*Globalization and the Cultural Grammar of 'Great Power' Aspiration**

Siddharth Mallavarapu

Treating globalization as an initial point of departure to examine how cultures may have a bearing on great power ambitions, one can identify and challenge seven popular fallacies surrounding the concept. Available histories of globalization amply demonstrate that it is not a new phenomenon and secondly, that it must not be simplistically equated with everything western. Further, ongoing processes of globalization suggest that conceptions of what constitutes 'culture' and similarly what constitutes 'greatness' are complicated and of crucial consequence in ascertaining any correlations between culture and predispositions to great power standing. One should not assume that greatness in conventional international relations usage is inevitably a generic predisposition of all cultures. The notion of an essentialist national culture is highly contentious as there is likely to be considerable divergence of opinion amongst diversely socially positioned domestic constituencies with regard to both the content of greatness and cultural inclinations to greatness as understood in the dominant international relations idiom.

'...today we must reckon with the fact that non-Western civilizations have grown in strength and self-confidence'. (Iriye 2005: 108–16)

> In the realm of ideas, the unintended consequences of domineering imperial expansion were quite apparent. If these connections caused colonized intellectuals to create tame, 'derivative discourses,' it also gave them opportunity to dissect Western ideologies, to emphasize their inconsistencies and to construct potent, hybrid species of ideas which appealed both to local audiences and to the wider world (Bayly 2004: 177).

The author is Assistant Professor, Centre for International Politics, Organization and Disarmament, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. E-mail: msiddharth@mail.jnu.ac.in

*A version of this article was originally presented at the joint national conference organized by the School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University and the Ministry of External Affairs on 23–24 February 2006, New Delhi. The author wishes to express his gratitude to the participants at the conference and the anonymous referee for his/her insightful comments on the article.

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES 44, 2 (2007): 87–102
Sage Publications Los Angeles/London/New Delhi/Singapore
DOI: 10.1177/002088170704400201

A rather compelling way of examining mutations both in terms of the central cast of players and in terms of the rules of the game in the contemporary international system is to historicize the present. This is not a plea for history of any kind—but specifically for a history of interconnections that maps the 'disjunctive flows' spread across different temporal and spatial frames (Hopkins 2002a; Appadurai 2002). The idea that globalization best serves us as a 'heuristic device' to comprehend ongoing systemic changes is indeed not a novel claim (Bayly 2002: 47–73). Historian Chris Bayly has advanced the case with panache and he is now joined by increasing members of the disciplinary guild contributing to the project of historically unravelling globalization (Mallavarapu 2006).

My objective in this article is limited. I make an attempt to refute seven popular fallacies surrounding globalization and in the process hint at implications it might carry for how we conceptualize norms, cultures and great powers. I argue that globalization provides us with an analytically useful set of parameters by which we might arrive at a more accurate judgement of existing and emerging configurations of power. I conclude by suggesting that we need to avoid essentializing cultures and posit national type cultural preferences vis-à-vis ambitions to be a great power. In this context, I examine briefly the circulation of the 'great power' appellation in the contemporary Indian context. A conception both of the content of greatness and the ability to meet the criterion of greatness is likely to vary substantively both within and between cultures. Ultimately, these remain normative questions that demand further scrutiny before we assume that greatness in the classical international relations usage is an impulse intrinsic to all cultures.

Seven Fallacies about Globalization

Globalization is a New Phenomenon

An initial point of departure to understand globalization is to partake of a debate about the genesis of globalization. While several contemporary characterizations of globalization tend to view the phenomenon as new or contemporary, there are now an increasing number of historians who refute the validity of this claim. Particularly instructive in this regard is a collection of essays brought together by historian A.G. Hopkins (2002a). Drawing on the work of his collective Hopkins makes the argument that we might indeed make a distinction between different phases of globalization. The preliminary phase of globalization, which originates from around 1500 A.D., is a period that might be characterized as 'Archaic Globalization'. Historians C.A. Bayly, John Lonsdale, Hans van de Ven and Tim Harper have chronicled various facets of 'archaic' globalization in non-western theatres.

According to Hopkins, 'archaic' globalization

> ...was sea-borne as well as land-based; and it was promoted particularly by great pre-modern empires—from Byzantium and Tang to the renewed expansionism

> of the Islamic and Christian powers after 1500. This was a world in which territorial state-systems were far more fluid than they were to become. The strongest affiliations were both universal and local; the junction between them was found most notably in the development of cities; connections between far-flung cities were made possible by diasporic networks and migrants of all kinds. The limits to the effective authority of the state, combined with the powerful presence of universal belief systems, notably Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, encouraged the movement of ideas, and with them people and goods, across regions and continents (2002a: 4).

The notion that these flows of ideas, capital, commodities and people emerged prior to modernity must actually come as no real surprise. However, it is not very often that one finds mention of these historical flows in contemporary accounts of globalization. What make these flows in the era of archaic globalization important are the strands of continuity that they establish with the modern period. Many of the visible precursors to a more full-fledged modernity—cities, diasporas and the increasing 'specialization of labour' were all elements that were present in the moment of 'archaic' globalization (Hopkins 2002b: 4).

