

Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors

Edward W. Said

pas un bout de ce monde qui ne porte mon empreinte digitale
et mon calcanéum sur le dos des gratte-ciel et ma crasse dans le scintillement
des gemmes!

—AIMÉ CÉSAIRE, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal*

I

Each of the four main words in the title of these remarks inhabits a rather agitated and somewhat turbulent field. It is now almost impossible, for example, to remember a time when people were *not* talking about a crisis in representation. And the more the crisis is analyzed and discussed, the earlier its origins seem to be. Michel Foucault's argument has put somewhat more forcefully and more attractively perhaps a notion found in the works of literary historians like Earl Wasserman, Erich Auerbach, and

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M. H. Abrams that with the erosion of the classical consensus, words no longer comprised a transparent medium through which Being shone. Instead, language as an opaque and yet strangely abstract, ungraspable essence was to emerge as an object for philological attention, thereafter to neutralize and inhibit any attempt at representing reality mimetically. In the age of Nietzsche, Marx, and Freud, representation has thus had to contend not only with the consciousness of linguistic forms and conventions, but also with the pressures of such transpersonal, transhuman, and transcultural forces as class, the unconscious, gender, race, and structure. What transformations these have wrought in our notions of formerly stable things such as authors, texts, and objects are, quite literally, unprintable, and certainly unpronounceable. To represent someone or even something has now become an endeavor as complex and as problematic as an asymptote, with consequences for certainty and decidability as fraught with difficulties as can be imagined.

The notion of the colonized, to speak now about the second of my four terms, presents its own brand of volatility. Before World War II the colonized were the inhabitants of the non-Western and non-European world that had been controlled and often settled forcibly by Europeans. Accordingly, therefore, Albert Memmi's book situated both the colonizer and the colonized in a special world, with its own laws and situations, just as in *The Wretched of the Earth* Frantz Fanon spoke of the colonial city as divided into two separate halves, communicating with each other by a logic of violence and counterviolence.¹ By the time Alfred Sauvy's ideas about Three Worlds had been institutionalized in theory and praxis, the colonized had become synonymous with the Third World.²

There was, however, a continuing colonial presence of Western powers in various parts of Africa and Asia, many of whose territories had largely attained independence in the period around World War II. Thus "the colonized" was not a historical group that had won national sovereignty and was therefore disbanded, but a category that included the inhabitants of newly independent states as well as subject peoples in adjacent territories still settled by Europeans. Racism remained an important force with murderous effects in ugly colonial wars and rigidly unyielding polities.

1. See Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York, 1966), and Albert Memmi, *The Colonizer and the Colonized*, trans. Howard Greenfield (New York, 1965).

2. See Carl E. Pletsch, "The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950–1975," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (Oct. 1981): 565–90. See also Peter Worsley, *The Third World* (Chicago, 1964).

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The experience of being colonized therefore signified a great deal to regions and peoples of the world whose experience as dependents, subalterns, and subjects of the West did not end—to paraphrase from Fanon—when the last white policeman left and the last European flag came down.³ To have been colonized was a fate with lasting, indeed grotesquely unfair results, especially after national independence had been achieved. Poverty, dependency, underdevelopment, various pathologies of power and corruption, plus of course notable achievements in war, literacy, economic development: this mix of characteristics designated the colonized people who had freed themselves on one level but who remained victims of their past on another.⁴

And far from being a category that signified supplication and self-pity, "the colonized" has since expanded considerably to include women, subjugated and oppressed classes, national minorities, and even marginalized or incorporated academic subspecialties. Around the colonized there has grown a whole vocabulary of phrases, each in its own way reinforcing the dreadful secondariness of people who, in V. S. Naipaul's derisive characterization, are condemned only to use a telephone, never to invent it. Thus the status of colonized people has been fixed in zones of dependency and peripherality, stigmatized in the designation of underdeveloped, less-developed, developing states, ruled by a superior, developed, or metropolitan colonizer who was theoretically posited as a categorically antithetical overlord. In other words, the world was still divided into betters and lessers, and if the category of lesser beings had widened to include a lot of new people as well as a new era, then so much the worse for them. Thus to be one of the colonized is potentially to be a great many different, but inferior, things, in many different places, at many different times.

As for anthropology as a category, it scarcely requires an outsider like myself to add very much to what has already been written or said about the turmoil occurring in at least some quarters of the discipline. Broadly speaking, however, a couple of currents can be stressed here. One of the major tendencies within disciplinary debates during the past twenty or so years has derived from an awareness of the role played in the study and representation of "primitive" or less-developed non-Western societies by Western colonialism, the exploitation of dependence, the oppression of peasants, and the manipulation or management of native societies for imperial purposes. This awareness has been translated into

3. See Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, p. 101.

4. See Eqbal Ahmad, "From Potato Sack to Potato Mash: The Contemporary Crisis of the Third World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 2 (Summer 1980): 223–34; Ahmad, "Post-Colonial Systems of Power," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 2 (Fall 1980): 350–63; Ahmad, "The Neo-Fascist State: Notes on the Pathology of Power in the Third World," *Arab Studies Quarterly* 3 (Spring 1981): 170–80.

various forms of Marxist or anti-imperialist anthropology, for example, the early work of Eric Wolf, William Roseberry's *Coffee and Capitalism in the Venezuelan Andes*, June Nash's *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us*, Michael Taussig's *The Devil and Commodity Fetishism in South America*, and several others. This kind of oppositional work is admirably partnered by feminist anthropology (for example, Emily Martin's *The Woman in the Body*, Lila Abu-Lughod's *Veiled Sentiments*), historical anthropology (for example, Richard Fox's *Lions of the Punjab*), work that relates to contemporary political struggle (Jean Comaroff's *Body of Power, Spirit of Resistance*), American anthropology (for example, Susan Harding on fundamentalism), and denunciatory anthropology (Shelton Davis' *Victims of the Miracle*).

