

## EMERGENT ENCOUNTERS TOWARDS A POLITICS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

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There is no end to the project of universal history, only the infinity of connecting links and if these are to be connected without domination, links will need to be lateral, additive, syncretic rather than synthetic. The project of universal history does not come to an end, it begins again, somewhere else.

Susan Buck-Morss (2009)

Wat joyful news, Miss Mattie,  
I feel like me heart gwine burs  
Jamaica people colonizin  
Englan in Reverse

Be the hundred, be de tousan  
Fro country and from town,  
By de ship-load, be the plane load  
Jamaica is Englan boun.

Dem pour out a Jamaica,  
Everybody future plan  
Is fe get a big-time job  
An settle in de mother lan.

What an islan! What a people!  
Man an woman, old an young  
Jus a pack dem bag an baggage  
An turn history upside dung!

Louise Bennet (1996)

Critique, crises and re-invention in social and cultural anthropology have punctuated a dramatic disciplinary history which traverses the distance from the seemingly insurmountable follies of colonial hegemony to the perplexing dilemmas of multiple indigeneity. In this narrative, the 'contemporary' provides another intriguing turn in the quest for anthropological renewal. This time, it acquiesces to both – the metanarrative of the global and the insistence of the local. The challenge now is to achieve an engagement with both simultaneously, yet remain radical enough not to repeat the past.

Two distinct, powerful recent trends in this are, first, a recognition that the relationship between assertions of the global and negotiations of the local manifest 'emergent forms of life' (following M. J. Fischer 2003, 2005, 2009; Maurer 2005) especially evident in the terrains of techno-cultures, bio-sciences, environmental ecologies, media and communication industries - terrains that demand re-orientations of anthropological method and epistemology. Second, an acknowledgement that the hierarchies of the center-periphery kind inherent in anthropological knowledge production demand 'disciplinary transformations' that would be more sensitive not just to epistemologies outside the discipline or the academe but to those articulated from locations outside the centers – thus, 'other anthropologies/anthropology otherwise' (following Escobar and Restrepo 2005, Escobar and Ribeiro 2006). The path towards recognizing emergent forms of life or inherent hegemonies in anthropology carry distinct strands of earlier critiques – critiques which have indeed had the intent of turning history 'upside down'. The turbulence faced in many critical turning points were, in many ways, echoes of the complex inequity rooted in the colonial origins of anthropology as a discipline that followed the power and knowledge mechanisms of ascendant empire. The consequent postcolonial backlash or in another way, the natives writing back secured a prized place for the recognition of multiplicity and more crucially, autonomy of the multiple. A tremendous follow up has been the reflexive turn in anthropology, sometimes called the postmodern or deconstructive moment, and better known as the 'crisis of representation'. Producing ethnographic texts was no longer the unproblematic product of authoritative, rational or realist fieldwork and writing largely anchored in the metropolitan ego; rather, it was an epistemological exercise that had to lay bare the subjective, reflexive conditions of writing by the anthropologist on one hand and on the other, the politics/poiesis of negotiating and representing

the authentic voices and expressions of those about whom the writing and representation was being done.

In both trends above, there is an embedded politics of epistemology, yet neither successfully displaces the solipsistic centrality of the west in the critique of concept or in the reformulation of method. The project that the following arguments undertake is the proposition of a politics of epistemology, but through perspectives developed elsewhere and 'otherwise'. This is neither a call for opposition and reclamation, nor is it a claim to authenticity and authority, but a proposition that learns from either in order to suggest a *methodological* innovation that abides by the foundations of anthropological method – fieldwork and ethnography. In keeping with those foundations, my principle motif here is the concept, method and practice of fashioning emerging *encounters*, especially hitherto untapped ones - which can provide the basis for another epistemology. In a nutshell, I argue that the force of these emerging encounters and their potential in epistemological innovation lie in the mappings, the connections or the associations they enact. The propositions are - what if the idea of the anthropological encounter is brought back to center focus again, but this time re-imagined in and as a multiverse<sup>1</sup> of possible connections methodologically initiated and epistemologically energized by logics of compatibility and resonance, between and among unconnected sites, locations and people which have been so far trapped either in imperial classifications or in epistemological orientations of academic locations, disciplinary boundaries, empiricism or theory? Can these encounters be recast away from conventional polarities of center/periphery, north/south, west/rest, self/other or even, intra or inter disciplinary, academic/nonacademic - in ways that are historically informed and critically relevant so that they do not lose sight of existing inequities yet gain epistemological potential? What would be this potential and what could it effectively achieve in not just the anthropological pursuit but in a more generic sense, in constituting ways of knowing.