The processes that follow the era of 'archaic' globalization between 1600 and 1800 are referred to as 'proto-globalization.' One of the distinguishing traits of this phase of globalization was a metamorphosis in the nature of the political community, with the emergence of the state system. The proto-globalized period also witnessed the emergence of 'pre-industrial manufacturing.' The implications of this were substantial. It generated a new political economy with 'circuits of exchange that created a complex pattern of multilateral trade across the world and ... a degree of convergence among consumers who otherwise inhabited different cultural spheres' (Hopkins 2002b: 5). The significance attached to 'military fiscalism' also emerged in the proto-globalized period. Military fiscalism came into conflict with the forces of cosmopolitanism. According to Hopkins, military fiscalism involved '...the use of state power to command the revenues needed to meet war expenditures, gave impetus to imperial expansion; it also added a predatory, and to that extent non-modern, element to the cosmopolitan ethos of the era' (2002c: 26).

Subsequent to the period of 'proto-globalization', we enter the age of 'modern' globalization. Commencing roughly around 1800 A.D., the two most fundamental transformations that inform the political landscape remain the institutionalization of the nation-state and the 'spread of industrialization.' This is an important phase because it is this phase that has resulted in considerable distortion about how we characterize the world we live in. There has been a tendency to simplistically interpret this phase as the 'rise of the west' and the consequent 'decline of the rest' (Bayly 2004). However, what is important to register are the expressions of

political agency in terms of the responses of the non-west to the west. Hopkins echoes what Bayly's opening remarks in the present article reflect when he points out that

> [l]ong before the end of empire, the subject peoples were adapting the language and ideals as well as the institutions and technology that accompanied the imperial mission. In this way, the extension of nationalism that reached the rest of the world as imperial rule or imperial influence was itself domesticated, thus helping to bring one phase of globalization to an end and pointing the way, albeit uncertainly, to another (2002b: 7).

A further delineation of the contemporary phases of globalization points to the processes of decolonization and the emergence of post-colonial states subsequent around the 1950s. The post-colonial period is also crucial in reinforcing the point that '...the concept of the West is itself an invention that owes a great deal to interaction with the non-European world' (Hopkins 2002c: 19–20). It is possible to glean two lessons from this strain of scholarship. First, we need to appreciate at the outset that globalization is not a completely novel phenomenon and second also to come to terms with the reality that '...historical sequences do not necessarily unfold in a linear, evolutionary fashion' (Hopkins 2002c: 25).

Globalization is Synonymous with Westernization

Globalization has tended to be equated with westernization in popular parlance (Sen 2002). This is an inaccurate account of both globalization and westernization (Mallavarapu 2006). A large part of the critique of this view comes again from rigorous historical scholarship that demonstrates that globalization extends 'beyond the radius of modernity/Westernization' (Pieterse 2003: 268). However, it is not just historians who have added their might to correcting this misperception. Cultural theorists have also explicitly rejected an approach that equates globalization with westernization. Consider, for instance, the claim advanced by development theorist Jan Nederveen Pieterse. He points out that

> [t]here are several problems associated with modernity/globalization approach. In either conceptualization, whether centred on capitalism or modernity, globalization begins in and emanates from Europe and the West. In effect, it is a theory of Westernization by another name, which replicates all problems associated with Eurocentrism: a narrow window on the world, historically and culturally (ibid.: 267).

Pieterse further argues that what might in fact be desirable is to view 'globalizations in the plural' rather than the singular (ibid.: 265). This is consistent with the line of argument being advanced by historians as well.

However, if globalization is not about westernization, what is it really about? Do we have an adequate vocabulary to capture the influence not merely of the west on the non-west, but vice versa as well? A conceptual innovation that seeks to address more accurately the processes that accompany contemporary globalization is the notion of 'hybridity'. Hybridity does not feign innocence about power differentials in the shaping of the encounter but provides us with a distinction between '...an assimilationist hybridity that leans towards the centre, adopts the canon and mimics the hegemony, and, at the other end, a destabilizing hybridity that blurs the canon, reverses the current, subverts the centre' (Pieterse 2003: 277). According to this sensibility, what remains critical is an appreciation of the 'fluid' nature of cultures as opposed to viewing them as static, immutable and rigid frames of reference.

