

Anthropology and Post-Colonial Thought: The Paradoxical Quest for Positionality

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The class, race, culture and gender assumptions, beliefs, and behaviors of the researcher her/himself [must] be placed within the frame of the picture that she/he attempts to paint (Harding 1987: 9).

The injunction in the above epigraph is now a professional obligation for those practitioners of the social sciences, for whom the self is *the* instrument of research, as is the case with anthropologists, and indispensably so. Indeed, as one practitioner rhetorically asked, ‘What sort of scientists are they whose main technique is sociability and whose main instrument is themselves?’ (Geertz, 2000: 94). Therefore, it has become a pre-requisite, if only to reassure one’s audience about the credibility of the product being offered to them, that a discursive space be reserved, in whatever forum or means of communication being used, for a kind of confessional about one’s vital statistics – that is, about one’s biological imprint, birth circumstances, intellectual propensities and moral sensibility. These are supposed to be constitutive of one’s positionality, that is the nature and location of one’s private Archimedean point, or mountaintop, from which one gazes at the world or that informs one’s ethnographic encounter. It is now a truism that there is an ineluctable interface, a mutual dependence, between the positionality of the ethnographer, his/her conception of fieldwork and ethnographic practice as well as the end product. The necessity, indeed, urgency, for this kind of self-branding, or biographical reflex-

ivity, was occasioned by a series of disruptive articulations within the discipline of anthropology and the resulting loss of innocence on the part of anthropologists as to the nature of the enabling conditions for the emergence and practice of their discipline. These disruptive articulations have indelibly marked the discipline, and have come to represent today the collective legacy of its practitioners as well as to constitute a kind of intellectual *rite de passage* through and against which they must define themselves with all the attendant dilemmas. One historian of the discipline aptly captures what this entails when he says, 'Students entering the field [of anthropology] today face unprecedented problems of self-definition... they must each... reinvent the field for themselves – rebounding it, if not rebinding it, in the process' (Stocking, 1992: 373). It is partly in response to the above injunction and to illustrate the pitfalls of self-definition that I discuss these disruptive articulations, albeit in an uneven manner, as my focus is on the intellectual trajectory and political (in)effectiveness of postcoloniality as a politico-academic phenomenon. More importantly, it is about resisting the premature normalization of one's professional identity and disciplinary practice in a context where we are beckoned by theories that seem 'to be in opposition against power or authority... [but are] often just a superficial reshuffling of terms or allegiances at the level of content' (Knauff, 1996: 142).

The three disruptive articulations are: the postcolonial insurgency, the feminist revolt, and the poststructuralist destabilization. Each one of them emerged in response 'to a genuine need... to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world' (Dirlik, 1997: 73). In responding to these provocations, anthropology sought to engage in a kind of disciplinary adjustment to conjunctural exigencies, as it simultaneously sought to accommodate the particular critique concerning which aspects of the discipline's discursive practice had to be modified in pursuit of its epistemic reconfiguration. However, it displayed varying degrees of receptivity, or different tolerance threshold, toward each one. Accordingly, the postcolonial insurgency was admitted gingerly and only as a compro-

mised vernacular sundered from its historical umbilical cord with the Third World; the feminist revolt was co-opted as some of its demands became norms of disciplinary discourse, albeit ultimately mitigated in practice by its adoption of the solipsistic discursive mode of post-modern feminism; and the poststructuralist destabilization became a full discursive colonization venture, as its apolitical textualism and sociological aestheticism became the new cross-disciplinary *lingua franca* of the academy.

In the discussion that follows, first, I trace briefly the genealogy of postcoloniality, the ambivalent reaction it induced in the Western intellectual ecology at the time, and characterize anthropology's problematic accommodation to it. Second, I review the role of postcolonial intellectuals, as a diasporic vanguard deploying postcolonial discourse in the Western academy as their Trojan horse, and assess their impact, which seems to have led to an intellectual *cul-de-sac*. Third, and finally, I suggest an alternative means of asserting one's positionality that is outside and beyond the postcolonial/Western discursive space.