## 1

Amitav Ghosh (2002) tells the story of an encounter between an Egyptian Imam and an Indian anthropologist in Egypt, when the

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1 Anchored in theoretical astrophysics, the metaphor of the multiverse I draw here refers to the base notion that contrary to the notion of a single ever expanding *uni*-verse, there are simultaneously developing universes - thus, *multi*-verse.

Indian (Ghosh himself), predictably in pursuit of tradition asks the Imam about his herbs and potions. The Imam's 'traditions' are no longer as much in demand in the village and his somewhat depleted position makes him retort sharply to the Indian that surely his own culture has enough of herbs and traditions, so why does he not go and study those. The Imam and the Indian meet again and the Imam by now is armed with stories of how Indians burn their dead (instead of burying as the Muslims in Egypt do) and worship cows. He uses this knowledge to confront and ridicule the Indian accusing his culture of being primitive and savage, saying

[...] You've been to the west; you've see how advanced they are. Now tell me: have you ever seen them burning their dead. They don't burn their dead in the West. They're not ignorant people. They are advanced, they're educated, they have science, and the have guns and tanks and bombs. (Ghosh 2002: 11).

In retort, the Indian shouts back that they too have bombs and guns and tanks, much better and ahead of the Egyptians. Ghosh then, concludes, "So there we were, the Imam and I, delegates from two superseded civilizations vying to lay claim to the violence of the West... We were both traveling, he and I: we were traveling in the west" (2002:11). David Scott interlocutes this story to make the following comment,

[...] what I want to notice is the way the imaginary West interrupts and mediates the intersection (or collision) of postcolonial identities and histories. The history of colonialism and neocolonialism is probably such that this is inevitable – two pathetic figures invoking the imaginary west under the fabled light of an Eastern sky. (Scott 1989: 83).

Can there be a meeting of such 'pathetic' peripherals, where their encounter does not perforce invoke the west? My arguments in this essay grow out of such an encounter of peripherals - my doctoral fieldwork in Beirut, Lebanon as a student of from the Department of Sociology, Delhi University, India, when I pursued issues and questions in relation to post-war recovery strategies, covering nuances of both formal reconstruction and informal coping. I have since conducted fieldwork in Delhi, India where I have again developed this theme of recovery in the lives of survivors of a communal massacre. Building up from these ethnographic foundations, my current work is an expansion from

local motifs into larger theoretical and empirical issues about how recovered life comes to be constituted in the interstices of aid and affect. I have now extended my list of events to include nuances from Hurricane Katrina in the United States; the South Asian Tsunami alongside my own ethnographic documentations of India and Lebanon. Although my initial encounter can be called one between postcolonial spaces, I emphasize that I do not chase the connection between postcolonial locations as much as I recognize the potential of that interconnection, and draw from it the epistemological possibility of other resonant interconnections.

These resonant connections are ones which, I suggest, can veer away from a solipsistic positioning of the west in debates on epistemological privilege and legitimacy. The presence of the west, in authoring critique or claiming epistemic privilege is a well fought out turf and my attempt to formulate a methodological alternate is not to seek an opposition to the west (in another way, the metropolitan centers), which I understand to be a misguided task, but rather to discover and invent ways in which the invoking of the west becomes less of a dominant mediation. Furthermore, the intent is to see how ethnographic and fieldwork re-mappings can make actual the kind of epistemological re-routing required to make viable the reach from the particular to the global (sometimes also called meta-narratives) without necessarily reiterating western privilege. There are two distinct ways in which this mediation/privilege is already under interrogation, displacement and critique in anthropology. The first, of course, is that the empirical necessity of emergent forms of anthropological life demand analytical deliberations that have left behind the mappings of center – periphery idioms, but rather work through interlinked, networked, collaborative circulatory movements across the globe. The second is the epistemological desire that goes beyond the postcolonial triumphs of multiplicity and heterogeneity on one hand and autonomy, authority and authenticity on the other to produce anthropological knowledge that is properly global and yet local without losing the postcolonial, post-oriental or post-occidental inscriptions that instigate this desire.