In order to emphasize that the role of the non-west has been crucial to the processes of globalization in the past as well, I focus attention on existing scholarship on an important Asiatic power—China. Hans van de Ven advances some rather fascinating claims about China and the advent of globalization that knock down simplistic notions of globalization as having originated in the west. Prior to what we have come to recognize as modern globalization, China witnessed considerable 'linkages' with South East Asia as early as the twelfth century. Ven argues that 'networks of social contract, trade linkages and cultural practices ...had linked China with Southeast Asia well before modern globalization took root' (2002: 169). A wide range of commodities were traded. These included silk garments, furniture, precious metals like gold and silver and items of daily consumption such as rice. Ven's larger point is that 'China itself was one center in the multi-polar world of archaic and proto-modern globalization long before commentators in the Western world assigned claims of origin to themselves' (ibid.: 175). Disavowing the notion that non-western societies were merely cast in the image of the west, there is a recovery of agency in the choices exercised by Asia even in this phase of history, which is typically interpreted as the 'expansion of Europe' story. What is extremely relevant about this grain of historical scholarship is the continuity it establishes between the roles played by Chinese capital today with those of the past (ibid.: 188).

Exploring the cultural facets of 'being Chinese' in the world of the contemporary Pacific Rim Capital, Aihwa Ong dispels an unmistakable Orientalist predilection to cast 'the Other as timeless, unchanging culture' (2005: 339). In contrast to this simplistic notion, Ong studies the choices exercised by the Chinese diaspora and discovers an element of 'flexible citizenship' that seems to best characterize the current transformations in Chinese identity. Laying a special emphasis on 'the agency of Asian subjects', Ong delves into 'regimes' instituted by the Chinese state, family and global capital that result in a complex negotiation by the diaspora generating a fluid response providing a repertoire of 'different possibilities of

being Chinese in the world' (Ong 2005: 341). She argues that the Chinese have creatively employed Orientalist tropes to their own advantage. 'Images of Orientalist docility, diligence, self-sufficiency, and productivity underpin contemporary notions that the Asian minority embodies the human capital desirable in good citizens, in contrast to those who make claims on the welfare program' (ibid.: 348). They have learnt to combine these images with an unmistakable 'ultra rationalism' that makes for a rather interesting mix in terms of identity.

How has the Asian agency manifested itself? Ong points out that

> [f]or centuries, Asians and other peoples have been shaped by a perception and experience of themselves as the Other of the Western world. The new prominence of Asians in the world markets has enabled Chinese subjects to play a bigger role in identifying what counts as 'Chinese' in the West (ibid.: 349).

Ultimately, Ong asks us to rethink whether culture has anything to do with capitalist success in the contemporary world. She argues that 'there may not be anything uniquely "Chinese" about flexible personal discipline, disposition and orientation; they are rather the expressions of a habitus that is finely tuned to the turbulence of late capitalism' (ibid.: 353). Thus, Chinese success may have less to do with the 'Confucian affective model' than with their ability 'to play to the metaphor of bridging political boundaries in their role as agents of flexible accumulation and flexible citizenship' (ibid.: 348, 351). Nevertheless, this is another interesting story that drives home the point that we need to be attentive to how non-western cultural identities are being subject to different negotiations in the context of global capitalism if we are to arrive at a more complete account of globalization.

Globalization Inevitably Involves a 'Clash of Civilizations'

In close compact with the fallacy that globalization amounts to westernization, there is often an equally troublesome cultural assumption advanced—that the west is inherently superior to the rest. The most explicit articulation of this idea came in the form of Samuel Huntington's thesis relating to the 'clash of civilizations.' While Huntington has had several critics, among more persuasive of them is the anthropologist Hugh Gusterson who identifies 'seven deadly sins' that Huntington's work lends itself to (Gusterson 2005: 24–32).[1]

The fundamental criticism that Gusterson advances vis-à-vis Huntington's thesis is that 'it stereotypes entire cultures while denying the reality of change and diversity within cultures and the possibility of solidarity between them' (ibid.: 25). Specific criticisms are also worth examining in this context.

[1] Of particular relevance in this context is a riveting critique of Huntington's thesis by Kanti Bajpai (1999) in an article titled 'Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Reconsidered', *International Studies*, vol. 36, pp. 165–89.

The first criticism that Gusterson levels against Huntington's formulation of the 'clash of civilizations' is that it assumes that the world can be carved up into neat cultural zones marked by a degree of homogeneity and staticity. This is bound to run into problems such as the exclusion of Greece from the notion of western civilization. Cultures are not amenable to the sort of symmetry that Huntington posits (Gusterson 2005: 29). A second fundamental criticism relates to Huntington's caricature of cultures. Huntington assumes certain stereotypical dimensions of civilizations and treats this as social fact. However, if there is one thing that emerges clearly from globalization literature it is that there is no 'single script' out there. As Gusterson emphatically observes, 'even before the mass migrations of colonialism and globalization scrambled societies demographically, societies did not consist of individuals with personalities and belief systems that were mass-produced to behave identically and consistently, but of complex patterns of integrated heterogeneity' (ibid.: 30). A third criticism that attends Huntington's thesis relates to his unwillingness to factor contingency and change. Huntington tends to view civilizations as immutable frames. The argument here is that '[p]recisely because Huntington assumes that cultures are immutable, he mistakes a slice of historical time for an eternal cultural present' (ibid.: 32–33). The unwillingness to concede change is particularly apparent in Gusterson's observations about Islam.

