘There is speculation . . .’, and so forth.

8 Newell and Newell, *The Struggle for Afghanistan*, Cornell, 1981, p. 140.

9 Lawrence Lifschultz, ‘External Resistance, Internal Conflicts’ *Far Eastern Economic Review* 23 January 1981.

10 V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, vol. 42, Progress Publishers, 1969, pp. 360–1.

11 Thomas E. Ewing, *Between the Hammer and the Anvil? Chinese and Russian Policies in Outer Mongolian 1911–1921*, Indiana University Press, 1980.

### 3. The Arrival of the Taliban

1 Contempt for the rights and lives of ordinary people elsewhere in the world – a trademark of the Washington outlook before, during and after the Cold War – could not be more pithily expressed, though I wonder how the citizens of New York would have responded to the question after 11 September 2001.

2 John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America and International Terrorism*, Pluto Press, 1999.

3 Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban: Islam, Oil and the New Great Game in Central Asia*, I.B. Tauris, 2000.

### 9. The Terror Trail

1 Mariane Pearl, *A Mighty Heart: The Brave Life and Death of My Husband*, Virago, 2004.

2 Bernard-Henri Lévy, *Who Killed Daniel Pearl?*, Duckworth, 2003.

### 12. Mirage of the Good War

1 In fact, the only period in Afghan history where women were granted equal rights and educated was from 1979–89, the decade it was ruled by the PDPA, backed by Soviet troops. Repressive in many ways, on the health and education fronts real progress was achieved, as in Iraq under Saddam. Hence the nostalgia for the past among poorer sections of society in both countries.

2 Visiting Madrid after Zapatero’s election triumph of March 2008, I was informed by a senior government official that they had considered a total withdrawal from Afghanistan a few months before the polls but had been outmanoeuvred by the US promising Spain that the head of its military would be proposed for commander of the NATO forces, and a withdrawal from Kabul would disrupt this possibility. Spain drew back, only to discover it had been tricked.

3 ‘Failing State’, *Guardian*, 1 February 2008; see also ‘The Good War, Still to Be Won’ and ‘Gates, Truth and Afghanistan’, *New York Times*, 20 August 2007 and 12 February 2008; ‘Must They Be Wars Without End?’ *Economist*, 13 December 2007; International Crisis Group, ‘Combating Afghanistan’s Insurgency’, 2 November 2006.

4 *New York Times*, 5 November 2006.

5 Pakistan’s key role in securing this ‘victory’ was underplayed in the Western media at the time. The public was told that it was elite Special Forces units and CIA ‘specialists’ that had liberated Afghanistan; having triumphed here they could now be sent on to Iraq.

6 Massoud had been a favourite pin-up in Paris during the Soviet–Afghan war, usually portrayed as a ruggedly romantic, anti-Communist Che Guevara. His membership of Rabbani’s Islamist group and reactionary views on social issues were barely mentioned. But if he had presented an image of incorruptible masculinity to his supporters in

the West, it was not the same at home. Rape and the heroin trade were not uncommon in areas under his control.

7 The stunning illustrations were exquisitely calligraphed by Malik Bakshi in the Uighur script. There are sixty-one paintings in all, created with great love for the Prophet of Islam. He is depicted with Central Asian features and seen flying to heaven on a magical steed with a woman's head. There are also illustrations of a meeting with Gabriel and Adam, a sighting of houris at the gates of Paradise, and of winebibbers being punished in hell. European scholars have suggested that an early Latin translation of the poem may have been a source of inspiration for Dante.

8 Afghanistan's ethnography has generated a highly politicized statistical debate. The six-year survey carried out by a Norwegian foundation is probably the most accurate. This suggests that Pashtuns make up an estimated 63 per cent of the population, along with the mainly Persian-speaking Tajiks (12 per cent), Uzbeks (9 per cent) and the mainly Shia Hazaras (6 per cent): WAK Foundation, Norway 1999. The CIA Factbook, by contrast, gives 42, 27, 9 and 9 per cent respectively. The tiny non-Muslim minority of Hindus and Sikhs, mainly shopkeepers and traders in Kabul, were displaced by the Taliban; some were killed, and thousands fled to India.

9 The CentGas consortium, incorporated in 1997, included Unocal, Gazprom, Hyundai and oil companies from Saudi Arabia, Japan and Pakistan. In late 1997 a Taliban delegation received full honours when they visited Unocal HQ, hoping to sign the £2 billion pipeline contract. According to the *Sunday Telegraph* ('Oil Barons Court Taliban in Texas', 14 December 1997): 'the Islamic warriors appear to have been persuaded to close the deal, not through delicate negotiation but by old-fashioned Texan hospitality. Dressed in traditional *shalwar kameez*, Afghan waistcoats and loose, black turbans, the high-ranking delegation was given VIP treatment during the four-day stay.' The project was suspended in 1998, as the Taliban were split on whom to award the pipeline project to: Mullah Rabbani preferred the offer from the Argentine company Bidas, while Mullah Omar was strongly in favour of the American-led deal. But US-Taliban contacts continued till mid-2001 both in Islamabad and New York, where the Taliban maintained a 'diplomatic office' headed by Abdul Hakim Mojahed.

10 BBC Monitoring Service, 15 December 2001.

11 The late Benazir Bhutto made the same request for American protection on her return to Pakistan, but in her case it was vetoed by Islamabad.

12 Barry McCaffrey, 'Trip to Afghanistan and Pakistan', US Military Academy Memorandum, West Point, NY 2006, p. 8.

13 Antonio Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop: The Neo-Taliban Insurgency in Afghanistan*, Columbia University Press, 2007, p. 60. The corruption and brutality of the newly established Afghan National Police is also widely credited with turning the population against the Karzai government.