Cosmopolitan Anthropology: Metropolitan Subsumption

The academic incorporation and disciplinary domestication of the postcolonial insurgency was rather long in the making, as its evolution took a circuitous route: From its origin in anti-colonial political resistance articulated in a national liberation discourse, to its migration into the metropolitan academy with an insurrectionist élan with the space-clearing and discipline-founding text *Orientalism* by Edward Said, it later mutated into a politically attenuated postcolonial theory in the guise of an accommodationist credo of Third World immigrant intellectuals preoccupied with the problematics of social integration and the politics of identity construction peculiar to that milieu. The catalytic birth pang of postcolonial thought was the Bandung conference.¹ That threshold event, held in 1955, which introduced a new 'political grammar', and enabled the 'eruption of the native' – that emblematic figure for the 'various others from the imperial domain' in the Third World –

both on the world's stage and in the midst of the West. Ultimately, it spawned the counter-narratives that sought, as Said explains, 'to challenge and resist settled metropolitan histories, forms, and modes of thought' (1989: 223). Indeed, according to Said in his insurrectionary incursion into anthropology, this challenge was the catalytic factor in the dawning of the crisis of modernity and the emergence of post-modernity. 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' (Ibid.). It was a deep ambivalence nurtured by the moral narcissism of the Enlightenment-induced universalism of European ideology that transformed the imperative to empire building into a regulative ideal that is constitutive of today's intellectual and other practices of incorporation and domestication by the West.² Thus the abandonment of territorial control subsequent to the demise of colonialism was replaced by an epistemic hegemony that entailed, as the French *belle lettrist* Paul Valery pithily explains, 'the transformation of everything into our own substances' (quoted in Said, 1978: 250).

That formal irony of modernism, which mutated into an intellectual imperialism, finally ossified into a colossal aporia in the Western episteme, as if enveloped in a Damoclean miasma, the resolution, or more aptly, the dissipation of which, would be tantamount to culturecide. That aporia, was the benign neglect in practice of the foundational principle of liberal-humanism, the philosophical flagship, and moral standard-bearer, of Western civilization, namely the intrinsic equality of all of human beings whatever their provenance and in spite of their differences; and instead the privileging of the ineluctability of hierarchy and hegemony in relating to the (non-Western) Other, and the foregrounding of ethnocentrism as the only possible mode of appropriating the cultural reality and of conceiving the ontological constitution of that Other. The source of this contradiction was the 'struggle at the heart of liberal theory, where a genuine desire for equality as a universal norm is tethered to a tenacious ethnocentric provincialism in matters of cultural judgment and recognition' (Pollock et al., 2000:

581). The consequence is that all attempts to escape this Western provincialism are regarded as ultimately provisional, and which has become a matter of conviction shared among (one too many) anthropologists, of both Western and non-Western provenance. This is illustrated in the following assertion: 'it seems impossible to imagine an anthropology without a Western epistemological link' (Abu-Lughod, 1991: 139, quoting Mudimbe). The unfortunate consequence is the reification of anthropology into a form of Eurocentric ventriloquism (to paraphrase Geertz), in which the aporia noted above has mutated into an incurable malaise that gestates in the discipline's episteme and informs its grammar of motive, namely an intellectual imperative to discover, or more accurately to construct, the world as a cornucopia of difference.

This intellectual cathexis with the search for difference seems to be merely for the sake of justifying that hierarchy and sustaining that hegemony. This in turn animates the occidentalist obsession with, and manic rejection of, relativism as if it were an intellectual obligation and moral duty in order to prevent the discipline's demise. This phobia of relativism is animated by the 'Cartesian anxiety', the notion that in the absence of a certain foundation for knowledge, especially an occidentalist one, there is only an absolute relativism, in which all claims to knowledge and all cultural practices are of equal standing and validity. This peculiar angst seems to have taken abode in an intellectual propensity that manifests itself as a 'hegemonic reflex.' In discursive practices informed by such a reflex, 'hierarchical opposition' and its corollary effect, cultural subsumption, is unwittingly privileged as the relational destiny between the archetypal (i.e., Western but not exclusively) disciplinary practitioners and its typical (i.e., predominantly southern) research subjects, and as the very conditions of possibility for anthropological practice. The mocking jabs at this intellectual propensity about it being a 'concocted anxiety', and the claim that it is underpinned by a 'simulacra of morality' have not diminished its epistemic currency in the least. Indeed, one disciplinary critic's anguished interrogations about the eventuality of disciplinary redemption from it,

remained at the level of rhetorical musing, as his useful review of the frittering away of the edges of disciplinary boundaries and increasing contestation of its practices ended on a note of foggy uncertainty, straddling the 'pessoptimistic' divide. As he rhetorically pondered:

Can anthropology be reinvented as a forum for variously routed fieldworks – a site where different contextual knowledges engage in critical dialogue and respectful polemic? Can anthropology foster a critique of cultural dominance which extends to its own protocols of research?(Clifford, 1997: 91).