Analytical and practical configurations in anthropology have indeed tried to do away with binarisms of the center-periphery sort, or, have also remapped research locations into multi-sited ethnographies – as M.J. Fischer states,

The original notion of a “multisited” or “multi-local” ethnography [...] was called forth by the challenges of comparative, cross-cultural and polycentric analyses of phenomena. These were

not only distributed spatially [...] but also vertically. Anthropology has long since given up the perspective of binary logic (us - them, civilized - primitive, Europe - the rest, Christian - savage, developed - underdeveloped) which constantly scan for difference, multiple voices and knowledge sets. This linguistically and sociologically attentive cross-cultural perspective of anthropology prepared the ethnographic method to scan for differences among occupation, expert, civic, consumer, entertainment and educational cultures (not merely, national, religious or ethnic ones). (2005: 60)

This meant not just that the anthropological imagination encompassed a variety of empirical locations, various agencies and syntaxes of articulation, but also that multiple disciplines and genres came to influence the concepts and objects of enquiry as well as their conduct in method and analysis. However, what multi-sited approaches pre-empted was the recognition that anthropological attention and method had to adapt to conditions of life and the possibilities of research where all formulations of location or context, dispersal or circulation, consumption or production, would in effect, completely realign the kinds of relationships or connectivities that the constituents of a field or concern could substantiate. Some compelling aspects among these are media, communication and information technologies; technocultures, biosciences and medical knowledges; ecological and environmental concerns; or massive upheavals in transnational movements like displacement or migration; or complete societal reformulations and reconstructions in societies undergoing sustained violence, civil wars or various catastrophes, natural or otherwise.<sup>2</sup>

In spite of such crucial recognitions, it is yet unclear how much success has indeed been achieved in tracing epistemological dispersals in theory making or even, in acknowledging that theory is not always a top – down flow (inevitably with the North at the top), especially when the subject areas are not those of emergent biotechnologies or technocultures which demand conscious collaboration, often across sites of expert knowledge

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2 These are by no means exhaustive new arenas of anthropological interest. I am following, roughly the list that Michael M.J. Fischer (2003) suggests in his “Emergent forms of Life and the Anthropological Voice.”

or multiple practices as well as political needs and ethical negotiations. Moreover, the legitimate sources of 'anthropological' knowledge continue its location in metropolises – however far away the collaborative ventures may have gone. In another way, how much have the erstwhile peripheries embraced this doing away of binarisms, in concept, method or practice, or, in intent and potential to reverse the gaze from the local outwards or even, in acknowledging their part in larger networks?

To rephrase Scott's concern above in this context then is to ask why is it that when the post-colony is so much of a paradigm, both ideological and epistemological, the same concerns of ideology and epistemology are rarely placed in the spaces that occur between postcolonials – or for that matter between and among locations that resonate such potentially connectible cartographies. In the contemporary present of an alleged new world, should dominant anthropologies continue to be the defining myth of origin that secure a relationship of power and inequity amongst the various loci of anthropological knowledge production? The obvious hegemonic enterprise of the colonial encounter and of the knowledge produced thereby; the subsequent postcolonial criticism that reclaimed the native/peripheral voice - are all well acknowledged discourses, critiques and revisions in the story that the history of anthropology has so far narrated. However, could an anthropology conducted through individual encounters which consciously reject the labels that constrain each (center/periphery, self/other etc.), but rather sculpt each encounter through its own trajectory of mutual discovery, fashion an alternate, perhaps another epistemology? Could this become possible especially because they are between centers and peripheries, or intra-center and intra-periphery, initiated from and to any which direction; because their encounter has been accessed through a belief in idiosyncrasies not contrarities, through dialogue not insularity, through complementariness rather than incompatibilities and most of all, through intentional equitability rather than hierarchy.

## 2

In many ways, one sense of the contemporary could be the common condition which simply stated implies that localized ways of living, the heterogeneous and the multiple are connected to larger and expanding discursive universes as well as intra-connected within themselves in their local, cultural or institutional practices. In another way, seemingly general and 'universal' discourses in turn manifest constant negotiation with the local or

the particular. For the pursuit of anthropology, this contemporary ontology of global connectivity and local interface is also about the likely emergence of new forms of socialities, ethics and politics, economics and practices that need apprehension through appropriate ethnographic method and fieldwork.

