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Introduction

Michel Boivin, Matthew A. Cook, and Julien Levesque

Means and meanings are inextricably intertwined.¹

Identity entails the creation of socio-cultural meanings and the symbolic means to express them. Some Sindhis describe their socio-cultural identities as the product of a ‘strange amalgamation’ process that symbolically mixes ‘everything that is good’.² In scholarly terms, this process could be labelled and/or described as syncretism.³

Despite a seemingly positive connotation, syncretism is not without its critics. At various moments in history, syncretism has negatively described a ‘jumbled and confusing mixture of religions’ and/or distinguished “‘hybrid”—and thus “lesser”—religions from what is “pure” and “authentic”.”⁴ Accordingly, Carl Ernst and Tony Stewart caution against using the term. They describe how syncretism can result from violent domination: when one group conquers a different group, syncretism can ‘describe the product of the large-scale imposition of one alien culture, religion, or body of practices over another that is already present.’⁵ In such situations, the subjugated group often reconstructs its identities by borrowing symbols and meanings from those who dominate it. Syncretism can thus negatively imply that the borrowing group is ‘dependent, lacking in creativity, and fundamentally incapable [2] of defining itself.’⁶ Among the metaphors used to describe syncretism, Ernst and Stewart are particularly concerned about its ‘alchemical model’:

The more common alchemical model of syncretism, however, is that of the mixture, a colloidal suspension of two ultimately irreconcilable substances. The result is a temporary mixture that will invariably separate over time because the component parts are unalterable

¹Jane Hill and Kenneth Hill, *Speaking Mexicano: Dynamics of Syncretic Language in Central Mexico* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1986), 3.

²Steven Ramey, *Hindu, Sufi, or Sikh: Contested Practices and Identifications of Sindhi Hindus in India and Beyond* (New York: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2008), 16 and 190.

³Ibid. 7.

⁴Vashuda Narayanan, ‘Religious Vows at the Shrine of Shahul Hamid,’ in Selva Raj and William Harman (eds.) *Dealing with Deities: The Ritual Vow in South Asia* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2002), 81.

⁵Carl Ernst and Tony Stewart, ‘Syncretism’, in Peter Claus, Sarah Diamond, and Margaret Mills, (eds.) *South Asian Folklore: An Encyclopedia* (London: Routledge, 2013), 587.

⁶Ibid.

and must remain forever distinct and apart.⁷

Ernst and Stewart argue that ‘explanations that hinge on syncretism really serve only to concretize the initial religious or cultural categories presumed to be self-evident.’⁸ By linking self-evident ‘orientations that are normally disparate, if not disjunctive,’ syncretism reaffirms differences of identity by implying an ‘inappropriate’ combination of ‘intrinsically alien’ socio-cultural symbols and meanings.⁹

Considering Ernst and Stewart’s critique, it is worth re-evaluating the idea that Sindhi identities are syncretic. Sindh can be described as a ‘shatter zone’ or a region ‘through which large numbers of people passed either in military or peaceful invasion ... socio-culturally the area[s] tend to be more of a mosaic than a relatively unitary kind of social structure.’¹⁰ The historical creation of such a mosaic in Sindh entails people reworking and intertwining shards of symbolic meaning. As a process, it involves ‘taking things apart’ just as much as it does ‘putting things together’.¹¹ By linking convergence with divergence, this process resists creating identities from ‘irreconcilable substances’.¹² Instead, it utilizes multi-voiced symbols and meanings to generate new socio-cultural ‘solutions’. Comprehending these solutions analytically involves numerous ‘side-long glances’ toward different socio-cultural assemblages.¹³ Such glances reveal how Sindhis create their identities *not* from the simple historical mixing of oppositions but a socio-cultural code-switching process that transgresses boundaries by intertwining them.¹⁴ Such ‘intertwined’ identities point towards meanings in [3] multiple socio-cultural assemblages and rarely ‘speak’, symbolically or otherwise, in singular voices and/or tones. Rather than simply conclude that Sindhi identity is syncretic, the region’s intertwined socio-cultural character points toward seeing it as a zone in which people’s lives are *not* constituted by a mixture of parts bound to naturally separate.