The other major current is the postmodern anthropology practiced by scholars influenced by literary theory generally speaking, and more specifically by theoreticians of writing, discourse, and modes of power such as Foucault, Roland Barthes, Clifford Geertz, Jacques Derrida, and Hayden White. I am impressed, however, that few of the scholars who have contributed to such collections as *Writing Culture* or *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*⁵—to mention two highly visible recent books—have explicitly called for an end to anthropology as, for example, a number of literary scholars have indeed recommended for the concept of literature. Yet it is also impressive to me that few of the anthropologists who are read outside anthropology make a secret of the fact that they wish that anthropology, and anthropological texts, might be more literary or literary theoretical in style and awareness, or that anthropologists should spend more time thinking of textuality and less of matrilineal descent, or that issues relating to cultural poetics take a more central role in their research than, say, issues of tribal organization, agricultural economics, and primitive classification.

But these two trends belie deeper problems. Leaving aside the obviously important discussions and debates that go on within discrete anthropological subfields such as Andean studies or Indian religion, the recent work of Marxist, anti-imperialist and meta-anthropological scholars (Geertz, Taussig, Wolf, Marshall Sahlins, Johannes Fabian, and others) nevertheless reveals a genuine malaise about the sociopolitical status of anthropology as a whole. Perhaps this is now true of every field in the human sciences, but it is especially true of anthropology. As Richard Fox has put it:

Anthropology today appears intellectually threatened to the same degree that anthropologists have become an endangered species

5. See *Anthropology as Cultural Critique: An Experimental Movement in the Human Sciences*, ed. George E. Marcus and Michael M. J. Fischer (Chicago, 1986), and *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986).

of academic. The professional danger has to do with the decline in jobs, university programs, research support, and other erosions of the professional status of anthropologists. The intellectual threat to anthropology comes from within the discipline: two disputing views of culture [what Fox calls cultural materialism and culturology], which share too much and argue about too little.⁶

It is interesting and symptomatic that Fox's own remarkable book, *Lions of the Punjab*, from which these sentences have been taken, shares in common with other influential diagnosticians of anthropology's *mal du siècle*—for it is that I think—like Sherry Ortner,⁷ that the salutary alternative is a practice based on practice, fortified with ideas about hegemony, social reproduction, and ideology on loan from such nonanthropologists as Antonio Gramsci, Raymond Williams, Alain Touraine, and Pierre Bourdieu. Nevertheless, the impression of a deep sentiment of Kuhnian paradigm-exhaustion persists, with consequences for the status of anthropology that must be, I believe, extraordinarily unsettling.

I suppose there is also some (justified) fear that today's anthropologists can no longer go to the postcolonial field with quite the same ease as in former times. This of course is a political challenge to ethnography on exactly the same terrain where, in earlier times, anthropologists were relatively sovereign. Responses have varied. Some have in a sense retreated to the politics of textuality. Others have used the violence emanating from the field as a topic for postmodern theory. And third, some have utilized anthropological discourse as the site for constructing models of social change or transformation. None of these responses, however, is as optimistic about the enterprise as were the revisionist contributors to Dell Hymes' *Reinventing Anthropology*, or Stanley Diamond in his important *In Search of the Primitive*, an academic generation earlier.

Finally, the word "interlocutors." Here again I am struck by the extent to which the notion of an interlocutor is so unstable as to split quite dramatically into two fundamentally discrepant meanings. On the one hand it reverberates against a whole background of colonial conflict, in which the colonizers search for an *interlocuteur valable*, and the colonized on the other are driven increasingly to more and more desperate remedies as they try first to fit the categories formulated by the colonial authority, then, acknowledging that such a course is doomed to failure, decide that only their own military force will compel Paris or London to take them seriously as interlocutors. An interlocutor in the colonial situation is therefore by definition either someone who is compliant and belongs to

6. Richard Fox, *Lions of the Punjab: Culture in the Making* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1985), p. 186.

7. See, for example, Sherry B. Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 26 (Jan. 1984): 126–66.

the category of what the French in Algeria called an *evolué*, *notable*, or *caïd* (the liberation group reserved the designation of *beni-wéwé* or white man's nigger for the class), or someone who, like Fanon's native intellectual, simply refuses to talk, deciding that only a radically antagonistic, perhaps violent riposte is the only interlocution that is possible with colonial power.

The other meaning for "interlocutor" is a good deal less political. It derives from an almost entirely academic or theoretical environment, and suggests the calm as well as the antiseptic, controlled quality of a thought-experiment. In this context the interlocutor is someone who has perhaps been found clamoring on the doorstep, where from outside a discipline or field he or she has made so unseemly a disturbance as to be let in, guns or stones checked in with the porter, for further discussion. The domesticated result brings to mind a number of fashionable theoretical correlatives, for example, Bakhtinian dialogism and heteroglossia, Jürgen Habermas' "ideal speech situation," or Richard Rorty's picture (at the end of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*) of philosophers discoursing animatedly in a handsomely appointed salon. If such a description of interlocutor appears somewhat caricatural, it does at least retain enough of the denaturing incorporation and cooptation that are, I think, required for such interlocutions to occur. The point I am trying to make is that this kind of scrubbed, disinfected interlocutor is a laboratory creation with suppressed, and therefore falsified, connections to the urgent situation of crisis and conflict that brought him or her to attention in the first place. It was only when subaltern figures like women, Orientals, blacks, and other "natives" made enough noise that they were paid attention to, and asked in so to speak. Before that they were more or less ignored, like the servants in nineteenth-century English novels, *there*, but unaccounted for except as a useful part of the setting. To convert them into topics of discussion or fields of research is necessarily to change them into something fundamentally and constitutively different. And so the paradox remains.

At this point I should say something about one of the frequent criticisms addressed to me, and to which I have always wanted to respond, that in the process of characterizing the production of Europe's inferior Others, my work is only negative polemic which does not advance a new epistemological approach or method, and expresses only desperation at the possibility of ever dealing seriously with other cultures. These criticisms are related to the matters I've been discussing so far, and while I have no desire to unleash a point-by-point refutation of my critics, I do want to respond in a way that is intellectually pertinent to the topic at hand.