As I formulate my arguments in the following, I draw on the notion of contemporary emergence sketched above and argue that such a connection can, paradigmatically, lead to 'emergent encounters'. It is, first of all, a response to the notion that in the dominant anthropological critiques of the day, while the intent is to craft appropriate objects and tools of enquiry which also destabilize epistemic and authorial privileges, there is yet an inadequate expression of a politics of epistemology. To reiterate, my proposals here suggest that while critiques are frequent and intense, there are yet few stances that successfully displace the solipsistic centrality of the west in concept or in the reformulation of method and practice.

A connection between Beirut and Delhi quickly suggests an obvious interpretation of the politics of location, where it could be placed within a postcolonial set of affairs, specifically within the supposed genre called 'anthropologies of the south' and discuss the attendant issues. However, that position seems to me to be far from adequate. In all of the ways that postcolonial consciousness has permeated the critical turns of the anthropological imagination in both theory and practice, one of the most persistent of contestations has been the intractable relationship of power of the metropolis over the periphery, usually categorized as the west and rest.<sup>3</sup> The postcolonial move, initiated and authored as it has been within metropolitan academia seem to have laid the terms of the contestation in such a way that it is once again the western ego that plays the protagonist. The terms of reference in critique rarely displace that centrality, and in that process make partial other negotiations, contestations and interfaces which can be or have already been manifest in many arenas of anthropological knowledge production.

To begin an argument for these 'other' negotiations is also to engage with an epistemological concern that begins with the futility of opposition between the characteristic binaries of center-periphery in the pursuit of freedom in knowledge production.

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3 The center-periphery tussles have their incarnation outside the west-rest pair – within local, national, regional regimes of hegemony. The authorial privilege of critique however, largely remains in the west-rest paradigm.



While I do not suggest a revisitation of the dichotomy debates, although they form a necessary foundation, a few reiterations are useful. Homi Bhabha writes,

Can the aim of freedom of knowledge be the simple inversion of the relation of oppressor and oppressed, center and periphery, negative image and positive image? Is our only way out of such dualism the espousal of an implacable oppositionality or the invention of an originary counter myth of radical purity? (1994: 19).

The dualism that Bhabha alludes to in his query above is one between theory and politics, or that supposed inalterable opposition which maintains that the real alchemy of critical knowledge can only be gained if the ‘metatheorizing’ West is placed at a polarity with the ‘engaged, activist experience of Third world creativity’ – particularly amidst the supposedly distinct ground of Third World ‘cultural’ practices (Bhabha 1994:19 -20). Bhabha steers his analytical gaze at this kind of counter from the Third World ‘Others’ and finds the improbable creation of a mythical collectivity with a pure radical will with which to challenge and topple western might. Dissolving this myth, he suggests that the alleged contestation is indeed a negotiation of political identifications, but one that works without any narrated fixity of identity or stability of antagonism, but rather gets reconstituted in the translation and transformation of a historical identity (a culture) into that of the political present. Properly historical, this negotiation, in effect, takes into account the profound changes that the post-colonial condition entails, from that of the colonial period and towards the present time of cultural uncertainty, thus marking most crucially, the signficatory or representational undecidability of any uniform, authentic post-colonial identity. Finding a Third Space of theoretical possibility between the redundant binarism or the two polar opposites of theory and practice thus constituted, he espouses the actuality of a hybrid position that takes little or none from either and makes a third.

I want to take my stand on the shifting margins of cultural displacement - that confounds any profound or ‘authentic’ sense of a ‘national’ culture or an ‘organic’ intellectual - and ask what the function of a committed theoretical perspective might be, once the cultural and historical hybridity of the postcolonial world is taken as the paradigm.

matic place of departure. (Bhabha 1994: 21).

Homi Bhabha's discussion on the third space of post-colonial difference is a finely nuanced argument that discerns the impossibility of a pristine, pure position of the post-colonial 'Other', from which to counter the insular monolithic of the Western, colonial, hegemonic 'self'. Rather, the enunciative moment of critical countenance (in the post-colonial world) is achieved in the here and now, when the stable (alleged) historical system of cultural identity (perhaps, national) interfaces with the immediate problems of a political present to produce the crucial cultural difference of hybrid identity. Once the Other (as is the Self) in this sense, is fragmented and unstable, the binarisms of theory/politics, of self /other become void. Negotiation and critical positioning then is indeed a privilege obtained accorded from a third, hybrid space.<sup>4</sup> The point of using Bhabha's words is not to revisit the debates of postcolonial criticism,<sup>5</sup> or more aptly – the critique of the postcolonial binarisms, but rather to reinforce two premises. First, that the freedom of knowledge cannot necessarily be limited to the relation between the oppressor and the oppressed as an epistemological foundation. And second, that the binarisms substantiating that relationship are redundant and even obsolete at this time.<sup>6</sup>

However, disclaiming the binary is not adequate nor enough in suggesting how indeed, then, could the potential of new knowledges be sought. Bhabha's reference to the efficacy of direc-

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4 This is, of course, a much too brief summary of Bhabha's exposition. See Bhabha (1994: 19-39).