The Pre-Partition Politics of Sindh and Identity

Prior to Partition in 1947, Sindhis did not generally view the intertwining of identities as incoherent and/or disorderly. Free from negative connotations, these identities resisted ‘vertical fallacies’ that separated Muslims and non-Muslims into socio-culturally discrete columns based on Islam and

⁷Ibid. 587.

⁸Ibid. 588.

⁹Ibid. 586.

¹⁰Bernard Cohn, ‘Regions Subjective and Objective: Their Relation to the Study of Modern Indian History and Society’, in Robert Crane (ed.) *Regions and Regionalism in South Asian Studies: An Exploratory Study*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1967), 12.

¹¹Hill and Hill, 417.

¹²Ernst and Stewart, 587.

¹³In literary theory, an ‘assemblage’ is a text that, unlike syncretism, blurs rather than reaffirms distinctions between what is borrowed and what is original (Stuart Selber and Johndan Johnson-Eilola, ‘Plagiarism, Originality, Assemblage’, *Computers and Composition* 24.4 (2007): 381). For details about how this concept applies to socio-cultural analysis, see: George Marcus and Erkan Saka, ‘Assemblage’, *Theory, Culture and Society* 23.2–3 (2006): 101–6.

¹⁴Such code-switching involves the ‘re-contextualization’ of socio-cultural interactions (Celso Alvarez-Caccamo, Codes, in Alessandro Duranti [ed.], *Key Terms in Language and Culture* [Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2001], 25). This process may yield new forms of socio-cultural difference and/or lead to the repositioning of already existing ones. For examples and greater detail about codeswitching, see: Kathryn Woolard, ‘Codeswitching’, in Alessandro Duranti (ed.) *A Companion to Linguistic Anthropology* (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 73–94.

Hinduism.¹⁵ By *not* framing in-group solidarities and networks into discrete realms of religious belonging, such identities socio-culturally subverted clear-cut communal distinctions by failing to foreground differences between Hindus and Muslims as politically relevant. In other words, religious distinctions were not particularly important political categories of identification for people in Sindh as they did not translate into radically segregated faith experiences. This lack of segregation reaffirms the historical divergence in Sindh between political power and socio-cultural purism. Although Sindh's rulers before its annexation by the British in 1843 were Muslims, access to positions of power in the region was rarely pre-conditioned on exclusive membership in the area's majority Muslim population. The codes (i.e., 'principles for selecting variants from a range of possible choices') of power and purism in Sindh did *not* historically encapsulate each other.¹⁶

The relationship between political power and socio-cultural purism began to shift in Sindh during the 1920s and the immunity that intertwined identities provided against communal politics weakened. Following the deaths of non-communal politicians like Ghulam Mohammad Bhurgri (1878–1924) and Seth Harchandrai Vishindas (1862–1928), as well as the communal riots of Larkana [4] (1927) and Sukkur (1930), the holding of political power in Sindh increasingly hinged on being part of its Muslim majority population.¹⁷ This shift manifested itself in the political demand that the British give Sindh provincial autonomy from the Bombay Presidency. Stressing Sindh's distinctive character, Vishindas argued in 1913 that the region deserved autonomy because it possessed 'several geographical and ethnological characteristics of its own, which give her the hallmark of a self-contained, territorial unit.'¹⁸ Vishindas, as well as Bhurgri, sought the backing of the secular Indian National Congress for Sindh's provincial autonomy. However, this unity of opinion between Muslim and non-Muslim politicians dissolved after communal riots in Larkana and Sukkur. Rather than becoming minorities in an autonomous province, Sindh's non-Muslims shifted their support for autonomy and advocated that the region remain part of the Bombay Presidency.

At the same time, Muslim politicians in Sindh campaigned to make autonomy an all-India issue and gained the support of the All-India Muslim League (AIML) in December 1925. United under the banner of the Sindh Azad Conference, they continued to put forward the argument that Sindh's socio-cultural uniqueness justified autonomy. Prominent politicians like Shahnawaz Bhutto and Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah maintained that Sindh deserved autonomy because of the 'racial and linguistic differences between Sindh and those of the Bombay Presidency proper.'¹⁹ But the most elaborate argument in favour of Sindh's unique character came from Muhammad Ayub Khuhro, a young landlord and politician who highlighted the region's continuity as a socio-cultural and political unit from the Indus Valley period onwards. Although not explicitly referenced, Khuhro's pluralistic perspective pointed towards the importance of Sufism as well as

¹⁵Barbara Metcalf, 'Too Little and Too Much: Reflections on Muslims in the History of India', *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.4 (1995): 959. In Sindh, such resistance did not always extend to socio-cultural distinctions outside of the communal domain (e.g., along vectors of caste, class and the urban/ rural divide).