What I took myself to be undertaking in *Orientalism* was an adversarial critique not only of the field's perspective and political economy, but also of the sociocultural situation that makes its discourse both so possible and so sustainable. Epistemologies, discourses, and methods like Ori-

entalism are scarcely worth the name if they are reductively characterized as objects like shoes, patched when worn out, discarded and replaced with new objects when old and unfixable. The archival dignity, institutional authority, and patriarchal longevity of Orientalism should be taken seriously because in the aggregate these traits function as a worldview with considerable political force not easily brushed away as so much epistemology. Thus Orientalism in my view is a structure erected in the thick of an imperial contest whose dominant wing it represented and elaborated not only as scholarship but as a partisan ideology. Yet Orientalism hid the contest beneath its scholarly and aesthetic idioms. These things are what I was trying to show, in addition to arguing that there is no discipline, no structure of knowledge, no institution or epistemology that can or has ever stood free of the various sociocultural, historical, and political formations that give epochs their peculiar individuality.

Now it is true of all the numerous theoretical and discursive revaluations, of which I spoke earlier, that they seem to be looking for a way to escape this embroiling actuality. To develop ingenious textual strategies as a way of deflecting the crippling attacks on ethnographic authority mounted by Fabian, Talal Asad, and Gérard Leclerc:⁸ these strategies have comprised one method for slipping past the hopelessly overlapping, impossibly overinterpreted and conflicted anthropological site. Call it the aesthetic response. The other was to focus more or less exclusively on practice,⁹ as if practice were a domain of actuality unencumbered by agents, interests, and contentions, political as well as philosophical. Call this the reductively pragmatic response.

In *Orientalism* I did not think it possible to entertain either of those anesthetics. I may have been disabled by radical skepticism as to grand theory and purely epistemological standpoints. But I did not feel that I could give myself over to the view that an Archimedean point existed outside the contexts I was describing, or that it might be possible to devise and deploy an inclusive interpretive methodology that could hang free of the precisely concrete historical circumstances out of which Orientalism derived and from which it drew sustenance. It has therefore appeared to me particularly significant that anthropologists, and not historians for instance, have been among the most unwilling to accept the rigors of this inescapable truth first formulated cogently by Giambattista Vico. I speculate—and I shall say more about this later—that since it is anthropology above all that has been historically constituted and constructed in its point of origin during an ethnographic encounter between a sovereign European observer and a non-European native occupying,

8. See *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter*, ed. Talal Asad (London, 1973); Gérard Leclerc, *Anthropologie et colonialisme: essai sur l'histoire de l'africanisme* (Paris, 1972), and *L'Observation de l'homme: une histoire des enquêtes sociales* (Paris, 1979); Johannes Fabian, *Time and the Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York, 1983).

9. See Ortner, "Theory in Anthropology Since the Sixties," pp. 144–60.

so to speak, a lesser status and a distant place, it is now some late twentieth-century anthropologists who say to someone who has challenged the status of that enabling moment, "at least provide me with another one."¹⁰

This digressive foray will continue a little later, when I return again to what seems to me to be entailed by it, namely, the problematic of the observer, remarkably underanalyzed in the revisionist anthropological currents of which I spoke earlier. This is especially true, I think, in works of resourcefully original anthropologists like Sahlins (in his *Islands of History*) or Wolf (in his *Europe and the People without History*). This silence is thunderous, for me at least. Look at the many pages of very brilliantly sophisticated argument in the works of the metatheoretical scholars, or in Sahlins and Wolf, and you will begin perhaps suddenly to note how someone, an authoritative, explorative, elegant, learned voice, speaks and analyzes, amasses evidence, theorizes, speculates about everything—except itself. Who speaks? For what and to whom? The questions are not pronounced, or if they are, they become, in the words of James Clifford writing on ethnographic authority, matters largely of "strategic choice."¹¹ The histories, traditions, societies, texts of "others" are seen either as responses to Western initiatives—and therefore passive, dependent—or as domains of culture that belong mainly to "native" elites. But rather than discussing this matter any further, I should like now to return to my excavation of the field surrounding the topic proposed for discussion.

You will have surmised then that neither representation, nor "the colonized," nor "anthropology" and its "interlocutors" can be assigned any very essential or fixed signification. The words seem either to vacillate before various possibilities of meaning or, in some instances, they divide in half. What is most clear about the way they confront us is of course that they are irremediably affected by a number of limits and pressures, which cannot completely be ignored. Thus words like "representation," "anthropology," and "the colonized" are embedded in settings that no amount of ideological violence can dismiss. For not only do we immediately find ourselves grappling with the unstable and volatile semantic ambience they evoke, but we are also summarily remanded into the actual world, there to locate and occupy if not the anthropological site then the cultural situation in which anthropological work is in fact done.

"Worldliness" is a notion I have often found useful because of two meanings that inhere in it together, one, the idea of being in the secular world, as opposed to being "otherworldly," and two, because of the suggestion conveyed by the French word *mondanite*, worldliness as the quality

10. In Marcus and Fischer, *Anthropology as Cultural Critique*, p. 9 and thereafter, the emphasis on epistemology is very prominent.

11. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Authority," *Representations* 1 (Spring 1983): 142.

of a practiced, slightly jaded *savoir faire*, worldly wise and street smart. Anthropology and worldliness (in both senses) necessarily require each other. Geographical dislocation, secular discovery, and the painstaking recovery of implicit or internalized histories: these stamp the ethnographic quest with the mark of a secular energy that is unmistakably frank. Yet the by now massed discourses, codes, and practical traditions of anthropology, with its authorities, disciplinary rigors, genealogical maps, systems of patronage and accreditation have been accumulated into various modes of *being anthropological*. Innocence is now out of the question of course. And if we suspect that as in all scholarly disciplines, the customary way of doing things both narcotizes and insulates the guild member, we are saying something true about all forms of disciplinary worldliness. Anthropology is not an exception.