A fourth criticism that Gusterson advances relates to the neglect of multiculturalism. Huntington remains wary of cultural intermingling and hybridization. He tends to view 'cultural miscegenation [a]s dangerous and unnatural' (ibid.: 34). The historical record, however, demonstrates indisputably the folly of resurrecting any pristine unchanging view of civilizations or cultures (ibid.: 36). A fifth charge Huntington is criticized for is his distortion in representing Islam. Gusterson points to the dangers of representing Islam as a 'monolith' and if anything the response to the 'war on terror' only reaffirms why such a view belies reality. To illustrate the point, Gusterson draws attention to the work of anthropologist Clifford Geertz whose work has distilled the differences, for instance, in what Islam has come to mean in Indonesia in marked contrast to Morocco (ibid.: 36–38). A sixth 'sin' that Huntington lends himself to is a certain innocence of method when it comes to documenting other cultures and civilizations. Gusterson notes that there is not a single foreign language source in his references, and his index of militarization and propensity towards violence are constructed with rather narrow terms of reference and 'the use of numbers and measurements lend a superficial sheen of objectivity...' (ibid.: 39). Even if one were to strictly employ Huntington's criteria for indexing, Gusterson points out that '...even by his own slanted criteria ...Western civilization would surely have come out listed among the most militaristic on earth' (ibid.: 40).

A final folly that Huntington commits is positing the west as inherently superior to the rest. In yet another moment of 'occidental narcissism', Huntington 'assumes that the West is the only civilization capable of secular reason, liberal democracy,

and true individualism' (Gusterson 2005: 40; Pieterse 2003: 269). Gusterson challenges the 'ethnocentric' bias in Huntington's claim that all political ideologies are creations of the west. In effect Huntington endorses a 'prescription for a rigid system of global cultural apartheid' by slotting cultures indiscriminately and denying them the possibilities of a syncretistic conversation (Gusterson 2005: 41).

Globalization Involves Only Legal and Licit Flows

A fourth popular fallacy surrounding globalization is that it primarily involves legal and licit flows alone. Nothing can be further from the truth. Carolyn Nordstrom in a fascinating account featuring facets of 'unrecorded trade' argues that '...vast transnational nonlegal networks ...move trillions in goods and services and millions of people around the globe' (2005: 138–53). What is, however, of particular interest is '...the relationships of unrecorded commodity flows from resource-rich locales in Africa to cosmopolitan industrial centers worldwide' (ibid.: 140).

Why have these flows not been the subject of commentary on globalization relative to their importance? For a fairly obvious reason—it remains extremely difficult to outline these flows given that they are unaccounted for. It is hard to fathom the actual scale of these illicit economies—but by no means are they insignificant or miniscule. Nordstrom points out that 'in many of the world's countries over half the entire GNP is generated extralegally' (ibid.: 143). The principal constituents of these illegal flows remain drugs, arms and human trafficking. There are some available statistics on these issues.

> As much as 20 per cent of the world's financial deposits are housed in unregulated banks and at offshore locations. The UN estimates illicit drug earnings at $500 billion, and profits from illicit arms industry to be of a similar size. Human trafficking, considered to be the third largest illicit activity after arms and drugs, brings in hundreds of billions of unregulated dollars a year. Of comparable size is the empire of gain from unregulated sex trade and pornography industries (ibid.).

These illicit flows are also not confined to any one particular state. Nordstrom argues that

> ...in the United States alone consumer fraud, corporate tax fraud and corporate financial crime range between $247 and $715 billion annually. India's 'black economy' in the early 1980s was estimated at more than $60 billion dollars, and has grown since then. In Peru, 48 per cent of the economically active population works in the 'informal' sector; the figure is 58 per cent in Kenya, and perhaps even higher in Russia. Michael Camdessus, former managing director of the International Monetary Fund, estimates that $600,000 million is laundered

annually in the world, representing between 2 and 5 per cent of the world's gross domestic product (2005: 144).

It is perhaps worthwhile to reflect on the consequences this poses for both states and markets. Some '...scholars like Susan Strange and Manuel Castells observe, criminal systems not only are globalizing but also are reconfiguring the very meaning of *market* and the very viability of the state. They write that diverse criminal networks are forging cross-group links, transnational associations, business partnerships, trade agreements, and foreign policy in unprecedented ways' (Nordstrom 2005: 142). Any reflection on cultures, norms and great powers will have to take cognizance of modalities of estimating and controlling these flows. As Nordstrom accurately indicates: '[t]he state is not disintegrating but it no longer holds the paramount power it once did: nonstate and nonlegal networks are overtaking some of the state's "turf", and the boundaries between state and nonlegal are more porous and difficult to define in a global market' (ibid.).