14 Ajmal Maiwandi, 'Re-Doing Kabul', presented at the London School of Economics, 11 July 2002.

15 Barnett Rubin, 'Saving Afghanistan', *Foreign Affairs*, January-February 2007.

16 Simon Jenkins, 'It Takes Inane Optimism to See Victory in Afghanistan', *Guardian*, 8 August 2007.

17 S. Frederick Starr, 'Sovereignty and Legitimacy in Afghan Nation-Building', in Fukuyama, ed. *Nation-Building Beyond Afghanistan and Iraq*, Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006, p. 117.

18 Barnett Rubin, 'Proposals for Improved Stability in Afghanistan', in Ivo Daalder et al., eds, *Crescent of Crisis: US-European Strategy for the Greater Middle East*, Brookings Institution Press, 2006, p. 149.

19 Rubin, 'Saving Afghanistan'.

20 Giustozzi, *Koran, Kalashnikov and Laptop*, pp. 42, 69.

21 'Per capita income was about one-twentieth of the level then attained in developed countries . . . Illiteracy was a high 84 per cent and the majority (60 per cent) of children in the 6 to 11 age-group did not attend school; mass communicable diseases (malaria, smallpox and cholera) were widespread and, in the absence of a good public health service and sanitation, mortality rates (27 per 1,000) were very high.' Dharma Kumar and Meghnad Desai, eds *Cambridge Economic History of India*, vol. II: *c.1757-c.1970*, Cambridge University Press, 1983, p. 23.

22 Mike Davis, 'Planet of Slums', *New Left Review* II/26, March-April 2004, p. 13.

23 *The 9/11 Commission Report*, W. W. Norton & Co., 2004, pp. 333-4, 251-2.

24 'Must They Be Wars Without End?'

25 'Afghanistan and NATO: Forging the Twenty-First Century Alliance', 29 February 2008; available at [www.brookings.edu](http://www.brookings.edu).

26 Paul Gallis, 'NATO in Afghanistan', CRS Report for Congress, 23 October 2007.

- 27 Julian Lindley-French, 'Big World, Big Future, Big NATO', *NATO Review*, Winter 2005.
- 28 Rubin, 'Proposals for Improved Stability in Afghanistan'.
- 29 In response to Karzai's pleas, Teheran proposed a treaty that would prohibit foreign intelligence operations in each country against the other; hard to see how Karzai could have signed this with a straight face.

## **14. Next Door to War**

- 1 Ahmed Rashid, *Descent into Chaos: How the War against Islamic Extremism Is Being Lost in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asia*, Allen Lane, 2008. His earlier book, *Taliban*, is discussed in Chapter 3, above.
- 2 Shuja Nawaz, *Crossed Swords: Pakistan, Its Army and the Wars Within*, Oxford University Press Pakistan 2008.

## **15. The American War Moves to Pakistan**

- 1 Eric Schmitt and Mark Mazzetti, 'Bush Said to Give Orders Allowing Raids in Pakistan' *New York Times*, 10 September 2008; Candace Rondeaux and Shaiq Hussain, 'Drone Attack Said to Kill 12 in Pakistan' *Washington Post*, 13 September 2008.
- 2 Jon Boone, 'Taliban Creep Closer to Kabul', *Financial Times*, 20 August 2008.
- 3 Tariq Ali, *The Duel: Pakistan on the Flight Path of American Power*, Scribner, 2008.
- 4 Julian Lindley-French, 'Big World, Big Future, Big NATO', *NATO Review*, Winter 2005.

## **16. On the North-West Frontier**

- 1 Graham Fuller, 'Obama's Policies Making Situation Worse in Afghanistan and Pakistan' *Huffington Post*, 25 May 2011.

## **18. A War Gone Badly Wrong**

- 1 Michael Hastings, 'The Runaway General: The Profile That Brought Down McChrystal' *Rolling Stone*, 22 June 2010.

## **19. It's No Secret What Pakistan's Been Doing with the Taliban**

- 1 Nicholas Watt and Vikram Dodd, 'Cameron Sparks Diplomatic Row with Pakistan after "Export of Terror" Remarks', *Guardian*, 28 July 2010.
- 2 Karen DeYoung, 'US Official Resigns over Afghan War', *Washington Post*, 27 October 2009.

## **22. More Cover-Up than Self-Criticism**

- 1 See Chapter 20, above.

## 23. 'Breaches of Sovereignty'

- 1 'Pakistan "Backed Haqqani Attack on Kabul" – Mike Mullen', BBC News, 22 September 2011.

## 24. Obama's Only Way out of Afghanistan Is to Talk

- 1 Aislinn Laing, 'US Afghanistan Envoy Gen Karl Eikenberry Urges Barack Obama Not to Send More Troops', *Telegraph*, 12 November 2009.
- 2 Jon Boone, 'Angry Protests Over Deaths in Nato Night Raid in Afghanistan', *Guardian*, 14 May 2010.
- 3 James Risen, 'US Identifies Vast Mineral Riches in Afghanistan', *New York Times*, 13 June 2010.

## 25. The Not-So-Lone Gunman

- 1 Emma Graham-Harrison, 'Tensions Increase as Nine Children Among 16 Shot Dead by Lone Gunman in Zangabad Village in Kandahar', *Guardian*, 12 March 2012.
- 2 Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979–89* Profile, 2011, discussed in 'Russian Lessons', below.

## 26. Pakistan's Future Is Tied to the Taliban

- 1 'Into Pakistan's Maelstrom', *Guardian*, 10 October 2001. Reproduced as Chapter 5, above.

## 27. Twenty Years after 9/11

- 1 'Memorandum by Mr Carne Ross', House of Lords Select Committee on Economic Affairs, Minutes of Evidence, 24 April 2007.
- 2 Bjartmar Oddur Þeyr Alexandersson and Gunnar Hrafn Jónsson, 'Key Witness in Assange Case Admits to Lie in Indictment', *Stundin*, 26 June 2021.