Like my own field of comparative literature, anthropology, however, is predicated on the fact of otherness and difference, on the lively, informative thrust supplied to it by what is strange or foreign, "deep-down freshness" in Gerard Manley Hopkins' phrase. These two words, "difference" and "otherness," have by now acquired talismanic properties. Indeed it is almost impossible not to be stunned by how magical, even metaphysical they seem, given the altogether dazzling operations performed on them by philosophers, anthropologists, literary theorists, and sociologists. Yet the most striking thing about "otherness" and "difference" is, as with all general terms, how profoundly conditioned they are by their historical and worldly context. To speak about "the other" in today's United States is, for the contemporary anthropologist here, quite a different thing than say for an Indian or Venezuelan anthropologist: the conclusion drawn by Jürgen Golte in a reflective essay on "the anthropology of conquest" is that even non-American and hence "indigenous" anthropology is "intimately tied to imperialism," so dominant is the global power radiating out from the great metropolitan center.¹² To practice anthropology in the United States is therefore not just to be doing scholarly work investigating "otherness" and "difference" in a large country; it is to be discussing them in an enormously influential and powerful state whose global role is that of a superpower.

The fetishization and relentless celebration of "difference" and "otherness" can therefore be seen as an ominous trend. It suggests not only what Jonathan Friedman has called "the spectacularization of anthropology" whereby the "textualization" and "culturization" of societies occur regardless of politics and history,¹³ but also the heedless appropriation and translation of the world by a process that for all its protestations of relativism, its displays of epistemological care and technical expertise,

12. Jürgen Golte, "Latin America: The Anthropology of Conquest," in *Anthropology: Ancestors and Heirs*, ed. Stanley Diamond (The Hague, 1980), p. 391.

13. Jonathan Friedman, "Beyond Otherness or: The Spectacularization of Anthropology," *Telos* 71 (1987): 161–70.

cannot easily be distinguished from the process of empire. I have put this as strongly as I have simply because I am impressed that in so many of the various writings on anthropology, epistemology, textualization, and otherness that I have read, which in scope and material run the gamut from anthropology to history and literary theory, there is an almost total absence of any reference to American imperial intervention as a factor affecting the theoretical discussion. It will be said that I have connected anthropology and empire too crudely, in too undifferentiated a way; to which I respond by asking how—and I really mean *how*—and when they were separated. I do not know when the event occurred, or if it occurred at all. So rather than assuming that it happened, let us see whether there is still some relevance to the topic of empire for the American anthropologist and indeed for us all as intellectuals.

The reality is a daunting one. The facts are that we have vast global interests, and we prosecute them accordingly. There are armies, and armies of scholars at work politically, militarily, ideologically. Consider, for example, the following statement, which quite explicitly makes the connection between foreign policy and “the other”:

In recent years the Department of Defense (DoD) has been confronted with many problems which require support from the behavioral and social sciences. . . . The Armed Forces are no longer engaged solely in warfare. Their missions now include pacification, assistance, “the battle of ideas,” etc. All of these missions require an understanding of the urban and rural populations with which our military personnel come in contact—in the new “peacefare” activities or in combat. For many countries throughout the world, we need more knowledge about their beliefs, values, and motivations; their political, religious, and economic organizations; and the impact of various changes or innovations upon their socio-cultural patterns. . . . The following items are elements that merit consideration as factors in research strategy for military agencies. *Priority Research Undertakings:* (1) methods, theories and training in the social and behavioral sciences in foreign countries. . . . (2) programs that train foreign social scientists. . . . (3) social science research to be conducted by independent indigenous scientists. . . . (4) social science tasks to be conducted by major U.S. graduate studies in centers in foreign areas. . . . (7) studies based in the U.S. that exploit data collected by overseas investigators supported by non-defense agencies. The development of data, resources and analytical methods should be pressed so that data collected for special purposes can be utilized for many additional purposes. . . . (8) collaborate with other programs in the U.S. and abroad that will provide continuing access of Department of Defense personnel to academic and intellectual resources of the “free world.”¹⁴

14. Defense Science Board, *Report of the Panel on Defense: Social and Behavioral Sciences* (Williamstown, Mass., 1967).

It goes without saying that the imperial system that covers an immense network of patron and client states, *as well* as an intelligence and policy-making apparatus that is both wealthy and powerful beyond precedent, *does not cover everything* in American society. Certainly the media is saturated with ideological material, but just as certainly not everything in the media is saturated to the same degree. By all means we should recognize distinctions, make differentiations, but, we must add, we should not lose sight of the gross fact that the swathe the United States cuts through the world is considerable, and is not merely the result of one Reagan and a couple of Kirkpatrickes so to speak, but is also heavily dependent on cultural discourse, on the knowledge industry, on the production and dissemination of texts and textuality, in short, not on “culture” as a general anthropological realm, which is routinely discussed and analyzed in studies of cultural poetics and textualization, but quite specifically on *our* culture.

The material interests at stake in our culture are very large, and very costly. They involve not only questions of war and peace—for, in general you have reduced the non-European world to the status of a subsidiary or inferior region, it becomes easier to invade and pacify it—but also questions of economic allocation, political priorities, and, centrally, relationships of dominance and inequality. We no longer live in a world that is three-quarters quiescent and underdeveloped. Nevertheless we have not yet produced an effective national style that is premised on something more equitable and noncoercive than a theory of fateful superiority, which to some degree all cultural ideologies emphasize. The particular cultural form taken by superiority in the context revealed—I cite a typical case—by the *New York Times*’ insensate attack (26 October 1986) on Ali Mazrui for daring as an African to make a film series about Africans, is that as long as Africa is viewed *positively* as a region that has benefited from the civilizing modernization provided by historical colonialism then it can be tolerated; but if it is viewed by Africans as still suffering under the legacy of empire then it must be cut down to size, shown as essentially inferior, as having regressed since the white man left. And thus there has been no shortage of rhetoric—for example, Pascal Bruckner’s *Tears of the White Man*, the novels of V. S. Naipaul, the recent journalism of Conor Cruise O’Brien—reinforcing *that* view.