Globalization Weakens Traditional Conceptions of State Sovereignty

A fairly popular assumption made with regard to processes of globalization is that it erodes state capacity. This is the position most clearly articulated by the hyper-globalists who believe that '...the autonomy and sovereignty of nation-states have been eclipsed by contemporary processes of economic globalization' (Held and McGrew 2001: 324). There is further an intermediate position which argues that globalization does not alter the standing of states—simply put the status quo persists. Sceptics who subscribe to this position argue that 'old-style geopolitics and neo-imperialism' continue to matter (ibid.). A third minority position argues that globalization in effect results in the augmentation of state capacity. I pursue the third line of thought here drawing largely on the work of John Torpey who catalogues systematically the efforts of states to monopolize successfully the 'legitimate means of movement' (Torpey 2003: 107–27).

Drawing attention to the classic Weberian dimension of state power—namely the ability to monopolize and legitimate violence, Torpey argues that state power is also best understood in terms of its success in similarly monopolizing the 'means of movement' permissible to both citizens and non-citizens within its territorial jurisdiction. He argues in this context that '...modern states, and the international state system of which they are a part, have expropriated from individuals and private entities the legitimate "means of movement" particularly though by no means exclusively across international boundaries' (ibid.: 107). The state institutes in this context 'techniques of identification' and devices means to distinguish its citizenry from aliens. Torpey argues that states are in the grip of two ambivalent motivations—while they seek to 'shelter' their citizenry, they simultaneously seek

to 'dominate' as well. Thus with the advent of political modernity there comes into being an '...extensive administrative infrastructure necessary to carry out such regulation in a pervasive and systemic fashion' (Torpey 2003: 110). Apart from a meticulously tailored administrative edifice, there also exists '...a body of legal norms designed to adjudicate claims by individuals to entry into particular spaces and territories' (ibid.).

While globalization in effect is about flows of people, ideas, commodities and capital not all of these flows must be treated as natural and not subject to state regulation. Particularly when it comes to the movement of people, there exists considerable latitude that states employ in framing their immigration policies as well as in restricting the flows of non-citizens. Certain flows are stigmatized and clearly referred to as 'illegal'. Torpey argues that '[t]he point here is obviously not that there is no unauthorized (international) migration, but rather that such movement is specifically illegal; that is, we speak of illegal (often indeed of "undocumented") migration as a result of states monopolization of the legitimate means of movement' (ibid.: 112).

With globalization and the advent of newer forms of technology, there is a case to be argued that in fact the 'surveillance' capacities of states has been enhanced rather than diminished. Mention may be made of a whole host of technologies deployed to establish citizen identity. These include 'fingerprinting, electronically scanned palm-prints, DNA fingerprinting and retina scans' as well (ibid.: 120). Thus states may have historically unprecedented means of tabulating their populations and reinforcing a truism 'that much of the necessary administrative capacity of modern states is rooted in *writing*' (ibid.: 117).

Globalization is a Clear Dichotomous either/or Choice that Faces Societies and States

If we treat globalization as fundamentally about flows whether of people, ideas, commodities or capital, these flows have been a part of the human condition for the *longue durée*. It would, therefore, be inaccurate to posit globalization as a simple binary either/or choice. Nobel laureate Amartya Sen raises an interesting question when he enquires if anti-globalization protesters are really opposed to globalization per se. The answer he points out is negative given the reality that they are indeed campaigning for a more just global order. Therefore he argues that '...there is no real contradiction in the fact that the so-called "anti-globalization" protests are now among the most globalized' events in the contemporary world (Sen 2004: 10). Similarly, it would be wrong to ignore the place of the market as an institution through much of human history. As Sen points out, '...there is no way of dispensing with the institutions of markets in general as an engine of economic growth. Using markets is like speaking prose—much depends on what

prose we choose to speak' (2004: 10). Thus while the question of distributive implications is very important, this does not derogate from the need to tread cautiously while assessing both the historical and current status of globalization.

Globalization Has a Fixed Teleology

A final fallacy that I deal with here is the view that globalization has a predictable telos. If anything the course of human history has shown that it would be wrong to assume linear patterns of change. While popular writers like Thomas Friedman have advanced the claim that 'new capitalism is fated to exist and expand because of its superior capacity to improve standards of living through consumerism...' (Hertz and Nader 2005: 122). Ellen Hertz and Laura Nader in a persuasive rebuttal of Friedman's claims argue that '...this is fatalism American style' (ibid.: 129). Any discerning social scientist is unlikely to accept futuristic claims uncritically and if history is a guide it is not hard to see the spate of 'unintended consequences' that have emerged as a consequence of conscious human choice (Lal 1998).