## Appendix: Russian Lessons

- 1 See Fred Halliday, 'Revolution in Afghanistan', *New Left Review* I/112, November–December 1978.
- 2 This is not simply a left-wing view. It is accepted by US writers specializing in the region. For an insightful analysis, see Selig S. Harrison, 'The Shah, not the Kremlin, Touched Off the Afghan Coup' *Washington Post*, 13 May 1979. Also Louis Dupree, 'Afghanistan Under the Khalq', *Problems of Communism*, vol. 28, July–August 1979.
- 3 *Kabul Times*, 24 May 1979.
- 4 Halliday, 'Revolution in Afghanistan'.
- 5 Leon Trotsky, *On China*, Pathfinder Press, 1976, pp. 400–1. A survey of Trotsky's ideas on the semi-colonial world is contained in Michael Löwy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development*, Haymarket Books, 1981. Löwy, a Brazilian Marxist, describes the genesis of Trotsky's theory of permanent revolution, rebuts ultra-left interpretations of the same, and explores the evolution of the Yugoslav, Chinese, Cuban and Nicaraguan revolutions within its framework. Halliday, 'Revolution in Afghanistan', cites numerous examples of Stalinization, including

grotesque personality cults and indiscriminate repression.

6 Feroz Ahmed was editor of *Pakistan Forum*, a socialist Urdu-language monthly in Karachi, throughout the Bhutto period. His perceptive writings on the national question and US penetration of Pakistan were not matched by an equally critical approach to early PDPA propaganda on Afghanistan. In a subsequent interview with Merip Report: (July–August 1980) in the United States, Feroz Ahmed admitted: ‘When I came back to Pakistan [after interview in Amin in Kabul] I did not write about my real impressions, but I told my close friends.’ He also described in graphic detail the failures of the PDPA after 1978, but appeared now to have transferred his support to the present rulers in Kabul.

7 Kuldip Nayar, *Report on Afghanistan*, Allied Publishers, 1981; Newell and Newell, *The Struggle for Afghanistan*, Cornell University Press, 1981.

8 Selig S. Harrison, ‘Did Moscow Fear an Afghan Tito?’, *International Herald Tribune*, 16 January 1980.

9 Cf. Selig S. Harrison, ‘The Shah, Not Kremlin, Touched Off Afghan Coup’, *Washington Post*, 13 May 1979.

10 Rodric Braithwaite, *Afgantsy: The Russians in Afghanistan 1979–89*, Profile, 2011.

11 Artemy Kalinovsky, *A Long Goodbye: The Soviet Withdrawal from Afghanistan*, Harvard University Press, 2011.

## Comments of Third World Network on Digital Sequence Information

Reference: SCBD/NPU/DC/VN/KG/RKi/87804<sup>1</sup>

1 June 2019

In response to the Executive Secretary's invitation pursuant to Decision 14/20, paragraph 9, Third World Network is pleased to submit the following to submit views and information a) to clarify the concept, including relevant terminology and scope, of digital sequence information on genetic resources and if and how domestic measures on access and benefit-sharing consider digital sequence information on genetic resources, and b) on benefit-sharing arrangements from commercial and non-commercial use of digital sequence information on genetic resources.

### General

Technological advances in a cluster of linked sciences and technologies including gene synthesis, gene editing, cell culture, epigenetics, genomics-guided breeding, high throughput phenome/genome screening, and numerous other “-omics” applications are, indisputably, changing the ways in which genetic resources are used. Some of these technologies may prove useful for conservation and sustainable use (the first and second objectives), but it is with respect to access and benefit sharing (the third objective) that, for the foreseeable future, the heaviest impacts will be felt.

Without doubt, the technological reality for some years now is that an increasing number of genetic resources can be accessed as digital sequence information (DSI),<sup>2</sup> rather than as biological material, and that users can thereby avoid benefit sharing, both by synthesizing materials from sequences<sup>3</sup> and by using the DSI itself for commercial purposes.<sup>4</sup>

For example, the pharmaceutical company Regeneron recently used the gene sequence of a Guinean Ebola virus collected in 2014 to create a treatment. Called REGN-EB3, the Ebola drug directly arises from use of Guinean genetic resources. It has received US \$400 million in research support and product orders from the US government. To make the drug, Regeneron downloaded the Guinean sequence information from GenBank and then synthesized portions of the C15 strain genome, using them to generate the monoclonal antibodies of which the patented therapy consists.

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<sup>1</sup> Submitted by Edward Hammond, Advisor. Contact: Tel: +1 325 347 2829 | Email: eh@pricklyresearch.com

<sup>2</sup> Dormitzer et al. 2013. Synthetic Generation of Influenza Vaccine Viruses for Rapid Response to Pandemics. *Science Translational Medicine*, 15 May. DOI: 10.1126/scitranslmed.3006368

<sup>3</sup> Hammond E 2019. Ebola: Company avoids benefit-sharing obligation by using sequences. Third World Network. May. URL: [http://www.twn.my/title2/intellectual\\_property/info.service/2019/ip190504.htm](http://www.twn.my/title2/intellectual_property/info.service/2019/ip190504.htm)

<sup>4</sup> See, for example, the “CropOS” product of Benson Hill Biosystems, funded by Google Ventures, which relies on machine-based analysis of a variety of public and proprietary DSI. The system is sold to biotechnology and plant breeding institutions. URL: <https://bensonhillbio.com/design-better-crops-together-benson-hill-biosystems/crop-improvement-platform-cropos/>

The C15 gene sequence was placed in GenBank – which makes sequences available for “free”, no strings attached - by the Nocht Institute, a research center in Hamburg, Germany. While Nocht loaded the C15 sequence into a “free” database, for transfers of samples of Ebola viruses, Nocht uses a legally-binding material transfer agreement (MTA) noting Convention and Nagoya Protocol obligations, and requiring negotiation of a benefit sharing agreement with Guinea in the event of commercial use.