As citizens and intellectuals within the United States, we have a particular responsibility for what goes on between the United States and the rest of the world, a responsibility *not* at all discharged or fulfilled by indicating that the Soviet Union is worse. The fact is that we are responsible for, and therefore more capable of influencing, *this* country and its allies in ways that do not apply to the Soviet Union. So we should first take scrupulous note of how—to mention the most obvious—in Central and Latin America, as well as in the Middle East, Africa, and Asia, the United States has replaced the great earlier empires as *the* dominant outside force.

It is no exaggeration to say that looked at honestly the record is not a good one, that is, if we do not uncritically accept the notion that we are entitled to an almost totally consistent policy of attempting to influence, dominate, and control other states whose relevance, implied or declared, to American security interests is supposed to be paramount. United States military interventions since World War II have occurred in every continent, and what we as citizens are now beginning to understand is only the vast complexity and extent of these interventions, the huge number of ways in which they occur, and the tremendous national investment in them. That they occur is not in doubt, all of which is, in William Appleman Williams' phrase, empire as a way of life. The continuing disclosures of Irangate are part of this complex of interventions, although it is worth noting that in little of the immense media and opinion deluge has there been much attention paid to the fact that our Iranian and Central American policies—whether they have to do with the exploitation of a geopolitical opening amongst Iranian “moderates,” or aiding the Contra “freedom-fighters” in overthrowing the legally constituted and elected government of Nicaragua—are nakedly imperialist policies.

Without wishing to spend a great deal of time on this perfectly obvious aspect of U.S. policy, I shall therefore neither cite the cases nor engage in silly definitional polemic. Even if we allow, as many have, that U.S. policy abroad is principally altruistic and dedicated to such unimpeachable goals as freedom and democracy, there is considerable room for a skeptical attitude. For are we not, on the face of it, repeating as a nation what France and Britain, Spain and Portugal, Holland and Germany, did before us? And do we not by conviction and power tend to regard ourselves as somehow exempt from the more sordid imperial adventures that preceded ours precisely by pointing to our immense cultural achievements, our prosperity, our theoretical and epistemological awareness? And, besides, is there not an assumption on our part that our destiny is that we should rule and lead the world, a role that we have assigned to ourselves as part of our errand into the wilderness?

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In short what is now before us nationally, and in the full imperial panorama, is the deep, the profoundly perturbed and perturbing question of our relationship to others—other cultures, other states, other histories, other experiences, traditions, peoples, and destinies. The difficulty with the question is that there is no vantage *outside* the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial and nonimperial powers, between different Others, a vantage that might allow one the epistemological privilege of somehow judging, evaluating, and interpreting free of the encumbering interests, emotions, and engagements of the

ongoing relationships themselves. When we consider the connections between the United States and the rest of the world, we are so to speak *of* the connections, not outside and beyond them. It therefore behooves us as intellectuals, humanists, and secular critics to grasp the role of the United States in the world of nations and of power, from *within* the actuality, and as participants in it, not as detached outside observers who, like Oliver Goldsmith in Yeats' marvelous phrase, deliberately sip at the honeypots of our minds.

Now it is certainly the case that the contemporary travails of recent European and American anthropology reflect the conundrums and the embroilments of the problem symptomatically. The history of that cultural practice in Europe and the United States carries within it as a major constitutive element, the unequal relationship of force between the outside Western ethnographer-observer and a primitive, or at least different but certainly weaker and less developed, non-Western society. In *Kim* Rudyard Kipling extrapolates the political meaning of that relationship and embodies it with extraordinary artistic justice in the figure of Colonel Creighton, an ethnographer in charge of the Survey of India, and also the head of the intelligence services in India, the so-called Great Game to which young Kim belongs. In the recent works of theoreticians who deal with the almost insuperable discrepancy between a political actuality based on force, and a scientific and humane desire to understand the Other hermeneutically and sympathetically in modes not always circumscribed and defined by force, modern Western anthropology both recalls and occludes that problematic novelistic figuration.

As to whether these efforts succeed or fail, that is a less interesting matter than the very fact that what distinguishes them, what makes them possible is some very acutely embarrassed if disguised awareness of the imperial setting, which after all *is* all pervasive and unavoidable. For, in fact, there is no way that I know of apprehending the world from within our culture (a culture by the way with a whole history of exterminism and incorporation behind it) without also apprehending the imperial contest itself. And this I would say is a cultural fact of extraordinary political as well as interpretive importance, because it is the true defining horizon, and to some extent, the enabling condition of such otherwise abstract and groundless concepts like “otherness” and “difference.” The real problem remains to haunt us: the relationship between anthropology as an ongoing enterprise and, on the other hand, empire as an ongoing concern.

Once the central wordly problematic has been explicitly reinstated for consideration, at least three derivative issues propose themselves for reexamination together with it. One, to which I referred earlier, is the constitutive role of the observer, the ethnographic “I” or subject, whose status, field of activity, and moving locus taken together abut with embarrassing strictness on the imperial relationship itself. Second is the

geographical disposition so internally necessary, historically at least, to ethnography. The geographic motif that is profoundly significant in so many of the cultural structures of the West has routinely been preferred by critics in deference to the importance of temporality. But it is the case, I believe, that we would not have had empire itself, as well as many forms of historiography, anthropology, sociology, and modern legal structures, without important philosophical and imaginative processes at work in the production as well as the acquisition, subordination, and settlement of space. The point is made illuminatingly in recent but quite disparate books like Neil Smith's *Uneven Development*, or Ranajit Guha's *Rule of Property for Bengal*, or Alfred Crosby's *Ecological Imperialism*, works that explore the ways in which proximity and distance produce a dynamic of conquest and transformation that intrudes on cloistral depictions of the relationship between self and other. In ethnography the exercise of sheer power in exerting control over geography is strong. Third is the matter of intellectual dissemination, the exfoliation of scholarly or monographic disciplinary work from the relatively private domain of the researcher and his or her guild circle to the domain of policy making, policy enactment, and—no less important—the recirculation of rigorous ethnographic representations as public media images that reinforce policy. How does work on remote or primitive or “other” cultures, societies, peoples in Central America, Africa, the Middle East, various parts of Asia, feed into, connect with, impede, or enhance the active political processes of dependency, domination, or hegemony?