¹⁶Hill and Hill, 100.

¹⁷Prior to this period, political power in Sindh depended largely on the ownership of land (David Cheesman, *Landlord Power and Rural Indebtedness in Colonial Sind, 1865–1901* [London: Curzon/Routledge 1997]).

¹⁸Seth Harchandrai Vishindas quoted in Alhaj Mian Ahmad Shafi, *Haji Sir Abdoola Haroon: A Biography* (Karachi: Begum Daulat Anwar Hidayatulla, 1942), 70.

¹⁹Allen Keith Jones, *Politics in Sind, 1907–1940: Muslim Identity and the Demand for Pakistan* (Karachi and London: Oxford University Press, 2002), 16.

Shah Abdul Latif Bhittai (1689–1752) as a symbol of Sindh’s intertwined religious inclusiveness.²⁰ Both Muslims and non-Muslims promoted and participated in Sufism but—by the 1930s—communal politics increasingly obstructed its inclusiveness. So much so that, when Sindh became [5] autonomous in 1936, it did so under the leadership of politicians who ‘were, on occasion, openly hostile to the Hindus’.²¹

Despite communal overtones, Sindh’s provincial autonomy from Bombay did not initially tax the resilience of its intertwined identities. Following autonomy, Sindh’s first Chief Minister, Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, called for unity:

What is most urgently needed above everything else is complete trust and confidence between various communities. We must refuse to believe that there is much deep-rooted hostility on the part of the majority towards the minorities, that the interests of the one can never be trusted in the hands of the other. If this attitude of distrust and suspicion is maintained, we might as well throw overboard all our schemes of nationalism. We call ourselves a nation and demand for ourselves the right of self-determination. But how can we possibly be one nation if we are so helplessly divided?²²

The first provincial governments in Sindh under Hidayatullah (1937–8), Allah Bux Soomro (1938–40/1941–2), and Mir Bandeh Ali Khan Talpur (1940–1) all included Muslim and non-Muslim politicians. By respecting the region’s socio-cultural mosaic, these governments illustrated how power codes after autonomy were encapsulated more by class and landownership than those of purism.²³ Nonetheless, efforts to establish an inclusive politics in Sindh were challenged after autonomy: the landowner-dominated Sind United Party only ran Muslim candidates and it emerged as the largest winner in the 1937 provincial elections. The separation of political power and communal ideas concerning purism also received a severe jolt from the Manzilgah incident of

²⁰Discourses that link identity in Sindh with Sufism were also fueled by Sindhi writers influenced by the Theosophical Society (Michel Boivin, ‘The New Elite and the Issue of Sufism: A Journey from Vedanta to Theosophy in Colonial Sindh’, in Muhammad Ali Shaikh, [ed.] *Sindh Through the Centuries II: Proceedings of the 2nd International Seminar* [Karachi: SMI University Press, 2015], 215–31; Michel Boivin, *Historical Dictionary of the Sufi Culture of Sindh in Pakistan and India* [Karachi and London: Oxford University Press, 2015]).

²¹Nandita Bhavnani, *The Making of Exile: Sindhi Hindus and the Partition of India* (Chennai: Tranquebar Press, 2014), xxxiii–xxxiv. Muslim politicians frequently blamed *baniyas* (i.e., Hindu moneylenders) for the woes of rural peasants in Sindh (David Cheesman, ‘The Omnipresent Bania: Rural Moneylenders in Nineteenth-Century Sind’, *Modern Asian Studies* 16.2 [1982]: 445–62).

²²Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah, ‘The Task Before Us’, *Alwahid: Special Sind Azad Edition* (1936): 6.

