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The Hot and the Cold: Ills of Humans and Maize in Native Mexico

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The bulk of his ethnographic material, however, focuses on the significance of animals and landscapes in Khanty cosmology and ritual. These discussions nicely illustrate the role that human agents play in the regeneration of nature through ritual practices. More specifically, he demonstrates that the creation and use of material artifacts within the landscape plays an integral part in the continual renegotiation of the relationship between people and animals.

The final part of his discussion describes the enculturation of place and space, respectively. By the former, Jordan refers to how individuals are socialized within the material spaces inhabited by the community, as well as how specific places in the landscape are enculturated by the transformation or deposition of artifacts and by the construction of structures. He traces the history of one community through four generations of visits to ritual sites. Jordan uses the phrase “enculturation of space” to mean the wider appropriation of the landscape through patterns of land tenure and territoriality.

His concluding chapter is short and somewhat redundant with the shorter summaries presented at the end of each of the other chapters. I would have preferred a longer synthesis that integrated the theoretical discussion in the early chapters with data presented later. However, my main complaint is with the quality of the text, which at times appeared as if it was printed on a poor quality desktop printer. I was also distracted by the frequent use of bulleted text, but many readers will no doubt appreciate having key points highlighted.

Aside from these few minor problems, Peter Jordan's book is a major accomplishment. By integrating the study of material culture into an ethnographic analysis of a contemporary society, Jordan has produced a work that should be of interest to a broad array of social scientists and theorists. Ethnographers will appreciate this account of a little-studied society in a portion of the world that is relatively poorly documented. Scholars of hunting and gathering societies may enjoy the book for its purely descriptive value, but they—as well as researchers with an interest in environmental studies and religion—will no doubt be impressed by the attention Jordan devotes to the manner in which the Khanty give meaning

to the landscape. Social theorists will be interested to read an example of how abstract concepts like “structuration” and “praxis” can be made concrete. Finally, archaeologists will find an ethnography that not only pays attention to material culture, but does so in a theoretically sophisticated manner. In short, this is a book that I highly recommend.

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The Hot and the Cold: Ills of Humans and Maize in Native Mexico

J. M. CHEVALIER AND A. SÁNCHEZ BAIN
UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO PRESS, TORONTO,
2002

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REVIEWED BY CAMERON ADAMS

In *The Hot and the Cold* the authors enter an ongoing debate regarding the “humoral system” in Latin American ethnomedical systems championed by Foster (e.g., 1994) and López Austin (e.g., 1980 and 1986) respectively. The central thesis of this work is that George Foster's theory of the humoral origin of the Latin American hot/cold system is incorrect. In addition, they argue that the basic hot/cold system should be modified to include a heliotropic model. This shifting focus plagues the book and weakens the authors' argument throughout.

Chevalier and Sánchez Bain, following López Austin, take the position that the hot/cold system in Latin America is of pre-Columbian origin, not a Spanish colonial artifact. The claims against the Spanish humoral source are threefold. First, the authors argue, the humoral system has no “humors.” Because there is no reference to blood, phlegm and

the biles, nor to air, earth, wind and fire, the system must not be humoral. They then argue that, furthermore, there is no wet/dry continuum to consider alongside the hot/cold and that this is of prime importance. Foster's (1994) position is that the system has been reduced over time via transmission from colonizers to colonized and from individual to individual. Chevalier and Sánchez Bain categorically do not accept this possibility and suggest that the acceptance of this position is racist because it denies New Worlders the ability to perform abstract and complex thought. Instead, they assume that the humoral system would have been transferred carefully from specialist to specialist. In Foster's model, the system was transferred from the Spanish to the general population, with the specialists holding on to their traditional system, while the secular masses picked up a bit here and there.

Second, the authors contest Foster's argument that the medical system is empirically based. They claim that if the humoral categories of medicinals and illnesses are learned, the system can not be empirical. Thus, they argue, Foster is wrong. It seems that the authors' faulty logic misses the point—while one may label diarrhea, for example, as a "cold" illness, this has no effect on the empirical observation that a particular plant cures it. Furthermore, they ignore the work of Matthews (1983) who demonstrates how inconsistent the ethnomedical system is, which allows it to conform to disjunctures between empirical observations and theories. This suggests that the system is a recent adoption as a theoretical framework to explain observed results.