Thus, by downloading the C15 sequence from GenBank and then synthesizing it, rather than requesting a virus sample from Nocht, Regeneron did not sign the MTA requiring negotiation of a benefit sharing agreement, and the company is manufacturing the product for drug stockpiles in North America without benefit sharing to Africa and Guinea.<sup>5</sup>

Some regions and countries anticipated such developments and have access and benefit sharing (ABS) rules on information, and others are now taking policy and legal steps. More generally, however, typical “classic” ABS approaches, often centered on MTAs, are inadequate to ensure benefit sharing for DSI, and ABS approaches are in need of major updates.

The task of creating a system that ensures benefit sharing when genetic resources are utilized as digital sequence information (DSI), and synthesized from DSI, is an existential challenge to the Convention. If benefit sharing is not required of users of DSI, then effective implementation of the third objective of the Convention will prove impossible. Users, especially commercial users, will avoid benefit sharing, thereby undermining the Nagoya Protocol and the Convention itself.

Other international processes related to biodiversity and the Convention look to the CBD for guidance on DSI. These processes, on genetic resources for food and agriculture and pathogens, have important ramifications for biodiversity that is used in public health and agriculture. The progress of these processes may depend on coordination with the Convention’s DSI approach and signals the importance of the Convention and Protocol rapidly moving forward at the next COP/COP-MOP.

Moreover, speed is of the essence because of technology-related concerns. DSI, particularly genetic sequence data, is presently being accumulated at a rate faster than it can be fully leveraged. This is because the ability to sequence is maturing more rapidly than the many ways to use sequence data emerging from genomics and other sciences. As a result, for some commercial purposes, accumulating sequences is akin to depositing money in the bank, or filling a petrol tank – it can be confidently foreseen that even more future uses will emerge for a resource gathered now.

But once such data is sequestered in a private databases, or placed in the (alleged) “public domain” through irresponsible forms of “open access” that do not respect the rights of genetic resource providers, the ability of Parties and IPLCs to protect their sovereign and traditional rights is impaired. The longer it takes for the CBD to act on DSI, the greater the problem becomes.

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<sup>5</sup> See Hammond 2019, *ibid*, for more information.

## Terminology and Scope

With respect to terminology, we note that it is agreed that “Digital Sequence Information” (DSI) is currently used as a placeholder term. Importantly, what the term is agreed to include, that is, its “scope”, is more significant than the words of the term itself. Adapting or even creating a term *de novo* and assigning a definition to it is within the normal scope of implementation of binding agreements, thus, terminology *per se* is not the trouble here. Rather, it is agreement on the breadth of the term.

Whatever term(s) is/are ultimately used, DSI should necessarily include DNA and RNA sequences in all their forms, including assembled and annotated genomes and partial sequences, as well as sequences of alternative forms such as cDNAs, codon optimized sequences, etc. DSI should also include amino acid sequences, SNPs, STR counts, and epigenetic and molecular characterization information (e.g. structures, DNA methylation, etc) and sequence associated metadata (e.g. ‘passport’ data, phenome-genome data, etc).

We note that a useful contribution to the discussion of the various elements of DSI in the context of agriculture - many of which can also be related to biodiversity more generally - can be found in the *Draft Exploratory Fact-Finding Scoping Study on “Digital Sequence Information” on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture* prepared for the Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture in 2018.<sup>6</sup>

We concur with others who believe that the word “digital” is both unnecessary and potentially confusing. It should not be part of the term(s) that is/are ultimately used, due to developments such as quantum computing and the much older phenomenon of storing sequence and other relevant information on non-digital media, such as plain old paper.

We understand DSI as a neologism that originally combined the phrases “digital sequences” with “genetic sequence information”, that were used in the 2015 meeting of the CBD’s Synthetic Biology AHTEG. At that meeting and in other early discussions, use of the word “digital” typically was not focused on the storage format of information, but rather sought to capture the comparative speed and ease with which modern information technology allows sequences to be transmitted across borders, often via the “digital” Internet. DSI is then stored, used *in silico*, and/or subsequently synthesized, and these phenomena pose considerable challenges to methods currently used to implement access and benefit sharing obligations, both in agriculture and beyond.

Thus capturing the above idea – the speed at which large amounts of DSI may be transmitted globally - in the term ultimately used is consistent with how the term arose and would be preferable to the less descriptive “digital”.

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<sup>6</sup> Heinemann J and D Coray 2018. Draft Exploratory Fact-Finding Scoping Study on “Digital Sequence Information” on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture. Commission on Genetic Resources for Food and Agriculture, CGRFA/WG-AqGR-2/18/Inf.10. URL: <http://www.fao.org/fi/static-media/MeetingDocuments/AqGenRes/ITWG/2018/Inf10e.pdf>



## **Benefit-sharing arrangements from commercial and non-commercial use of DSI**

Benefit-sharing arrangements for commercial and non-commercial use of DSI should reflect the same or similar benefit sharing obligations as those attached to biological materials. Benefit sharing obligations should apply to both use of DSI that remains *in silico*, for example, to guide and inform marker-assisted breeding in agriculture, as well as use of DSI to generate materials, for example, vaccine viruses and cell culture strains, or the replication of DSI in material by gene editing.

As is the case with MTAs, *a priori* exemptions from benefit sharing obligations for DSI for categories of users are impractical given the legal structures of non-profit research and intellectual property systems in many countries, particularly developed countries. Rather, benefit sharing for DSI should be structured such that obligations are triggered based on types of use, without regard for the identity of the user, be it a company, a non-profit, an academic, or other entity.

For example, it would be unwise to exempt public or private academic users from benefit sharing obligations when they use DSI because in many countries, as a legal condition of employment, and as a condition of receiving public funding, academics are required to patent, and their institutions legally obligated to financially exploit, any commercially-applicable discovery, even if that discovery is incidental. Moreover, others may derive commercial uses from DSI that is initially handled by academic entities.