²³Having an exclusively Muslim identity was not a precondition for participating in any of these governments. Two government ministers under Mir Bandeh Ali Khan Talpur were non-Muslim Lohanas (i.e., Nichaldas Chotmal Vazirani and Rai Sahib Gokaldas Mewaldas) from different endogamous moieties. Hidayatullah’s government also included non-Muslim ministers, like the *bhaiband* merchant Mukhi Gobindram Pritamdas (a leader of the Sindh Hindu Mahasabha) and the *Amil* Hemandas Rupchand Wadhvani. Additionally, Hidayatullah crossed the communal divide to support Bhojsingh Gurdinomal Pahalajani as Sindh’s first Assembly Speaker in 1937. Allah Bux Soomro, while from an “indigenous” Sindhi family, was only able to form a government with support from Vazirani in 1938. Subsequently, Vazirani became Public Works Department, Public Health, and Medical Minister. Allah Bux Soomro’s second government (1941–2) also had support from non-Muslims and included Mewaldas as Minister for Local Government and Agriculture. It is also relevant to note that Mir Bandeh Ali Khan Talpur’s power base was largely ethnic rather than religious: he led an alliance of Baluch–Talpur. The family and personal histories of some key politicians from this period were also not always so religiously lengthy: Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah came from a family that converted to Islam and Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi, a minister in Mir Bandeh Ali Khan Talpur’s government, converted to Islam in his youth (Bhavnani, xxxi).

1939. This incident, in combination with Partition in 1947, dealt a body-blow to Sindh's intertwined identities from which they never fully recovered.

The seeds of the Manzilgah incident can be found in the failure of the All-India Muslim League to establish a firm foothold in Sindh until the 1940s. While the AIML had individual members in Sindh [6] prior to the provincial elections of 1937, the party had no proper branch office. While political parties led by Sindhi Muslims had contacts with the AIML, they did not lead to the foundation of a provincial branch office. Establishing a foothold in Sindh was also stymied by disagreements among Sindhi politicians as well as those the AIML had with its local advocates.²⁴ The AIML's lack of structure resulted in the party failing to secure a single win in Sindh's 1937 provincial elections.²⁵

Despite its electoral failure in 1937, some Sindhi politicians continued to view AIML in a positive light. Abdullah Haroon (1872–1942), a prominent Karachi businessman and a member of the Central Legislative Assembly in Delhi, organized the Sindh Provincial Muslim League Conference in 1938. The AIML leader Muhammad Ali Jinnah attended this conference at which the Muslim League Assembly Party (MLAP) was formed. The MLAP's aim was to lay the foundation for the AIML's electoral success in Sindh by building and organizing a united political front for Muslim politicians.²⁶ Nonetheless, regional politicians who wanted to safeguard their influence and interests within Sindh were an important block within the MLAP. While some MLAP members (e.g., Haroon) prioritized the AIML's all-India agenda, others (e.g., Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi) used the organization as a vehicle to promote regional issues. Such divisions within the MLAP resulted in it frequently not consulting and/or coordinating with the AIML. One important example of this lack of consultation/coordination was the Manzilgah incident. The Manzilgah was a group of buildings in Sukkur, which some believed was a mosque complex. These buildings stood on the shore of the Indus River and across from the socio-culturally intertwined island shrine of Sadh Belo.²⁷ Fearing that prayers at the Manzilgah would impede access to Sadh Belo, locals protested against the possibility of the site becoming a mosque. Attempting to bring down the government of Allah Bux Soomro, the MLAP backed making the Manzilgah a mosque. It supported a civil disobedience protest that occupied the Manzilgah on 3 October [7] 1939. The use of force by the police to expel protesters resulted in communal riots that killed 15 Muslims and 19 Hindus.²⁸ These riots represented a particularly intense challenge to Sindh's intertwined identities. After the riots, this challenge was further intensified by the assassination, on 1 November 1939, of Bhagat Kanwar Ram, a 'Hindu' Sufi singer with followers

²⁴Jones, 160; Hamida Khuhro, 'Masjid Manzilgah, 1930–40: Test Case for Hindu–Muslim Relations in Sind', *Modern Asian Studies* 32.1 (1998): 50. For example, Shaikh Abdul Majid Sindhi's Sind Azad Party sought the AIML's endorsement but refused to identify itself as its branch.