Two instances, the Middle East and Latin America, provide evidence of a direct connection between specialized “area” scholarship and public policy, in which media representations reinforce not sympathy and understanding, but the use of force and brutality *against* native societies. “Terrorism” is now more or less permanently associated in public discourse with Islam, an esoteric religion or culture to most people, but one in recent years (after the Iranian Revolution, after the various Lebanese and Palestinian insurrections) given particularly menacing shape by “learned” discussions of it.¹⁵ In 1986, the appearance of a collection of essays edited by Benjamin Netanyahu (Israeli ambassador to the United Nations), entitled *Terrorism: How the West Can Win*, contained three essays by certified Orientalists, each of whom asseverated that there was a connection between Islam and terrorism. What this type of argument produced was in fact consent for the bombing of Libya, and for similar adventures in coarse righteousness, given that the public had heard it said by experts

15. I have discussed this in my *Covering Islam: How the Media and the Experts Determine How We See the Rest of the World* (New York, 1981). See also “The MESA Debate: The Scholars, the Media and the Middle East,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 16 (Winter 1987): 85–104.

in print and on television that Islam was little short of a terrorist culture.¹⁶ A second example concerns popular meaning given the word “Indians” in discourse about Latin America, especially as the association between Indians and terrorism (or between Indians as a backward, unregenerately primitive people and ritualized violence) is cemented. Mario Vargas Llosa's famous analysis of an Andean massacre of Peruvian journalists (“Inquest in the Andes: A Latin American Writer Explores the Political Lessons of a Peruvian Massacre,” *New York Times Magazine*, 31 July 1983) is premised on the susceptibility of the Andean Indian to particularly terrible forms of indiscriminate murder; Vargas Llosa's prose is shot through with phrases about Indian rituals, backwardness, gloomy unchangeability, all of them relying on the ultimate authority of anthropological descriptions. Indeed, several prominent Peruvian anthropologists were members of the panel (chaired by Vargas Llosa) that investigated the massacre.

These are matters not just of theoretical but of quotidian importance. Imperialism, the control of overseas territories and peoples, develops in a continuum with variously envisaged histories, current practices and policies, and with differently plotted cultural trajectories. Yet there is by now a sizable literature in the Third World addressing an impassioned theoretical and practical argument to Western specialists in area studies, as well as to anthropologists and historians. The address is a part of the revisionist postcolonial effort to reclaim traditions, histories, and cultures from imperialism, and it is also a way of entering the various world discourses on an equal footing. One thinks of the work of Anwar Abdel Malek and Abdullah Laroui, of people like the Subaltern Studies group, C. L. R. James and Ali Mazrui, of various texts like the Barbados Declaration of 1971 (which directly accuses anthropologists of scientism, hypocrisy, and opportunism) as well as the North-South Report and the New World Information Order. For the most part, little of this material reaches the inner chambers of and has no effect on general disciplinary or discursive discussion in metropolitan centers. Instead, the Western Africanists read African writers as source material for their research, Western Middle East specialists treat Arab or Iranian texts as primary evidence for their research, while the direct, even importunate solicitations of debate and intellectual engagement from the formerly colonized are left largely unattended.

In such cases it is irresistible to argue that the vogue for thick descriptions and blurred genres acts to shut and block out the clamor of voices on the outside asking for their claims about empire and domination to be considered. The native point of view, despite the way it has often been portrayed, is not an ethnographic fact only, is not a hermeneutical

16. See *Blaming the Victims: Spurious Scholarship and the Palestinian Question*, ed. Edward W. Said and Christopher Hitchens (London, 1988), pp. 97–158.

construct primarily or even principally; it is in large measure a continuing, protracted, and sustained adversarial resistance to the discipline and the praxis of anthropology (as representative of "outside" power) itself, anthropology not as textuality but as an often direct agent of political dominance.

Nevertheless there have been interesting, albeit problematic attempts to acknowledge the possible effects of this realization on ongoing anthropological work. Richard Price's book *First-Time* studies the Saramaka people of Suriname, a population whose way of staying alive has been to disperse what is in effect a secret knowledge of what they call First-Time throughout the groups; hence First-Time, eighteenth-century events that give the Saramakas their national identity, is "circumscribed, restricted, and guarded." Price quite sensitively understands this form of resistance to outside pressure, and records it carefully. Yet when he asks "the basic question of whether the publication of information that gains its symbolic power in part by being secret does not vitiate the very meaning of that information," he tarries very briefly over the troubling moral issues, and then proceeds to publish the secret information anyway.¹⁷ A similar problem occurs in James C. Scott's remarkable book *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. Scott does a brilliant job in showing how ethnographic accounts do not, indeed cannot, present a "full transcript" of peasant resistance to encroachments from the outside, since it is peasant strategy (footdragging, lateness, unpredictability, noncommunication, and so on) not to comply with power.¹⁸ And although Scott presents a brilliant empirical as well as theoretical account of everyday resistances to hegemony, he too undercuts the very resistance he admires and respects by in a sense revealing the secrets of its strength. I mention Price and Scott not at all to accuse them (far from it, since their books are extraordinarily valuable) but to indicate some of the theoretical paradoxes and aporias faced by anthropology.