The US Bayh-Dole Act is an example of a law creating the above type of requirements, and Bayh-Dole Act types of legal obligations and institutional policies permeate the developed world (and some developing countries). Where such laws are in place, put simply, it is against policy or even illegal for academics not to patent and commercially exploit academic inventions, even if they are made accidentally.

While aspects of policy and law vary from country to country, across the North, it can consistently be observed that academic users of DSI:

1. Must report all inventions to their employer, even if unintended;
2. Must convey rights to inventions (or proceeds from them) to the employer, either as a matter of law or terms of employment;
3. Receive payments as personal income from their employer in return for their compliance;
4. May not waive or negotiate the intellectual property interests and policies of their institution in an access and benefit sharing agreement.

Having said the above, while all users of DSI should be subject to benefit sharing requirements, not every use of DSI – indeed not the vast majority of uses outside of corporate confines – would necessarily trigger action in relation to those obligations, particularly if the use proves to be genuinely non-commercial. Thus, the benefit sharing

obligations incumbent on users of DSI can and should contain carefully crafted thresholds that ensure that genuinely non-commercial research will typically proceed without triggering financial benefit sharing obligations.

One way to cause such benefit sharing obligations to take effect is through the use of **data access and use agreements** that DSI users must agree to before accessing data, for example, DSI in internet-linked databases. Data access and use agreements offer the potential to permit DSI to remain publicly-accessible while protecting the interests of providing countries and IPLCs. Akin to the “terms and conditions” that accompany an airplane or train ticket, or utilities such as water and sewer services, data access and use agreements can be used to set forth benefit sharing obligations connected to publicly-accessible DSI.

Opponents of benefit sharing for use of DSI sometimes suggest, while seldom offering evidence, that data access and use agreements and similar approaches would inherently impede research. Review of online databases related to biodiversity, however, confirms that it is quite normal for databases to employ terms and conditions, and this includes databases specializing in widely diverging sets of biodiversity.

The Global Biodiversity Information Facility (GBIF)<sup>7</sup> emphasizes “free” data sharing in a way that may be inappropriate for some DSI, however even this “free” database aggregator utilizes a “data use agreement” that “requires and implies agreeing” to a variety of stipulations. These include that the national law of Denmark (GBIF Secretariat host) governs the agreement, recognition of the “scope and application of Intellectual Property Rights and benefit sharing agreements as determined under relevant laws, regulations and international agreements,” that data providers may restrict access to data, and that “reasonable assurances” be made by data providers that prior informed consent has been obtained.

(The latter, and some other stipulations of the GBIF data use agreement, fall well short of protecting the benefit sharing interests of provider countries and IPLCs in DSI, however, the fact that such stipulations exist in the GBIF user agreement demonstrate that terms and conditions relevant to DSI are already in use.)

The Center for Australian National Biodiversity Research and the Australian National Botanic Gardens assert a Commonwealth copyright and other restrictions on data hosted at their websites,<sup>8</sup> which include a number of biodiversity databases. These restrictions expressly prohibit commercial use, stating that, unless otherwise noted, “*Information and data on this server have **NOT** been placed in the public domain, but are provided for the personal non-commercial use of educators, students, scholars and the public,*” and that “*Any **commercial use** or publication of these resources without a licence from the custodians is strictly prohibited*” (emphasis in the original).

The “World Database of Key Biodiversity Areas”<sup>9</sup> (“KBA”), managed by Birdlife International on behalf of a consortium including IUCN, WWF, and a number of other

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.gbif.org/en/terms/data-user>

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.anbg.gov.au/copyright.html>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.keybiodiversityareas.org/info/dataterms>

organizations employs a “terms and conditions of use” document that asserts copyright and ownership over the data, prohibits commercial use, prohibits reposting or redistribution, and prohibits commercial use of derivative works. This latter restriction has substantial implications with respect to intellectual property.

The Seabird Tracking Database,<sup>10</sup> also managed by Birdlife, has terms of use that assert copyright and state that database users may not “*adapt, alter or create a derivative work from any BirdLife International content except for your own personal, non-commercial use.*” This and other terms “*shall take effect immediately on your first use*” of the website.

The Marine Metagenomics Portal,<sup>11</sup> based in Norway, takes a less restrictive approach than Birdlife, IUCN, WWF, and colleagues, utilizing a Creative Commons No Derivatives license. This allows copying and redistribution of the data, however, users may not redistribute the data if they “*remix, transform, or build upon*” it, and users “*may not apply legal terms or technological measures that legally restrict others.*” These restrictions have an effect of limiting any intellectual property claims. To enhance clarity, the terms of use add that “*Any genetic information is provided for research, educational and informational purposes only.*”

The Arabidopsis Information Resource (TAIR)<sup>12</sup> maintains a database of genetic and molecular biology data for the model higher plant *Arabidopsis thaliana*. This database has lengthy terms that include “*You may not utilize the Service if you are an employee (including part-time employees) or contractor of, or in any way acting on behalf of a for-profit entity.*” Access to portions of the data requires registration and a paid subscription. The terms may be amended at any time without notice to users.

In the public health field, a number of DSI databases linked to pathogens impose terms and conditions on users. In the field of public health, in contrast to claims that benefit sharing for DSI will impede data sharing, in several instances databases with terms and conditions designed to protect the interests of genetic sequence data providers have become lauded examples of sharing.

For instance, GISAID, the Global Initiative on Sharing All Influenza Data, employs a detailed user agreement.<sup>13</sup> Among its provisions, it prohibits users from reposting data in other databases, states that data providers have not relinquished data ownership by making it available to GISAID users, and prohibits users from providing data to third parties. While GISAID predates the Nagoya Protocol and its user agreement does not require benefit sharing, the highly elaborated GISAID agreement, with its emphasis on protecting data provider interests, has proven very popular among influenza researchers.