²⁵This situation particularly stung the AIML since 32 out of 60 seats were reserved for Muslims and Sindh's population was 72 per cent Muslim.

²⁶Many politicians in Sindh had multiple party memberships. A major goal of the MLAP was to prevent politicians from shifting their alliances when favorable political winds shifted from one party to another party.

²⁷Swami Bankhandi Maharaj Udasi established this shrine in 1823. Swami Bankhandi Maharaj Udasi followed a religious sect that centered on the teachings of Sri Chand, the son of Guru Nanak (i.e., Sikhism's founder). Reflecting Sindh's intertwined identities, members of this sect also worshipped the *panchayatana* (i.e., Shiva, Vishnu, Durga, Ganesh, and Surya). Prior to the rise of the Akali or Gurdwara Reform Movement in the twentieth century, *udasis* were the key custodians of Sikh shrines and philosophy.

²⁸These riots were apparently started by jeering aimed to imply that protesters 'had gotten what they deserved' (Jones, 138).

from across the communal divide. Hassaram Sunderdas Pamnani (a non-Muslim member of the Sindh Assembly from Sukkur) openly accused the Sufi Pir of Bharchundi of ordering Bhagat Kanwar Ram's death. Later, in July 1940, Hassaram Sunderdas Pamnani was also assassinated (purportedly at the direction of the Pir of Bharchundi).

By heightening communal tensions to new levels, the Manzilgah incident and its aftermath dealt a blow to Sindh's intertwined identities.²⁹ Although orchestrated independently from the AIML, this communal blow, in conjunction with the MLAP's generally successful creation of a united political front for Muslims, helped it expand its base in Sindh. This expansion led to the AIML forming a provincial government in 1942 under the leadership of Ghulam Hussain Hidayatullah. AIML's formation of a provincial government in 1942 illustrated how holding political power in Sindh after the Manzilgah incident increasingly depended on being part of the region's majority population. The elections of 1946 further reaffirmed this fact when the AIML won a landslide victory with 82.1 per cent of Sindh's rural Muslim vote and 98.8 per cent of its urban Muslim vote.³⁰ After these elections, power codes in Sindh were increasingly encapsulated by the socio-culturally purist codes of communalism. The region's historically intertwined identities hit an additional turning point with Partition in 1947. Migrations into and out of Sindh after Partition significantly modified its socio-cultural mosaic: many non-Muslims left while Urdu-speaking migrants arrived from India. Rather than result in the further intertwining of identities, these migrations increasingly communalized them. As a result, the processes by which people created their identities in Sindh became less intertwined and more 'colloidal' after Partition.³¹ [8]

Identity, History, and the Journal of the Sindh Historical Society

The Sindh Historical Society (SHS) published its journal from May 1934 to January 1948. The articles printed in the *Journal of Sindh Historical Society (JSHS)* were first presented and debated at meetings of the SHS. The society's participants primarily included the educated elite of Karachi, both European and South Asian.³² Its founding President, Hotchand Mulchand Gurbaxani, reflected Sindh's intertwined identities: a non-Muslim professor of Persian who knew Arabic, he was well known for his annotated translation of the Sufi poetic compendium *Shah Jo Risalo*. In a newspaper article, 'Writing the History of Sindh', historian Mubarak Ali states that the SHS was the key that unlocked 'modern' methods for understanding Sindh's past:

The modern historiography of Sindh was introduced during the British rule when the Historical Society of Sindh [*sic*] was founded with the purpose of reconstructing the history of Sindh. The Society held regular meetings where the members presented research papers on different aspects of history, as well as published a historical journal which contained well-researched papers, thus contributing immensely to recording the history of Sindh.³³

²⁹Ibid. 145.

³⁰While the 1946 elections were a clear victory for the AIML, the results should be taken with a grain of salt since important candidates were excluded and/ or prevented from filing applications to run (e.g., G. M. Sayed).

³¹Ernst and Stewart, 587.

³²The lists of SHS officers and members at the beginning of each edition of the *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society* reveals the socio-cultural spectrum of urban Sindh. It also explains why so few Muslims, who dominated the population of rural Sindh, contributed articles to the journal.