3

As I said earlier, and as has been noted by every anthropologist who has reflected on the theoretical challenges now so apparent, there has been a considerable amount of borrowing from adjacent domains, from literary theory, history, and so on, in some measure because much of this has skirted over the political issues for understandable reasons, poetics

17. Richard Price, *First-Time: The Historical Vision of an Afro-American People* (Baltimore, 1983), pp. 6, 23.

18. James C. Scott, *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance* (New Haven, Conn., 1985), pp. 278–350. See also Fred R. Myers, "The Politics of Representation: Anthropological Discourse and Australian Aborigines," *American Ethnologist* 13 (Feb. 1986): 138–53.

being a good deal easier to talk about than politics. Yet gradually, however, anthropology is being seen as part of a larger, more complex historical whole, much more closely aligned with the consolidation of Western power than had previously been admitted. The recent work of George Stocking and Curtis M. Hinsley is a particularly compelling example,¹⁹ as is also the case with the very different kinds of work produced by Talal Asad, Paul Rabinow, and Richard Fox. At bottom the realignment has to do, I think, first with the new and less formalistic understanding that we are acquiring of *narrative* procedures, and then second, with a far more developed awareness of the need for ideas about alternative and emergent counterdominant practices. Let me now speak about each of these.

Narrative has now attained the status in the human and social sciences of a major cultural convergence. No one who has encountered Renato Rosaldo's remarkable work can fail to appreciate that fact. Hayden White's *Metahistory* pioneered the notion that narrative was governed by tropes and genres—metaphor, metonymy, synecdoche, irony, allegory, and so on—which in their turn regulated and even produced the most influential nineteenth-century historiographers, men whose historical work had been presumed to advance philosophical and/or ideological notions supported by empirical facts. White dislodged the primacy both of the real and of the ideal; then he replaced them with the astringent narrative and linguistic procedures of universal formal codes. What he seemed unwilling or unable to explain was the necessity and the anxiety for narrative expressed by historians, why, for instance, Jakob Burckhardt and Marx employed narrative (as opposed to dramatic or pictorial) structures at all, and inflected them with differing accents that charged them, for the reader, with quite various responses and burdens. Other theoreticians—Fredric Jameson, Paul Ricoeur, Tzvetan Todorov—explored the formal characteristics of narrative in wider social and philosophical frameworks than White had used, showing at once the scale and the significance of narrative for social life itself. Narrative was transformed from a formal pattern or type to an activity in which politics, tradition, history, and interpretation converged.

As a topic of the most recent theoretical and academic discussion, narrative has of course resonated with echoes from the imperial context. Nationalism, resurgent or new, fastens on narratives for structuring, assimilating, or excluding one or another version of history. Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities* drives the point home attractively, as do the various contributors to *The Invention of Tradition*, edited by Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger. Legitimacy and normativeness—for

19. See George W. Stocking, Jr., *Victorian Anthropology* (New York, 1987), and Curtis M. Hinsley, Jr., *Savages and Scientists: The Smithsonian Institution and the Development of American Anthropology, 1846–1910* (Washington, D.C., 1981).

example, in recent discussions of "terrorism" and "fundamentalism"—have either given or denied narratives to forms of crisis. If you conceive of one type of political movement in Africa or Asia as being "terrorist" you deny it narrative consequence, whereas if you grant it normative status (as in Nicaragua or Afghanistan) you impose on it the legitimacy of a complete narrative. Thus *our* people have been denied freedom, and therefore they organize, arm themselves, and fight and get freedom; *their* people, on the other hand, are gratuitous, evil terrorists. Therefore narratives are either politically and ideologically permissible, or not.²⁰

Yet narrative has also been at issue in the by now massive theoretical literature on postmodernism, which can also be seen as bearing on current political debate. Jean-François Lyotard's thesis is that the two great narratives of emancipation and enlightenment have lost their legitimizing power and are now replaced by smaller local narratives (*petits recits*) based for their legitimacy on performativity, that is, on the user's ability to manipulate the codes in order to get things done.²¹ A nice manageable state of affairs, which according to Lyotard came about for entirely European or Western reasons: the great narratives just lost their power. Given a slightly wider interpretation by situating the transformation within the imperial dynamic, Lyotard's argument appears not as an explanation but as a symptom. He *separates* Western postmodernism from the non-European world, and from the consequences of European modernism—and modernization—in the colonized world.²² In effect then postmodernism, with its aesthetic of quotation, nostalgia, and indifferenciation, stands free of its own history, which is to say that the division of intellectual labor, the circumscription of praxes within clear disciplinary boundaries, and the depoliticization of knowledge can proceed more or less at will.

The striking thing about Lyotard's argument, and perhaps the very reason for its widespread popularity, is how it not only misreads but misrepresents the major challenge to the great narratives and the reason why their power may now appear to have abated. They lost their legitimacy in large measure as a result of the crisis of modernism, which foundered on or was frozen in contemplative irony for various reasons, of which one was the disturbing appearance in Europe of various Others, whose provenance was the imperial domain. In the works of Eliot, Conrad, Mann, Proust, Woolf, Pound, Lawrence, Joyce, Forster, alterity and difference are systematically associated with strangers, who, whether women,

20. See Said, "Permission to Narrate," *London Review of Books* (16–29 Feb. 1984): 13–17.

21. See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10 (Minneapolis, 1984), pp. 23–53.

22. See Irene L. Gendzier, *Managing Political Change: Social Scientists and the Third World* (Boulder, Colo., 1985).

natives, or sexual eccentrics, erupt into vision, there to challenge and resist settled metropolitan histories, forms, modes of thought. To this challenge modernism responded with the formal irony of a culture unable either to say yes, we should give up control, or no, we shall hold on regardless: a self-conscious contemplative passivity forms itself, as Georg Lukács noted perspicaciously, into paralyzed gestures of aestheticized powerlessness.²³ For example, the ending of *A Passage to India* in which Forster notes, and confirms the history behind, a political conflict between Dr. Aziz and Fielding—Britain's subjugation of India—and yet can neither recommend decolonization, nor continued colonization. "No, not yet, not here," is all Forster can muster by way of resolution.²⁴