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<sup>10</sup> <http://seabirdtracking.org/termsfuse>

<sup>11</sup> <https://mmp.sfb.uit.no/terms/>

<sup>12</sup> [https://www.arabidopsis.org/doc/about/tair\\_terms\\_of\\_use/417](https://www.arabidopsis.org/doc/about/tair_terms_of_use/417)

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gisaid.org/registration/terms-of-use/>

MeaNS, the World Health Organization's database of measles infection data and measles strain gene sequences, operated by Public Health England,<sup>14</sup> utilizes terms and conditions that prohibit the downloading of sequence data: “...as part of the terms and conditions of site usage, downloading sequences is not allowed. This is to ensure that users who submit sequences will not have sequences used by other individuals without permission.” Some DSI in MeaNS is available in other, less restrictive, databases, but other data are not. The MeaNS terms further require database users to be academic or non-profit researchers and state that users may not use the database for “reproduction, adaptations, preparation of derivative works, or distribution of copies of any portion of MeaNS for any purpose.”

RubeNS, the World Health Organization's rubella database, also operated by Public Health England,<sup>15</sup> utilizes similar restrictions.

Thus, for databases hosting DSI of a wide array of biodiversity, including the databases noted here, agreement to terms and conditions is frequently required before access to information is granted, and those terms and conditions frequently impose particulars on commercial use and govern DSI including gene sequences.

It is worthwhile to explore how making access to DSI contingent on acceptance of data access and use agreements, and how such agreements can protect the rights of providers, can be means by which to operationalize benefit sharing for DSI and thereby protect the Convention and advance implementation of its third objective and the Nagoya Protocol.

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<sup>14</sup> MeaNS Terms and Conditions: [http://www.who-measles.org/Public/Web\\_Front/terms\\_conditions.php](http://www.who-measles.org/Public/Web_Front/terms_conditions.php) Also see the FAQ: [http://www.who-measles.org/Public/Web\\_Front/faq.php](http://www.who-measles.org/Public/Web_Front/faq.php)

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.who-rubella.org/tanc>



# Autism Spectrum Disorders, is it Under Reported In Third World Countries

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## Editorial

Autism spectrum disorders (ASD) is defined as a pervasive developmental disorder characterized by impairment of social communication, repetitive and restrictive patterns of behavior, interests, and activities.

The incidence of autism steadily increasing in the past decades in both developing and developed countries. Worldwide prevalence of ASD is 7.6 per 1000 (1 in 132). The prevalence of ASD in Europe, Asia, and the United States ranges is 1 in 40 to 1 in 500 while comparing developed countries to developing countries its notable that the incidence is lower in developing countries, an example of developing country is China which has the incidence of 1.1 in every 1,000 children. However, this is not reflecting the reality, in fact the lower incidence is due to under reporting of the affected children.

It is well known that autism is a multi-factorial disease, which is contributed to genetic or/and environmental causes, unfortunately so far, no fingers cannot be pointed toward a clear reason. A community-based case control study was conducted in the US on 2961 individuals with a diagnosis of autism spectrum disorder, the study gave additional evidence that pesticides are related to autism and intellectual disability. Interestingly, from the pesticides which were studied, there is 2 commonly used medications in the treatment of head lice and scabies, which are malathion and permethrin. Another unique study done last year, for first time it is shown high levels of aluminium in brain tissue of 5 children with autism, this study although it is small sample, but it attributed the incidence of autism to the high levels of aluminium deposition in brain tissue and this needs to be further studied. there were other reports trying to link ASD with other environmental factors, drugs, diet and vaccinations; However, non-has strong evidence. There are probably other factors in other areas of the world that were not well studied.

ASDs may significantly limit the capacity of an individual to conduct daily activities and participate in society. ASD often neg-

atively influence the person's educational and social attainments as well as employment opportunities. While some individuals with ASD are able to live independently, others have severe disabilities and require life-long care and support.

The diagnosis of AD is usually clinical and there are criteria like DSM V criteria that includes: persistent difficulties in the social use of verbal and nonverbal communication, functional limitations social participation, social relationships, academic achievement, or occupational performance, individually or in combination. the onset of the symptoms is in the early developmental period, symptoms are not attributable to another medical or neurological condition.

Some people with ASD can live independently, others have severe disabilities and require life-long care and support and for those the earliest psychosocial interventions the better the outcome.

Despite of the bad consequences of late detection of autism, still many cases have delayed diagnosis as a result there is delay in treatment, which will have huge impact on the prognosis. Delayed diagnosis may be related to lack of awareness, fear from social stigmata and poor access to medical care, especially in developing countries. Regardless the reason, this will cause a huge financial and social burden on the family and government.

ASD has high association with lower IQ and mental, which will need extra attention management and early intervention which is found to be very effective specially when initiated below the age of 2 years includes both pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic treatments. the non-pharmacologic therapy includes group therapies, which encourage autistic patients and stimulates them to express their feelings, additionally, Improve the social skills and interactions with other people. Other modes of therapy are psychotherapy, occupational and speech therapy. Psychotherapy is crucial due to the high incidence of comorbid mental illness such as Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) and depression in

these patients, unfortunately these children are more risk of abuse and neglect. Occupational therapy is needed to teach the child his daily activities, such as dressing, writing and eating. speech and language therapy is from the major pillars of treatment, which is needed to teach communication with others

In conclusion, ASD is a prevalent disorder that will have bad outcomes if diagnosed late. The incidence and prevalence in the developing countries is not clear and this might affect the diagnosis, management and ultimately the outcome and the impact of the disorder. More studies for the incidence, prevalence, possible and management.