5 Using Bhabha as a main interlocutor also does not cover the immense range of issues the postcolonial critique has engendered and sustained. It will be a rather pointless, if not, impossible exercise to summarize post-colonial criticism and therefore I have chosen to limit my reference to a point closest to my arguments.

6 My intention is not to brush aside an enormously rich set of debates that have been undertaken in disciplinary anthropology (as also in other approaches that are involved in understanding the colonial legacy). Especially during mid -20th century, the recognition of a crisis within the discipline, particularly as regards the epistemological privilege of the North, the possibility of articulation from the south and the critical issues therein. Through fine arguments that I can best summarize as the poetics and politics of representation and reflexivity, the corpus of work that has developed in this genre has laid bare the significance of the colonial relationship in the inequities of knowledge production.

ting theoretical work to cultural difference *rather than* diversity is a strong foothold with which to seek this potential. The argument of cultural diversity rests on the point that the position of the historical 'Other' as one of identifiable fixity is one that leads to the identifying segregated, culturally diverse others – a conceptual move that retards the progress of any critical theorizing to an 'implacable oppositionality' of hegemonic theory against given and identified others. On the other hand, if the position of the (ironically monolithic) culturally *diverse* Other is understood as the *different* Other, this positionality takes into account the vital force of negotiation that can emerge out of the interface of the hybridized Self and Other, each of which is properly historical and located in the present as well as in the new problems, challenges and complexities of the political immediacy.

My fieldwork episode seems to fit best, as an initial positioning, this hybridized third position where elements of either are retained but belonging to none seems appropriate. First, because it allows me steer away from, to the extent possible, a devout opposition. Accordingly, my field experiences in Beirut does not get referenced to the limiting world of binarisms but better placed in the discursive and practical sphere that Arturo Escobar and Eduardo Restrepo develop around the concepts of 'dominant anthropologies' and 'other anthropologies/anthropology otherwise'. By 'dominant anthropologies', they indicate, "the discursive formations and institutional practices that have been associated with the normalization of anthropology under academic modalities chiefly in the United States, Britain and France" (Escobar and Restrepo, 2005:83). They add that,

'Dominant anthropologies' [...] assumes a single epistemic space within which Anthropology functions as a real, albeit changing and contested practices. 'Other anthropologies /anthropology otherwise,' on the contrary, suggests that the space in which anthropology is practiced is fractured – perhaps even more so today than in the past, and despite increasing normalizing tendencies world wide – making it into a plural space. (Escobar and Restrepo, 2005:81-82).

My discussion is best enunciated from this 'plural' fractured space because it opens the possibilities both methodological and analytical of this plural positioning that can indeed contribute to the making of world anthropologies. Two conceptions

(among others) that the authors above develop their trajectories from are, first, the framework of geopolitics of knowledge that Walter Dignolo has amplified (2000, 2001 and 2002) through his notions of “border thinking”. Crucially, Dignolo’s position refers to a meta-politics of location, where legitimacy could be claimed and hegemony be challenged by an implication of positioning on the map of global power orders. Second, Dipesh Chakravarty’s (2000) “provincialization of Europe” effectively illustrates how Eurocentric modernity, although indispensable in its base, is not necessarily translatable to or from non – western contexts of modern rationality and reason. Clearly, either stance endorses that knowledge production has as its working template an unequal balance of power, sustained not just through inequities in global legitimacy but also in epistemological hegemonies – hegemonies and inequities whose redress echoes the need for a politics of location enunciated by multiple, hybridized positions.

However, multiplicity or heterogeneity per se is not the solution. For instance, Escobar and Ribeiro (2006:5) suggest Nestor Garcia Canclini’s “interculturality” as a viable alternative where,

Multicultural conceptions admit the diversity of cultures, underscore their difference and propose relativist policies of respect that often reinforce segregation. Dissimilarity, interculturality refers to confrontation and entanglement, to what happens when groups establish relationships and exchanges. The term supposes two (different) modes of production of the social: multiculturalism supposes the acceptance of what is heterogeneous; interculturality implies that those who are different are what they are in relations of negotiations, conflicts and reciprocal loans. (2004:15).