Globalization, Cultures and Great Powers

Culture as a category lends itself to several lines of interpretation. According to Renato Rosaldo, there is a classical conception of culture that tends to view cultures in terms of a 'self-contained whole'. This is in contrast to viewing culture '...as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders' (Rosaldo 1993: 20). Culture has been likened to a 'garage sale' at least in one account where the premise is that '...nothing is sacred, permanent or sealed off' (ibid.: 44). This is a point that is also reinforced by the experience of globalization. The important element however is to recognize that '...all human conduct is culturally mediated. Culture encompasses the everyday and the esoteric, the mundane and the elevated, the ridiculous and the sublime. Neither high nor low, culture is all-pervasive' (ibid.: 26). Another valid assumption to make about cultures is that they are '...learned not genetically encoded' (ibid.: 26).

However, a more fundamental question relates to the interplay of culture and power. Here the questions assume a more specific character. We need to ask '[w]ho is speaking to whom, about what, for what purposes, and under what circumstances?' (ibid.: 54). According to Jean and John Comaroff, power is manifest in cultural terms both in hegemony and ideology. From their perspective, '...hegemony ...refer[s] to that order of signs and practices, relations and distinctions, images and epistemologies—drawn from a historically situated cultural field, that come to be taken for granted as the natural and received shape of the world and everything that inhabits it' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 210). Distinguishing between hegemony and ideology, Comaroff and Comaroff identify

the exercise of hegemony in the politics of 'muted naturalization', while they view ideology as subject to a politics of 'articulation' (2005: 211). When we, therefore, examine the connections between culture and great powers, we might not be able to resist the temptation to examine how hegemony naturalizes the exercise of power in epistemological terms as well in a discipline like international relations (Cox 2000: 1537–71). An equally important distinction that Comaroff and Comaroff make relates to 'agentive' and 'non-agentive' facets of power. While agentive power '...refers to the command wielded by human beings in specific historical contexts', non-agentive power refers to power that '...hides, itself in the forms of everyday life' (2005: 209). The truth about power is that the non-agentive dimension '...may be as effective as the most violent coercion in shaping, directing, even dominating social thought and action' (ibid.: 209).

While reflecting on culture and power especially in their more naturalized forms, it is perhaps worthwhile to examine if the concern with great powers in the discipline of international relations emerges from a culture which valorizes certain forms of power uncritically and treats it as a natural state of affairs. The concern with power in terms of greatness viewed in material capabilities might itself be a narrow view both of culture and power. While hegemony is 'habit forming', so also are the dominant epistemological frames of a discipline that is complicit with power in very fundamental ways. We might well ask if the desire to cast oneself in the image of the hegemon is itself a mark of 'non-agentive power' that circulates in the ambitions and desires of those aspiring to be great powers.

This brings us to a third way of conceptualizing culture. According to Arjun Appadurai, cultures are not merely about the past but they also play a crucial role in shaping responses to the future (2004: 59–84). Culture in this conceptualization is about the 'capacity to aspire' (ibid.: 59). It remains a vital 'navigational capacity' that structures human choice (ibid.: 69). Culture also performs two other vital functions according to Appadurai. Drawing on the work of Albert Hirschman and Charles Taylor, Appadurai points out that cultures viewed in aspirational terms are about securing 'voice' and seeking 'recognition' (ibid.: 66). Thus there remains an important performative dimension to culture viewed in these terms (ibid.: 67).

Is then the desire to be a great power ultimately a matter of cultural inclination? Are certain cultures more receptive to playing a central role in the international system and likewise are certain cultures disinclined in playing any such role? These are complex questions and not amenable to easy answers simply because scholars studying culture have demonstrated that it is wrong to view cultures in terms of a simplistic 'national type'. Ultimately, the response to these questions will hinge on who within a certain culture is being asked this question and how that social positioning in a sense determines a response to it. There is considerable internal diversity within cultures that needs to be respected and my conjecture is that you will find as many answers to the question as you would care for depending on how, to whom and in what context the question is ultimately posed.

Contemporary India and the 'Great Power' Appellation

The idea that India is closing in on the ranks of 'great powers' is increasingly being bandied around in academic and policy circles (Cohen 2001; Nayar and Paul 2004). The term 'great powers' in this context is employed implicitly and sometimes explicitly in the conventional neo-realist frame as encompassing a combination of strategic and economic capabilities, which in India's case is seen as altering its location (from a middle power to an 'emerging'/great power) in terms of the systemic evaluation of the 'distribution of capabilities' criterion (Waltz 1979: 79–101). Prior to delving into whether this is indeed true, I briefly consider some arguments being advanced to support the thesis that India is headed towards a 'great power' standing.

Arguably, the staunchest advocate of this stance is Raja Mohan who in a recent article in *Foreign Affairs* makes the case that 'India is now emerging as the swing state in the global balance of power' (2006: 17). According to Raja Mohan, this implies that the west is now compelled 'to engage India on its own terms' (ibid.: 18). Is this an accurate assessment? Reading through this particular account one gets the impression that India is already another 'great power'. Notice, for instance, a universal register of great power proclivities being discussed. Raja Mohan remarks 'alliance formation and balancing are tools in the kits of all great powers—and so they are likely to be in India's as well' (ibid.: 30). If all it took to be a great power was merely to behave like one, there would be several contenders for the 'great power' tag.