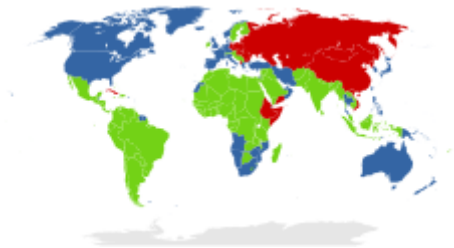
# Third World

The term "**Third World**" arose during the Cold War to define countries that remained non-aligned with either NATO or the Warsaw Pact. The United States, Canada, Japan, South Korea, Western European nations and their allies represented the "First World", while the Soviet Union, China, Cuba, Vietnam and their allies represented the "Second World". This terminology provided a way of broadly categorizing the nations of the Earth into three groups based on political and economic divisions. Since the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War, the term *Third World* has decreased in use. It is being replaced with terms such as developing countries, least developed countries or the Global South. The concept itself has become outdated as it no longer represents the current political or economic state of the world and historically poor countries have transited different income stages.

The Third World was normally seen to include many countries with colonial pasts in Africa, Latin America, Oceania and Asia.

It was also sometimes taken as synonymous with countries in the Non-Aligned Movement. In the dependency theory of thinkers like Raúl Prebisch, Walter Rodney, Theotônio dos Santos, and Andre Gunder Frank, the Third World has also been connected to the world-systemic economic division as "periphery" countries dominated by the countries comprising the economic "core".<sup>[1]</sup>

Due to the complex history of evolving meanings and contexts, there is no clear or agreed-upon definition of the Third World.<sup>[1]</sup> Some countries in the Communist Bloc, such as Cuba, were often regarded as "Third World". Because many Third World countries were economically poor and non-industrialized, it became a stereotype to refer to developing countries as "third world countries", yet the "Third World" term is also often taken to include newly industrialized countries like Brazil, China and India now more commonly referred to as part of BRIC. Historically, some European countries were non-aligned and a few of these were and are very prosperous, including Austria, Finland, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland.



The "Three Worlds" of the Cold War era, April – August 1975

■ First World: Western Bloc led by the USA, Japan, United Kingdom and their allies

■ Second World: Eastern Bloc led by the USSR, China, and their allies

■ Third World: Non-Aligned and neutral countries

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## Etymology

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French demographer, anthropologist and historian Alfred Sauvy, in an article published in the French magazine L'Observateur, August 14, 1952, coined the term *third world* (*tiers monde*), referring to countries that were playing little role on the international scene. His usage was a reference to the Third Estate (*tiers état*), the commoners of France who, before and during the French Revolution, opposed the clergy and nobles, who composed the First Estate and Second Estate, respectively (hence the use of the older form *tiers* rather than the modern *troisième* for "third"). Sauvy wrote, "This third world ignored, exploited, despised like the third estate also wants to be something."<sup>[2]</sup> In the context of the Cold War, he conveyed the concept of political non-alignment with either the capitalist or communist bloc.<sup>[3]</sup> Simplistic interpretations quickly led to the term merely designating these unaligned countries.<sup>[4]</sup>

## Related concepts

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### Third World vs. Three Worlds

The "Three Worlds Theory" developed by Mao Zedong is different from the Western theory of the Three Worlds or Third World. For example, in the Western theory, China and India belong respectively to the second and third worlds, but in Mao's theory both China and India are part of the Third World which he defined as consisting of exploited nations.

### Third Worldism

Third Worldism is a political movement that argues for the unity of third-world nations against first-world influence and the principle of non-interference in other countries' domestic affairs. Groups most notable for expressing and exercising this idea are the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and the Group of 77 which provide a base for relations and diplomacy between not just the third-world countries, but between the third-world and the first and second worlds. The notion has been criticized as providing a fig leaf for human rights violations and political repression by dictatorships.<sup>[5]</sup>

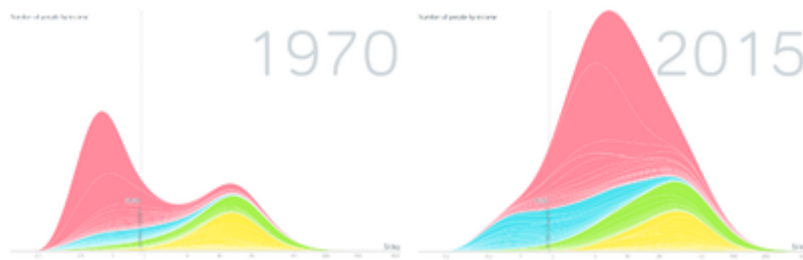
Since 1990, this term has been redefined to make it more correct politically. Initially, the term "third world" meant that a nation is "under-developed".<sup>[6]</sup> However, today it is replaced by the term "developing." The world today is more plural, and so the third world is not just an economic state. These nations have overcome many setbacks and are now developing rapidly. Thus, this categorization becomes anachronistic in a diverse society..

### Great Divergence and Great Convergence

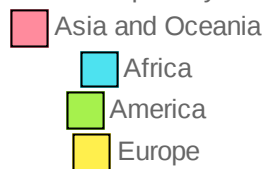
Many times there is a clear distinction between First and Third Worlds. When talking about the Global North and the Global South, the majority of the time the two go hand in hand. People refer to the two as "Third World/South" and "First World/North" because the Global North is more affluent and developed, whereas the Global South is less developed and often poorer.<sup>[7]</sup>

To counter this mode of thought, some scholars began proposing the idea of a change in world dynamics that began in the late 1980s, and termed it the Great Convergence.<sup>[8]</sup> As Jack A. Goldstone and his colleagues put it, "in the twentieth century, the Great Divergence peaked before the First World War and





Density function of the world's income distribution in 1970 by continent, logarithmic scale: The division of the world into "rich" and "poor" is striking, and the world's poverty is concentrated in Asia. Density function of the world's income distribution in 2015 by continent, logarithmic scale: The division of the world into "rich" and "poor" was vanished, and the world's poverty can be found mainly in Africa.



continued until the early 1970s, then, after two decades of indeterminate fluctuations, in the late 1980s it was replaced by the Great Convergence as the majority of Third World countries reached economic growth rates significantly higher than those in most First World countries".<sup>[9]</sup>

Others have observed a return to Cold War-era alignments (MacKinnon, 2007; Lucas, 2008), this time with substantial changes between 1990–2015 in geography, the world economy and relationship dynamics between current and emerging world powers; not necessarily redefining the classic meaning of *First*, *Second*, and *Third World* terms, but rather which countries belong to them by way of association to which world power or coalition of countries — such as G7, the European Union, OECD; G20, OPEC, N-11, BRICS, ASEAN; the African Union, and the Eurasian Union.