Interculturality in this sense seems to be a term for relationships that implicate a matter of difference – one that allows a contact, a negotiation or potential exchange between those who seek to do so. Even with the hybridized Third Space that Bhabha postulates, the problem of epistemology and knowledge production seem to remain trapped within the two inadequate stances of the last decades of the 20th century. In Garcia Canclini’s words,

[...] on the one hand, the entrenchment of certain African, Asian or Latin American thinkers with ‘their own ways’ of producing knowledge and developing culture; on the other hand, post modern narratives – particularly influential in metropolitan anthropology and cultural studies – which carried to

an extreme the praise of difference and the positioning of the autonomy of the forms of knowledge of each ethnic group, gender, country, or subaltern group, as a supreme value. (2006: 296 -297).

The inadequacy does not, of course, lie in these knowledges themselves, but rather in their inability to transcend their insularities and their relativisms in order to comprehend a global order that links each of these knowledges, each of their positionings or their vulnerabilities in an incessantly interactive web. The challenge then is not just to acknowledge the presence of multiplicities, or rather multiplicities as fragments but to fathom how these multiplicities/fragments are interlinked and interdependent in a current world across complexities of geography and history. For instance, anecdotally, Garcia Canclini writes that 90% of the global music market is owned by four discography companies; in the west, 60% of book production, who and what will be published is decided by two multimedia editorial companies. These monopolies are successful not just by their homogenizing capacities, but also by their keen skill in incorporating multiple sensitivities, which results in a literal synchronicity of production, circulation, and consumption of symbolic and practical ways of living. And it is again this interdependent web that dismisses, devastates, challenges and delegitimizes ways of being and knowing that sometimes reassert their place in the web in cataclysmic ways. Quoting Garcia Canclini again,

The socio-economic, political and cultural catastrophes of the last decade show that the most upright towers of New York and the apparently most reliable investments of the occidental metropolis teeter when they interact with the beliefs and rites of people who hide computers in caves, and together circulate drugs, arms and peasant utopias. (2006: 297).

The event itself is about the clash of two iconographic opposites, but the orders of comprehension that it provokes are that this singular event has repercussions to the far and near reaches of the contemporary globe. But that is not all –the problem lies in understanding how caves, computers, arms, peasant utopias and New York assemble together in the same event and yet successfully communicate multiple meanings to multiple peoples in ways that emergent practices and ideas encompass the globe in totalizing interconnections but also appear in vernacular forms with critical local implications. What way of knowing,

what epistemic stance can comprehend this challenge and find ways, simultaneously pliant and robust, which can comprehend multiplicities and acknowledge fragments, yet comprehend their static or kinetic place in an interactive, often abstract web. In another way, what bridges of understanding can make the connection between multiply saturated times and places, multitudes of groups, worldviews, ways of living and their unequal relations to a planetary web of production and consumption, terror and violence, media and information and a myriad other interconnectivities – between, as Garcia Canclini (2006) could suggest, totalizations and detotalizations.

Clearly, an anthropological attempt that can tackle this horizon will require a combined crafting of conceptual innovation and empirical rigor. It has to avoid the obvious pitfalls of totalizing discourse or fragmentary ethnocentrism. Bringing together the notions of meshworks with that of multiple fragments, an approach beginning to find articulation in the ethnographic imagination is that of an epistemological assembly. Jean and John Comaroff's (2003) notion of 'anthropology on an awkward scale' endorses the kind of assembly I suggest. Speaking both of ethnographic methodology and epistemic implication, they discuss this possible anthropological approach in terms of their research on the rise of an 'occult economy' (which implies practices and beliefs that connect magical means and mysterious techniques to the materialization of wealth) in South Africa. Investigating the peculiar appearance of 'zombies' in Mafeking, they make an interpretive suggestion that the figure of the zombie, in effect, is a peculiar product of the interstices of neoliberal capitalism and vernacular ways of refracting multifaceted experiences of globalization, poverty, alienation and so forth. It is a product that does not find interpretive fullness in the ethnographic limitations of the locality, say, in relations to sorcery and witchcraft, but rather in a social imaginary that is surmised from an 'awkward' ethnography that starts with something found *in situ* but whose explanation marks the movement from the local to the supralocal, the concrete to the conceptual. In their words,