However, a closer look at the domestic face of Indian politics reveals that there is plenty of homework to be done on basic issues—provision of health, housing, education and livelihood on an equitable basis to a vast majority of our people. None of this is disguised by great power semantics and calls for an act of domestic political will. It does not take an astute political scientist to notice this imperative. A contribution to the same volume of *Foreign Affairs*, by Gurcharan Das is closer to the mark, at least in one respect when he argues that India '...will reach greatness only when every Indian has access to a good school, a working health clinic, and clean drinking water' (2006: 16). This brings us to the other dimension, namely, the prerequisite of a robust state to ensure this is a translatable programme of action. Here, perhaps Das's diagnosis is fallacious when he argues that '[t]he middle class withdrew from the state system long ago. Now, even the poor are depending more and more on private services. The government merely needs to catch up' (ibid.: 13). If this were true of the middle classes you would not have the statistically challenging numbers you see outside government-run hospitals or schools on a daily basis. There is an enormous demand even amongst the Indian middle classes for affordable health and education and the state has a vital role to play here. We must not conflate current inability to meet the demand with a lack of demand for state services.

A large part of the estimation of great power standing for India has to do with our current economic growth rates and the potential it holds. While we could be optimistic about the sustainability of these rates of growth, we cannot forget that fifty years is a long way to go if we are to be persuaded by the Goldman Sachs projections. These projections are suspect given the time frames they dabble in and a whole range of potentially unexplained variables that the analyst remains blind to at the current political juncture.[2] Fareed Zakaria who is otherwise upbeat about a 'rising India' warns that the business of estimations such as that of Goldman Sachs is at the end of the day 'treacherous business' (2006). The point about schisms within India does not escape close observers. Zakaria writes that 'the country might have several Silicon Valleys, but it also has three Nigerias within it, more than 300 million people living on less than a dollar a day. India is home to 40 per cent of the world's poor and has the world's second largest HIV population. But that is the familiar India, the India of poverty and disease' (ibid.). He is, however, open to the possibility of a break from the past. In his affirmative prose, '[t]he India of the future contains all this but also something new. You can feel the change even in the midst of the slums' (ibid.).

Another well-known scholar on Indian nuclear behaviour, George Perkovich does not mince words when he claims that '...if analysts of international power are correct, then the most empowering course will be the one that provides the greatest mass of the Indian populace with the education, infrastructure, and political-economic liberty and security necessary to lead productive lives. The most successful course will be the one that strengthens the cohesion and allegiance of the greatest number of India's diverse citizens and groups' (2003). Suspicious of the accent on military strength, Perkovich argues that '[n]uclear weapons cannot grow an economy, gain international market share, or win political support for a nation's demands to shape the political-economic order' (ibid.). Perkovich is not alone in his suspicion of military strength as a guarantor of great power standing. Dilip Mohite, for instance, also affirms that

> [i]t makes little sense to talk of India as the fourth power on the basis of its military capability, given the global economic power of Japan and Germany. Furthermore, the increasing interconnectedness of the world economy as well as increasing interstate interdependence have made the unilateral exercise of military power extremely difficult, if not impossible (1993: 9).

India's biggest asset remains its democracy. As pertinently suggested, it 'has imparted to [India] a distinct identity, and which is a true global currency of political legitimacy: it is a form of political capital that has been amassed over the past five and a half decades' (Khilnani 2004).

[2] I have benefited from discussions with Anindya Saha with regard to this particular dimension.

An overall assessment of India as a great power in my view should induce caution before we make any large unsubstantiated claims. While there is enormous potential that shows signs of promise, it would be unrealistic to overlook the message the human development index provides about India. In 2006, India was ranked 126 amongst various states of the world (UNDP 2006). The index considered life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, combined enrolment ratio for primary, secondary and tertiary schools and standard of living assessed in terms of purchasing power parity income. While the index may have its own limitations, it does not derogate from Perkovich's note of caution, 'India, to be great, has more urgent things to do' (2003).

November 2006

References

Appadurai, Arjun. 2002. 'Grassroots Globalization and the Research Imagination', in Joan Vincent, ed., *The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory and Critique*, Malden: Blackwell, pp. 271–84.

———. 2004. 'The Capacity to Aspire: Culture and Terms of Recognition', in Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton, eds, *Culture and Public Action*, pp. 59–84. New Delhi: Permanent Black.

Bajpai, Kanti. 1999. 'Samuel Huntington's Clash of Civilizations Reconsidered', *International Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, pp. 165–89.

Bayly, C.A. 2002. '"Archaic" and "Modern" Globalization in the Eurasian and African Arena, c. 1750–1850', in A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History*, London: Pimlico.

———. 2004. *The Birth of the Modern World: 1780–1914*. Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 47–73.