In sharp contrast to such ambivalent musing, one reviewer of the state of anthropological theory at the dawn of the twenty first century left no doubt as to what the discipline's future should be like. She declares peremptorily, 'anthropology occupies a discursive and practical space defined by the West/Other relations, and no amount of critiques of "othering" will ever alter that fact. Anthropology must on no account vacate that space' (Moore, 2000: 6). This hyphenated space is at the core of anthropology's pursuit of the exotic, which Bongie has characterized as the 'space of duplicity', because it simultaneously renounces and re-announces the exotic, affirming and negating it (1991: 22). In insisting on its preservation, Moore is, unwittingly perhaps, reaffirming the illegitimate yet foundational and still operative distinction between the West and the rest as the pivot of anthropological discourse in spite of the fact that 'on sheer empirical grounds, the differences between Western and non-Western societies are blurrier than ever before.' And yet, 'anthropology's answer to this ongoing transformation has been typically ad hoc and haphazard' (Trouillot, 1991: 19). Alas, the labor of the few to evince anthropology from its obstinate occupation of the 'savage slot' and to bring about the belated demise of its fetishism of the marginals and natives from elsewhere, have yet to bear fruit. This assertion is corroborated in a manner evocative of a form of intellectual misanthropy in a book by Kirsten Hastrup (1995: 120-21) in which she unfurls an unapologetic, almost supercilious, reassertion of the claim that anthropology is the preserve of the Eurocentric zone, where are to be found exclusively, what she

calls the 'theoretical cultures.' The latter imbued with a 'charity principle'³ would come to the interpretive rescue of the 'atheoretical cultures' in their 'miserable situation' through a revamped imperial imagination armed with 'transcultural insights' as an antidote to the 'blind ethnocentrism' presumed to be the exclusive property of these 'atheoretical cultures.' This two-culture dichotomy, which is evocative of an earlier anthropological distinction between 'cold' and 'hot' societies, suggests that what some have called the 'malignancy of primitivism' remains a festering and seemingly terminal tumor in anthropology's episteme.

In effect, Hastrup's aim seems to be about thwarting any attempt to delink anthropology from the occidental imaginary, in order to reclaim the ground for a renewed intra-tribal conversation within the Euro-American tribal confederation with a passing gesture of discursive philanthropy as to how the natives on the outside ought to be dealt with. As to be expected, her ethnographic practice betrays that same condescending exuberance. In an article about writing ethnography, she informs us in a tone that brooks no dissent: 'the purpose of ethnography is to speak *about* something for somebody' (1992: 122). What she is reaffirming here is the foundational neo-imperial assumption of ethnographic writing that is claimed to have been dissolved due to the emergence of a 'new political grammar' informing the relations between empire and its former dominions: ethnography's 'subjects and its audience were not only separable but morally disconnected, that the first were to be described but not addressed, the second informed but not implicated' (Geertz, 1988: 132). It should be stressed that while the above described tendency does not emblemize a unanimous intellectual disposition among most anthropologists; it is indicative of a persistent and ubiquitous streak in anthropological discourse.

The Postcolonial Credo: Co-opted Agency

The currency of this type of imperious semantic subsumption of a global swath of cultural formations, as if an incorrigible disciplinary habitus that usually betrays itself in more subtle formulations than the

condescending assertions quoted above, raises the concern about the effectiveness of postcoloniality in its theoretical manifestation in the metropolitan academic milieu. There, a stable of postcolonial intellectuals were supposed to have constituted an 'imagined community of resisters' against the intellectual seduction and politically disabling enticements of metropolitan theory. This community of resisters was supposed to be the missionary vanguard of the Third World, to proselytize the manufacturers of the Western episteme in the First World academy, and to whittle away at their epistemic arrogance and cultural provincialism. And ultimately, to relieve the Euro-American world of its 'white man's burden.' Indeed, the postcolonial anthropologist has a special mandate to provide such a relief, if one concurs with Fischer's description of anthropology's arbitrating role, as it occupies 'a third space between the desires of empire (of control) and the defense of the oppressed (of subaltern voices, interests, values and perspectives)' (2003: 8). Alas, this was not to be, at least not yet. In contrast, the feminist revolt succeeded in marshalling a collective enterprise aimed at burying the euro-androcentric legacies of imperialism, by having their male colleagues in the metropolitan academy acknowledge that the androcentricity of social science categories and their misogynic analytical effects could no longer be tolerated as an epistemological fatalism. Also, the poststructuralist destabilization 'heralded the thorough-going reconstitution of the whole of the anthropological project itself... [as part of] a radical undoing of the legitimation of the master narratives of "masterful meanings"... which have sought to inscribe the world within the *telos* of the West.' However, for the most part the poststructuralist discourse still operates within a 'bounded reflexivity' as the ground for the West's epistemological privilege remains unexamined (Scott, 1992: 371).