We came across zombies, recall, through an empirical conjuncture: it was by force of historical fact, rather than by way of abstract analytical interest, that we found ourselves compelled to make sense of them *in situ*....By what ethnographic means does one capture the commodification of human beings in part or in whole, the occult economy of which it is part, the material and moral conditions

that animate such an economy, the new religious and social movements it spawns, the modes of producing wealth which it privileges, and so on? Inherently, awkward of scale, none of these phenomena are easily captured by the ethnographer's lens. Should each of them nonetheless be interrogated purely in their own particularity, their own locality? Or should we try to recognize where, in the particularity of the local, lurk social forces of larger scale, forces whose sociology demands attention if we are to make sense of the worlds we study without parochializing and, worse yet, exoticizing them?

The challenge, then, takes the following formulation. A conventional geographical locale, while it situates the empirical fact of the phenomenon, does not also situate, in its own physical limits its possible analytical frame of interpretation. The necessary situatedness of any phenomena that triggers off the exploration is an intimate ethnographic recognition found in fieldwork, but one that demands a social imaginary that can connect the local to the translocal, interlocal or global; or the empirical to the theoretical that they may be part of. This is not a situation where the local, or the revered anthropologist's ethnographic location has lost its place and that ethnography is no longer relevant and the move is toward generic abstractions or meta-narratives that in the first place led us to our crises of representations. Rather, it is the empiricism, the intimate ethnographies that allow access to the possibility of a multidimensional social imagination that can reveal the connections to the larger scale analytic. In effect, it is the vernacular, contextual, localized ethnographic motif that sets the frame for the assemblage that will constitute the larger theoretical analysis. But, the converse – that is, the understanding that the local can also provide sufficient, if not the best, explanation and analysis of the localized phenomenon is possibly a drastic short-sightedness that refuses to acknowledge that human experience can no longer be contained within its experiential margins.

In another instance, Garcia Canclini (2006) remarks on the blending of, in Latin American countries (and certainly in many other parts of the world) alternate medicines, gastronomies, farming practices, native sciences and craft techniques, languages and everyday education with recent internet technologies of archiving and disseminating. This is not a set of heterogeneous elements that find useful analysis in an obscure teleology of tradition vs. modernity, or of scientific knowledge vs. native

knowledge and so on. Rather, the problematic is about understanding the ‘global dynamics of combined homogenization and differentiation processes’ (i.e. “the dominant technology and the differentiated uses of this technology”, Garcia Canclini 2006:300) that suggest the localized, vernacular renditions and negotiations of larger structures, where its fullest contours can only be revealed through an anthropologically awkward investigation that takes the important steps away from the immediate or the localized particular to focus on the larger interconnections, the substantiation of the ideas, concerns, issues that the local seems to channel.

The combined approaches of Garcia Canclini’s ‘interculturality’ and the Comaroff’s ‘awkward ethnographies’ provide the methodological anchors that lay the ground for what I call emergent encounters. To reiterate, the former suggests the movement beyond multiplicity into a communication between correspondences and resonances among and between the heterogeneous and the latter suggests the analytical reach from the local encounter, the empirical motif into global, theoretical, universal contours of anthropological knowledge. I suggest that another kind of epistemological intervention is possible when the empirical motif is built through encounters between resonances that carry the possibility of a particular political correspondence – an anthropological encounter like that of my own between Beirut and Delhi.

My research in both these places over the past years have been about how life is lived in realms of coping and recovery after devastation and damage, especially when these contexts have been of political violence. The methodological meaning in this interface is to suggest an analytical horizon that could, potentially, make an epistemological movement possible. This is a movement that directs a re-routing of empirical and fieldwork connections and frames a certain ensemble of ethnographic motifs. Through these newly drawn maps of the anthropological imagination an epistemological potential emerges, one that expresses itself through a methodology in order to access a horizon of politics in knowledge production. I started with a notion of how ‘recovery’ plays itself out in the urban spaces of post-war Beirut, in the milieu of a nation devastated by 15 years of Civil War. My movement to Delhi was a foray into recovery in another urban context of political violence – the carnage of the Sikh community after the assassination of our then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi by her Sikh bodyguards. The slow assembling together of vignettes in Beirut, for instance of remembrances in a city that em-placed, often together, both destruction and nostalgia; of spaces that



included places for architectural futures and scarred presents put together a empirical set of motifs in and for 'recovery' in Beirut. The notion of recovery in Delhi assembled for itself and further in the same frame of understanding recovery, experiences of city spaces as those of places of exile; or as places that circumscribed identity and stigmatized livings and biographies.