³³Mubarak Ali, 'Writing the History of Sindh', *Dawn*, November 23, 2014 <<http://www.dawn.com/news/1145793>>

During the period in which the SHS met and published its journal, the socio-cultural and political ecologies of Sindh were increasingly communal. As products of their time, some articles published by the SHS had a communal tinge. However, these articles mostly swam against the emerging current of communalism by detailing Sindh's socio-cultural mosaic. Before and after the region's autonomy from the Bombay Presidency in 1936, the SHS published articles about this mosaic that supported Vishindas, Bhutto, Hidayatullah and others who argued that Sindh deserved greater political independence due to its distinct socio-cultural identity. Through the Manzilgah incident and Partition, the SHS published research [9] that reaffirmed Sindh's distinct character. However, symbolic of the region's increasingly colloidal rather than intertwined identities, the SHS disbanded in the wake of Partition and ceased publishing in January 1948.³⁴ With a sense of loss, the SHS dedicated the last edition of its journal to the memory of Gurbaxani (who died in January 1947). This loss was also represented by the last article published in the *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society*: it was about the Lohana, a group that fled Sindh after Partition and the formation of Pakistan.³⁵

This collection of articles from the *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society* concentrates on precolonial and colonial Sindh. It focuses on indigenous and British actors. It also showcases Sindh's broad socio-cultural spectrum. Scholarship on Pakistan frequently overlooks the subjects and people in this collection. In part, this oversight is due to such few libraries in Pakistan (and around the world) having copies of the *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society*. It is also explained by the fact that articles from the journal are not often reprinted in books. Beyond this collection, Mubarak Ali's *Sindh Observed* is the only book to reprint full articles from the *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society*.³⁶ None of the articles in this collection are in Ali's *Sindh Observed*, nor has anyone reprinted them in their entirety since the 1930s and 1940s.

This collection is chronologically organized. Chapter 1 describes Sindh's Kalhora rulers and their eighteenth-century overthrow by the Talpurs. Chapter 2 addresses justice and its decentralization under the Talpurs. Chapter 3 focuses on two men, Gidumal (an *aamil*, or government administrator) and Naomul (a *bhaiband* or merchant) as well as their relationships with the Kalhoras and the Talpurs. Chapter 4 is about Mirza Khusro Beg, a Georgian and influential advisor to the Talpur rulers of Hyderabad. Chapter 5 tackles the British 'militarization' of Baluch tribes on Sindh's frontier during the late 1830s. Chapter 6 describes three less-known military clashes between the British and Sher Muhammad Talpur: the Battle of Hyderabad, the Battle of Pir Ari and the Battle of Shadadpur. Chapter 7 depicts, [10] from a first-hand indigenous perspective, diplomatic interactions between the British and the Talpurs. Chapters 8 and 9 address the private opinions and correspondences of John Jacob, a key figure in the British conquest and early rule of Sindh. Chapter 10 analyses Baluch poetry and history in Sindh. Chapter 11 socio-culturally and historically examines Hyderabad's *Amil* community. Chapter 12 details four popular Sindhi folk legends. Chapter 13 compares the Sindh census reports of 1931 and 1941.

³⁴This date is particularly meaningful due to the killing of about 200 Sikhs in Karachi during January 1948. These killings contributed to the exodus of upper caste non-Muslims from all over Sindh after Partition. Despite this exodus, many from the low castes (e.g., Kohlis, Bhils, and Meghwars) remained in Sindh.

³⁵T. S. Thadani, 'The Lohanas', *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society* 8.3 (1948): 166–70.

³⁶Mubarak Ali, (ed.) *Sindh Observed: Selections from the Journal of the Sindh Historical Society* (Lahore: Gautam Publishers, 1993).

Individually, the articles reprinted as chapters in this collection reveal much about Sindh's past. Collectively, these articles not only deepen knowledge about Sindh but also the history of Pakistan and the diversity of its people. They represent, like most research published in the *Journal of the Sindh Historical Society*, 'forgotten' chapters in both Sindhi and Pakistani history. These chapters celebrate Pakistan's socio-cultural diversity as well as point toward how the histories of region and nation should be 'intertwined' rather than exclusive.