It was this 'bounded reflexivity' that postcolonial theory was supposed to breach, since Eurocentrism and its addictive craving for that virtually conceived inferior alterity were its main targets; and against which a strategy of internal contamination was to be deployed by the diasporic vanguard of the subalterns left behind. In effect, this diasporic

vanguard was supposed to launch a discursive *intifadha* (revolt) within the womb of academia by deploying heteroglossia and hybridization, as the subversive solvents that would corrode its exclusionary metaphysics of natural difference and hierarchy. Two tactical moves were to be used: the first was cultural hybridization, which entailed a process of symbolic interaction along an 'interstitial passage' between cultural agents of fixed identities (e.g., European and non-European) that 'entertains difference without an assumed or imposed hierarchy', while preventing these identities from 'settling into primordial polarities' (Bhabha, 1994: 4). In this way the West would be gradually weaned away from its dependence on that hegemonic fixation. The second involved the mostly textual strategy of 'catachrestic reinscription,' which calls for the surreptitious take over, a kind of fifth-column politics, of the metropolitan academy through a process of 'reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding' (Spivak in Dirlik, 1997:56).⁴

These tactical moves were to be underpinned, on the one hand by an epistemology rooted in a radical anti-foundationalism, which entails the rejection of all macro-structural categories as framing axes of social reality, such as capitalism, the Third World, as well as of social categories such as class, in favor of heterogeneity. In this context, reality, historical or otherwise, became a matter of discursive reconstruction, not with foundationalist categories given their propensity toward spatial homogenization and temporal teleology, but from a discursive location embodied in a 'subject position' molded entirely by anti-essentialist anxieties. And on the other hand, the adoption of a conception of agency that entailed a categorical repudiation of allegiance to national origin (e.g., primordial polarities and their parochial fealties), incarnated in a subjectivity purged of all essentialist predilections (i.e., human biases) and animated by a politics of location (i.e., I speak from where I am, not about where I am from). The postcolonial self that emerged from this cultural lobotomy, emptied of all its primary affiliations, was a mutant in its intellectual constitution and a martyr in its political conduct for the sake of a virtual heterotopia. Shorn of all

‘structural commonalities of struggle’ (e.g., national identity, ethnic allegiance, state loyalty, etc.) with his/her fellow subalterns, the post-colonial intellectual became a monadic vagrant in the Western academy. The social precariousness of this status has inspired a kind of esoteric discursivity, as a dissimulated genuflection at the altar of the Western intellectual pantheon. She had gone as a subversive but instead was subverted, and became complicit in the consecration of hegemony. Alas, they failed to heed Lorde’s admonition: ‘the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change’ (1984: 112).

There seem to be two explanatory factors to this phenomenon of postcolonial intellectual’s self-subversion: the first concerns the modality of border crossing, and the migratory impulse that accompanies it, which has a determining impact on one’s positionality. Border crossing takes place under a number of guises: tourist, UN development worker, anthropologist-ethnographer, exile, and immigrant. It is the latter, however, that is the privileged modality, since ‘the demography of the new internationalism is the history of postcolonial migration’ (Bhabha, 1994: 5) Indeed, it is the status of immigrant that is the defining feature of the subjectivity of postcolonial intellectuals. JanMohamed offers an apt portrait of this immigrant as intellectual that epitomizes the postcolonial scholar in his/her prevalent manifestation today: his/her stance toward the host culture is positive. S/he is ‘eager to discard with deliberate speed the formative influences of his own culture and to take on the values of the new culture.’ S/he is imbued with an ‘uncritical gregariousness’, that is ‘an ability to identify rapidly and to merge with the structure of the new culture’s collective subjectivity.’ And animated by ‘an anxious desire to become an uncritical subject of the new culture’ (1992: 101, 105). This uncritical gregariousness of the immigrant intellectual is to be contrasted with the phobia of cultural contamination of the Western anthropologist when he encounters Third World cultures. Indeed, there are disciplinary strictures against ‘going native.’ These strictures are best illustrated in the following por-

trait of the anthropologist vis-à-vis the native culture: he is motivated by a deliberate denial and often an explicit, militant repression of the desire to become a subject of the host culture. All aspects of his or her individual subjectivity remain under the discursive control of the home culture. Furthermore, he apprehends the culture, not as field of subjectivity, but rather as an object of and for his gaze that is epistemological, organizational and panoptic, thus dominating (Ibid: 102). In fact, the Western anthropologist is professionally obligated to affirm and maintain his nativeness – that is, his attachment to place of origin – in sharp contrast with the postcolonial who is encouraged to shun his own native attachments (perceived as ‘blind ethnocentrism’) in favor of a subjectivity characterized by a contrived hybridity and cultural heterogeneity. Two examples of the pathologies of positionality associated with this form of postcolonial subjectivity, at least in its postmodern manifestation, are briefly discussed below.