Third, it is suggested by Chevalier and Sánchez Bain that according to Foster's model, there is one perfect and rarely attained thermal value for health and that any activity is risky "to the point that a stable health condition becomes painfully rare (Foster 33-35)" (p. 17). In fact, on the pages cited here from Foster's work, he discusses how hot and cold insults to body equilibrium usually do not precipitate illness unless they are extreme. I will further discuss this issue below.

One of the goals of this book consists of developing a "heliotropic," as opposed to the basic humoral, model of health. By heliotropic the authors refer to

a cyclical model that not only varies in the course of the day, as the term suggests, but also over the lifetime of the entity in question. Here lies the book's strong point. Rich ethnographic data is explored in the realms of health and illness, agricultural beliefs and practices, and mythology. Health and agricultural practice are shown to be interrelated in very direct ways while the inclusion of multiple versions of the corn myth adds to the ethnographic documentation and helps support facets of the heliotropic model. Also included are a series of related graphic models that are informative, easy to understand, and distill the text quite nicely.

However, the authors conflate two distinct realms of illnesses, naturalistic and personalistic, in stating, "the Nahuas and Popolucas do not make a clear distinction between health, milpa production, and considerations of morality and spirituality" (pp. xv-xvi). While this may be the case, no evidence is given to support this statement for all health-related issues. The reader must accept this on faith, while distinctions between secular medicine with a naturalistic focus and specialist medicine with a personalistic focus have been well explained for other regions of Mesoamerica (e.g., Berlin and Berlin 1996).

It is the denial of these two distinct facets of medical etiology that is the source of disagreement between Foster and the authors of this text. Naturalistic illnesses, the ones Foster addresses with the humoral hypothesis, are cured according to secular models as practiced by the secular public. These etiologies and cures rarely call upon mythological models. It is simply known or believed that this or that medicine cures this or that disease. Only when asked to explain how a cure works, is the humoral system invoked (Berlin and Berlin 1996; Casagrande 2002). However, by drawing in agricultural and moral motifs the authors focus on personalistic illness and causation; ultimately, they are arguing around Foster, not with him.

Regardless, the heliotropic model is presented as "health as moving equilibrium" (p. xvi) and based on a "threefold law of balance, cyclic motion and growth" (p. 80). The claim is that over the course of a day, and one's life, there exists a moving ideal thermal point that can be achieved through the normal

heating and cooling aspects of regular life activities. It is only when one makes a distinct change from the moving ideal that illness befalls an individual. It is argued that this is fundamentally different than the humoral model of an ideal thermal point. However, as noted above there are accepted normal variations from the ideal in the humoral model that do not precipitate illness. The heliotropic model, instead of an alternate to the humoral, is merely a more fine-grained explanation of the differing heat qualities of an individual over the course of a day and throughout their lifetime.

As mentioned above, the authors present as damning to the humoral model its lack of a wet/dry component. They then proceed to spill a lot of ink building an argument for the strong salience and ubiquity of a hydrological aspect of traditional concepts of health. It is fundamental to the heliotropic model as stated and is well documented. Instead of hitting the target of "Foster as straw man," this salvo lands at the authors' own feet. Moreover, much of the ethnographic data presented is irrelevant to the argument regarding the hot/cold or wet/dry systems. Jabs are taken at cognition-focused classificatory systems, yet not a single author is cited and Foster is cited out of context or in misleading ways. Finally, little relevant data is brought to bear on whether the humoral health system is pre-Columbian or of colonial influence.

In conclusion, this book's point is shifting, its scope not unified and its logic peccable. If you are interested in compelling ethnographic descriptions of the Gulf Nahuas and Popolucas, I suggest reading the middle chapters of this book. If you are interested in entering the debate about the hot/cold health system in Latin America, I suggest reading Foster and López Austin.

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