Both Beirut and Delhi, in their ethnographic density and interpretive potential, together constituted not just the possibility of ethnographic connections between located spaces (with their own histories and geographies and socialities) that resonated a conceptual linking but also an emerging frame of what recovery could entail. These were linkings that liberates empirical motifs from preconceived location of meaning (derived from history, geography or theory) to flow out and meet other motifs in order to find, in these associations, and connections, bursts of new conceptual coherence and theoretical formations. In this ethnographic movement between Beirut-Delhi (eventually including a return to Beirut), that 'recovery' now describes lives that are lived in a chaotic jumble that includes semblances of adequate normality, of ubiquitous grief and loss, of the persistence of hope and futures intertwined along with experiences of identity and notions of insecurity, unstable belonging and also incomplete justice – to cite a few facets. No over arching narratives of space (geography) or time (history) nor singular theoretical formulation of bio-politics, or neoliberalism or the political economy of political violence can draft for my analysis an adequate encapsulation of these nuances. Understanding, illustratively - memory, or loss, or hope as part of a larger terrain of 'recovery' came about through an epistemological work that did not just relate, for instance, the 'Theory' of memory to a localized interpretation in either Beirut or Delhi (as illustrations of already accepted theory), but rather as a nuanced meaningfulness that combined instances of both in order to situate a epistemological potential to further theory-making. This is how I would suggest the potential of emergent encounters that assemble, in this case, in the larger frame of recovery, inscribing in this methodological orientation an epistemological rerouting which moves towards larger conceptual terrains that can carry the force of theorizing.

First, it is an encounter between locations that have a particular historical location in the anthropological cartography of encounters – they are both locations that are erstwhile 'others'. In the least, this by itself creates a frame of reference which provides the potential for a transgressive shift in classical ethnographic journeys. Second, the ethnographic encounter so conducted

through corresponding empirical motifs in resonant locations directs the anthropological social imaginary to understand a routing which does not just endorse intercultural negotiations and global connectivities but also brings into relief, in their interpretive fullness the meaning of vernacular formations in their maximum possible conceptual and analytical clarity. This is the kind of interpretive fullness that shifts the negotiation away from one empirical location with a global narrative but rather enacts a correspondence between resonant particulars, which interaction then informs and substantiates the communication with the universal.

I conclude by sketching the initial blueprint for emergent encounters thus far suggested - an assembly of encounters that is framed through an isomorphic cartography of dialogic spaces which play with the dynamic of "others", now released from erstwhile binaries and from insular heterogeneity. A contemporary mapping that identifies such a mapping is the metaphoric 'global south' but I would suggest that the anthropological imagination articulates its awkwardness by transgressing those cartographies that iterate limiting classifications. It is an imaginary routed through an anthropological intent that makes connections and analytical jumps between cultures, locations and places that changes the original encounter between the west and the rest, simultaneously dismantling the original self/other dynamic into an interface, collaboration, negotiation and interaction of different others. In my continuing work, I now look into the practices of recovery in the context of Hurricane Katrina in the United States to elaborate further on what its conceptual reach could be. The assembly in this case, which would allow access to both empirical and epistemological possibility is to interface these differentiated cultures, knowledges, social formations and experiences with *each other*, in order to see how they negotiate with the larger archive suggested by the thematic empirical motif of recovery. This then becomes another routing through which to trace the reach between the universal and particular, or even, empirical motif and theory. What, then, emerges in this methodological intent is an interactive understanding of *intercultural* interfaces - in other words, between and amongst multiplicities that are not seen as isolated diverse wholes but rather as *different* analogous or resonant nodes under global discourses. The epistemological shift lies precisely in the routing through isomorphic encounters, which by contouring emergent objects of enquiry though resonant encounters do not simply map the path from the local to the global (and vice versa), but in effect, show how such correspondences

negotiate with each other in ways in which both the particularities of the local and the universalisms of the global continually change and reformulate themselves. This epistemological reformulation becomes potent for another kind of anthropological knowledge production because these isomorphic mappings have been enacted through a politically motivated cartography – one that makes a conscious acknowledgement of hegemonic patterns by deliberately denying them in practice. The innovation in method is not just in making those connections, but also acknowledging these as conscious innovations and finally, in judging them as epistemological moments with political intent.

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