## History

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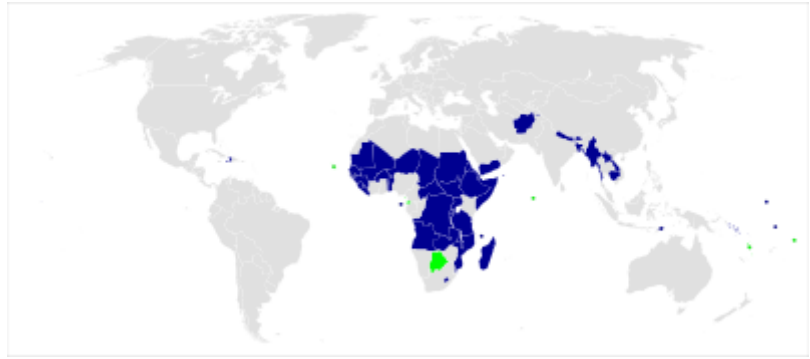
Most Third World countries are former colonies. Having gained independence, many of these countries, especially smaller ones, were faced with the challenges of nation- and institution-building on their own for the first time. Due to this common background, many of these nations were "developing" in economic terms for most of the 20th century, and many still are. This term, used today, generally denotes countries that have not developed to the same levels as OECD countries, and are thus in the process of *developing*.

In the 1980s, economist Peter Bauer offered a competing definition for the term "Third World". He claimed that the attachment of Third World status to a particular country was not based on any stable economic or political criteria, and was a mostly arbitrary process. The large diversity of countries considered part of the Third World — from Indonesia to Afghanistan — ranged widely from economically primitive to economically advanced and from politically non-aligned to Soviet- or Western-leaning. An argument could also be made for how parts of the U.S. are more like the Third World.<sup>[10]</sup>

The only characteristic that Bauer found common in all Third World countries was that their governments "demand and receive Western aid," the giving of which he strongly opposed. Thus, the aggregate term "Third World" was challenged as misleading even during the Cold War period, because it had no consistent or collective identity among the countries it supposedly encompassed.

## Development aid

During the Cold War, unaligned countries of the Third World<sup>[1]</sup> were seen as potential allies by both the First and Second World. Therefore, the United States and the Soviet Union went to great lengths to establish connections in these countries by offering economic and military support to gain strategically located alliances (e.g., the United States in Vietnam or the Soviet Union in Cuba).<sup>[1]</sup> By the end of the Cold War, many Third World countries had adopted capitalist or communist



Least Developed Countries in blue, as designated by the United Nations. Countries formerly considered Least Developed in green.

economic models and continued to receive support from the side they had chosen. Throughout the Cold War and beyond, the countries of the Third World have been the priority recipients of Western foreign aid and the focus of economic development through mainstream theories such as modernization theory and dependency theory.<sup>[1]</sup>

By the end of the 1960s, the idea of the Third World came to represent countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that were considered underdeveloped by the West based on a variety of characteristics (low economic development, low life expectancy, high rates of poverty and disease, etc.).<sup>[4]</sup> These countries became the targets for aid and support from governments, NGOs and individuals from wealthier nations. One popular model, known as Rostow's stages of growth, argued that development took place in 5 stages (Traditional Society; Pre-conditions for Take-off; Take-off; Drive to Maturity; Age of High Mass Consumption).<sup>[11]</sup> W. W. Rostow argued that *Take-off* was the critical stage that the Third World was missing or struggling with. Thus, foreign aid was needed to help kick-start industrialization and economic growth in these countries.<sup>[11]</sup>

## Perceived "End of the Third World"

Since 1990 the term "Third World" has been redefined in many evolving dictionaries in several languages to refer to countries considered to be underdeveloped economically and/or socially. From a "political correctness" standpoint the term "Third World" may be considered outdated, which its concept is mostly a historical term and cannot fully address what means by developing and less-developed countries today. Around the early 1960s, the term "underdeveloped countries" occurred and the Third World serves to be its synonym, but after it has been officially used by politicians, 'underdeveloped countries' is soon been replaced by 'developing' and 'less-developed countries,' because the prior one shows hostility and disrespect, in which the Third World is often characterized with stereotypes.<sup>[12]</sup> The whole 'Four Worlds' system of classification has also been described as derogatory because the standard mainly focused on each nations' Gross National Product.<sup>[13]</sup>

The general definition of the Third World can be traced back to the history that nations positioned as neutral and independent during the Cold War were considered as Third World Countries, and normally these countries are defined by high poverty rates, lack of resources, and unstable financial standing.<sup>[14]</sup> However, based on the rapid development of modernization and globalization, countries that were used to be considered as Third World countries achieve big economic growth, such as Brazil, India, and Indonesia, which can no longer be defined by poor economic status or low GNP today. The differences among nations of the Third World are continually growing throughout time, and it will be hard to use the Third World to define and organize groups of nations based on their common political arrangements since most countries live under diverse creeds in this era, such as Mexico, El Salvador, and Singapore, which they all

have their own political system.<sup>[15]</sup> The Third World categorization becomes anachronistic since its political classification and economic system are distinct to be applied in today's society. Based on the Third World standards, any region of the world can be categorized into any of the four types of relationships among state and society, and will eventually end in four outcomes: praetorianism, multi-authority, quasi-democratic and viable democracy.<sup>[16]</sup> However, political culture is never going to be limited by the rule and the concept of the Third World can be circumscribed.

## See also

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- Fourth World

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