Europe and the West, in short, were being asked to take the Other seriously. This, I think, is the fundamental historical problem of modernism. The subaltern and the constitutively different suddenly achieved disruptive articulation exactly where in European culture silence and compliance could previously be depended on to quiet them down. Consider the next and more exacerbated transformation of modernism as exemplified in the contrast between Albert Camus and Fanon both writing about Algeria. The Arabs of *La Peste* and *L'Etranger* are nameless beings used as background for the portentous European metaphysics explored by Camus, who, we should recall, in his *Chronique algérienne* denied the existence of an Algerian nation.²⁵ (Is it farfetched to draw an analogy between Camus and Bourdieu in *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, perhaps the most influential theoretical text in anthropology today, which makes no mention of colonialism, Algeria, and so on, even though he writes about Algeria elsewhere? It is the exclusion of Algeria from Bourdieu's theorizing and ethnographical reflection in *Outline* that is noteworthy.) For his part, Fanon forces on a Europe playing "le jeu irresponsable de la belle au bois dormant" an emerging counternarrative, the process of national liberation.²⁶ Despite its bitterness and violence, the whole point of Fanon's work is to force the European metropolis to think its history *together with* the history of colonies awakening from the cruel stupor and abused immobility of imperial dominion, in Aimé Césaire's phrase, "mesurée au

23. Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (London, 1971), pp. 126–34.

24. The argument is made more fully in my forthcoming *Culture and Imperialism* (New York, 1989).

25. Albert Camus, *Actuelles, III: Chronique algérienne, 1939–1958* (Paris, 1958), p. 202: "Si bien disposé qu'on soit envers la revendication arabe, on doit cependant reconnaître qu'en ce qui concerne l'Algérie, l'indépendance nationale est une formule purement passionnelle. Il n'y a jamais eu encore de nation algérienne. Les Juifs, les Turcs, les Grecs, les Italiens, les Berbères, auraient autant de droit à réclamer la direction de cette nation virtuelle."

26. Fanon, *Les Damnés de la terre* (Paris, 1976), p. 62.

compas de la souffrance" ["measured by the compass of suffering"].²⁷ Alone, and without due recognition allowed for the colonial experience, Fanon says, the Western narratives of enlightenment and emancipation are revealed as so much windy hypocrisy; thus, he says, the Greco-Latin pedestal turns into dust.

We would, I believe, completely falsify the shattering novelty of Fanon's inclusive vision—which so brilliantly makes use of Césaire's *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* as Lukács' *History and Class Consciousness* for its synthesis—if we do not stress, as he did, the amalgamation between Europe and its imperium acting together in the process of decolonization. With Césaire and C. L. R. James, Fanon's model for the postimperial world depended on the idea of a collective as well as a plural destiny for mankind, Western and non-Western alike. As Césaire says, "et il reste à l'homme à conquérir toute interdiction immobilisée aux coins de sa ferveur et aucune race ne possède le monopole de la beauté, de l'intelligence, de la force / et il est place pour tout au rendez-vous de la conquête" ["and man still must overcome all the interdictions wedged in the recesses of his fervor and no race has a monopoly on beauty, on intelligence, on strength / and there is room for everyone at the convocation of conquest"].²⁸

Thus: think the narratives through together within the context provided by the history of imperialism, a history whose underlying contest between white and nonwhite has emerged lyrically in the new and more inclusive counternarrative of liberation. This, I would say, is the full situation of postmodernism, for which Lyotard's amnesiac vision has been insufficiently wide. Once again *representation* becomes significant, not just as an academic or theoretical quandary but as a political choice. How the anthropologist represents his or her disciplinary situation is, on one level, of course, a matter of local, personal, or professional moment. But it is in fact part of a totality, one's society, whose shape and tendency depend on the cumulatively affirmative or deterrent and oppositional weight made up by a whole series of such choices. If we seek refuge in rhetoric about our powerlessness or ineffectiveness or indifference, then we must be prepared also to admit that such rhetoric finally contributes to one tendency or the other. The point is that anthropological representations bear as much on the representer's world as on who or what is represented.

I do not think that the anti-imperialist challenge represented by Fanon and Césaire or others like them has by any means been met; neither have we taken them seriously as models or representations of human effort in the contemporary world. In fact Fanon and Césaire—

27. Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un retour au pays natal* [Notebook of a Return to the Native Land], *The Collected Poetry*, trans. Clayton Eshleman and Annette Smith (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1983), pp. 76, 77.

28. Ibid.

of course I speak of them as types—jab directly at the question of identity and of identitarian thought, that secret sharer of present anthropological reflection on "otherness" and "difference." What Fanon and Césaire required of their own partisans, even during the heat of struggle, was to abandon fixed ideas of settled identity and culturally authorized definition. Become different, they said, in order that your fate as colonized peoples can be different; this is why nationalism, for all its obvious necessity, is also the enemy. I cannot say whether it is now possible for anthropology as anthropology to be different, that is, to forget itself and to become something else as a way of responding to the gauntlet thrown down by imperialism and its antagonists. Perhaps anthropology as we have known it can only continue on one side of the imperial divide, there to remain as a partner in domination and hegemony.

On the other hand, some of the recent anthropological efforts critically to reexamine the notion of culture top to bottom may be starting to tell a different story. If we no longer think of the relationship between cultures and their adherents as perfectly contiguous, totally synchronous, wholly correspondent, and if we think of cultures as permeable and, on the whole, defensive boundaries between polities, a more promising situation appears. Thus to see Others not as ontologically given but as historically constituted would be to erode the exclusivist biases we so often ascribe to cultures, our own not least. Cultures may then be represented as zones of control or of abandonment, of recollection and of forgetting, of force or of dependence, of exclusiveness or of sharing, all taking place in the global history that is our element.²⁹ Exile, immigration, and the crossing of boundaries are experiences that can therefore provide us with new narrative forms or, in John Berger's phrase, with *other* ways of telling. Whether such novel movements are more easily available only to exceptional visionary figures like Jean Genet or to engaged historians like Basil Davidson, who scandalously criss-cross and transgress the nationally constructed barriers, than to professional anthropologists is not for me to say. But what I want to say in any case is that the instigatory force of such examples is of startling relevance to all the humanities and social sciences as they continue to struggle with the formidable difficulties of empire.

29. See Raymond Williams, *Problems in Materialism and Culture: Selected Essays* (London, 1980), pp. 37–47.