Cohen, Stephen P. 2001. *Emerging Power: India*. Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Comaroff, Jean and John Comaroff. 2005. 'Of Revelation and Revolution', in Joan Vincent, ed., *The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory and Critique*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 203–12.

Cox, Robert W. 2000. 'Social Forces, States and World Orders: Beyond International Relations Theory', in Andrew Linklater, ed., *International Relations: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, *vol. IV*, London: Routledge, pp. 1537–71.

Das, Gurcharan. 2006. 'The India Model', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 4 (July/August), pp. 2–16.

Gusterson, Hugh. 2005. 'The Seven Deadly Sins of Samuel Huntington', in Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson, eds, *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 24–42.

Held, David and Anthony McGrew. 2001. 'Globalization', in Joel Krieger, ed., *The Oxford Companion to World Politics*, New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 324–27.

Hertz, Ellen and Laura Nader. 2005. 'On *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*, by Thomas L. Friedman', in Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson, eds, *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong*, pp. 121–37 Berkeley: University of California Press.

Hopkins, A.G. ed. 2002a. *Globalization in World History*. London: Pimlico.

Hopkins, A.G. 2002b. 'Introduction: Globalization—An Agenda for Historians', in A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History*. London: Pimlico.

Hopkins, A.G. 2002c. 'The History of Globalization—and the Globalization of History', in A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History*. London: Pimlico. pp. 1–10.

Iriye, Akira. 2005. 'Beyond Imperialism: The New Internationalism', *Daedalus*, vol. 134, no. 2 (Spring), pp. 108–16.

Khilnani, Sunil. 2004. 'Branding India', *Seminar*, no. 533 (January). http://www.india-seminar.com/2004/533/533%20sunil%20khilnani.htm. Accessed on 1 August 2006.

Lal, Deepak. 1998. *Unintended Consequences: The Impact of Factor Endowments, Culture and Politics on Long-Run Economic Performance*. Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press.

Mallavarapu, Siddharth. 2006. 'The Templates of Globalization and the Making of Indian Foreign Policy', in Amit Shovon Ray, Garth L. Le Pere, Gilberto Dupas, Lyal White, Marcelo Fernandes de Oliveira and Siddharth Mallavarapu ed. *India, Brazil and South Africa: Perspectives and Alliances*. Säo Paulo: Editora UNESP, pp. 197–253.

Mohite, Dilip. 1993. 'India: The Fourth Great Power?', *Swords and Ploughshares*, vol. VII, no. 3 (Spring), pp. 7–9.

Nayar, Baldev Raj and T.V. Paul. 2004. *India in the World Order: Searching for Major Power Status*. New Delhi: Foundation Books.

Nordstrom, Carolyn. 2005. 'Extrastate Globalization of the Illicit', in Catherine Besteman and Hugh Gusterson, eds, *Why America's Top Pundits are Wrong*, Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 138–53.

Ong, Aihwa. 2005. 'Flexible Citizenship among Chinese Cosmopolitans', in Joan Vincent, ed., *The Anthropology of Politics: A Reader in Ethnography, Theory and Critique*, Oxford: Blackwell, pp. 338–55.

Perkovich, George. 2003. 'Is India a Major Power?', *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 27, no. 1, pp. 129–44. http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/washington_quarterly/v027/27.1perkovich.html. Accesed on 1 August 2006.

Pieterse, Nederveen Jan. 2003. 'Globalization as Hybridization', in Roland Robertson and Kathleen White, eds, *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology*, *vol. 1: Analytical Perspectives*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 265–90.

Raja, Mohan C. 2006. 'India and the Balance of Power', *Foreign Affairs*, vol. 85, no. 4 (July/August), pp. 17–32.

Rosaldo, Renato. 1993. *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis*. Boston, Massachusetts: Beacon Press.

Sen, Amartya. 2002. 'How to Judge Globalism', *The American Prospect*, vol. 13, no. 1, 1–14 January, available at http://www.theprospect.com/print/v13/1/en-a.html. Accessed on 11 March 2007.

———. 2004. 'Sharing the World', *The Little Magazine*, vol. V, Issue 4 & 5, pp. 6–11.

Torpey, John. 2003. 'Coming and Going: On the State Monopolization of the Legitimate "Means of Movement"', in Roland Robertson and Kathleen White, eds, *Globalization: Critical Concepts in Sociology, vol. 2: The Nation-State and International Relations*, London and New York: Routledge, pp. 107–27.

UNDP Human Development Report. 2006. *Beyond Scarcity: Power, Poverty and the Global Water Crisis.* New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Ven, Hans van de. 2002. 'The Onrush of Modern Globalization in China', in A.G. Hopkins, ed., *Globalization in World History*, pp. 167–193. London: Pimlico.

Waltz, Kenneth. 1979. *Theory of International Politics*, New York: Random House.

Zakaria, Fareed. 2006. 'India Rising', *Newsweek*, 6 March. http://www.fareedzakaria.com/articles/newsweek/030606.html. Accessed on 1 August 2006.