Arjun Appadurai, a postcolonial anthropologist, provides a rather embarrassing illustration of this subjectivity as cultural parody:

I saw and smelled modernity reading *Life* and American college catalogs.... I gradually lost the England that I had earlier imbibed in my Victorian schoolbooks.... I did not know then that I was drifting from one sort of *postcolonial subjectivity* (Anglophone diction, fantasies of debates in the Oxford Union...) to another: the harsher, sexier, more addictive New World of Humphrey Bogart... [and] launched myself into the pleasures of cosmopolitanism (1996: 1-2).

To flaunt his cosmopolitan credentials, he prophesied the terminal crisis of the nation-state (in the Third World to be sure, not in his host culture), and the Phoenix-like rise of a post-national order atomized into heterogeneous units of ‘community of sentiments’ in which everyone is pre-occupied with ‘experimenting with self-making’, as they indulge their imaginative, mostly consumptive, urges. Unwittingly, Appadurai’s analytical aim seems to be to appropriate the local for the global, by breaking down the cultural parochialism of the former in

order to enhance its penetration by the latter. Alas, as one commentator pointed out, 'Far from being oppositional, academic enthusiasts for diversity articulate the inclusive logic' of empire (Ahmad, 1997). The end result is the 'reconstitution of subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and consumers more responsive to the operations of global capital' (Dirlik, 1997: 72).

In a tone less egregious in its fawning exuberance, but similarly informed by that anxious desire for institutional integration and social acceptance, is the manifesto-like article by Gupta and Ferguson (1997) symbolizing an intellectual marriage of convenience, aimed at assaulting, as they put it, the crumbling ramparts of the tyrannical center of anthropological traditionalism and its methodological dynasty. The latter is reified in the mantra of one of modern anthropology's forefathers, namely Malinowski's 'mythic charter', which advocates a research approach that was mockingly characterized by Geertz as 'join-the-brutes ethnography', because it calls for the obligatory residence in a village in the midst of people isolated from modernity, as the discipline's ideal research subjects. While these two partners were ostensibly urging the overthrow of that tradition, they were in effect calling merely for acts of aggressive re-imagining and re-interpreting within the bounds of that very tradition, or what is called the 'traditional mise-en-scene.' In essence the two basic objectives of this manifesto were aimed at the marginal tinkering with the prevailing norms of professionalization into the discipline and not their transgression and subversion: 1) to displace the centrality of participant observation as anthropology's methodological orthodoxy; and 2) to renegotiate the disciplinary boundaries so as to accommodate external sources of innovation, as a form of affirmative action that would allow the inclusion of postcolonials within the academic milieu of the hegemonic core, and the valorization of their formerly 'subjugated knowledges.' The concern here is not about developing knowledge relevant to collective social emancipation, but to achieve individual intellectual recognition within a socially insulated community of discourse.

The second explanatory factor is that postcoloniality is an 'ideological effect of a new world situation', namely the emergence of global capitalism, which in turn provided the enabling condition for the rise of postcoloniality, just as colonialism had done for ethnography and anthropology during an earlier phase of capitalism's development. The characterization of ethnography's relationship to colonialism is equally applicable to the relationship of postcoloniality to the current form of capitalism: 'ethnography was colonialism's twin. The political and economic relations were the conditions for others to be construed in specific terms and as particular objects of knowledge... It prejudged the form and content of the act of representation' (Geertz, 1990: 16). This prejudging factor was to give rise to the 'crisis of representation' during anthropology's self-flagellating critique during the 1980s, without resolving that crisis satisfactorily, if at all. In fact, according to one prominent practitioner of the discipline, who has achieved the rank of disciplinary ambassador in the estimation of his colleagues, there is no crisis to resolve, as it is simply part of the realpolitik of the ethnographic encounter. As Geertz explains, 'The moral asymmetries [that have induced bouts of moral hypochondria] across which ethnography works and the discursive complexity [and the epistemological anxieties it has generated] within which it works make any attempt to portray it as anything more than the representation of one sort of life in the categories of another impossible to defend.' Accordingly, he reneged on his earlier advocacy of, and commitment to, uncovering the 'native's point of view', which he now characterizes almost contemptuously as 'ethnographic ventriloquism.' Alas, he seemed to have abandoned his ambassadorial function of pursuing anthropology as an 'enabling conversation' across societal and cultural divides, and has surrendered to the inexorability of symbolic domination (Geertz, 1988: 144).

Similarly, postcoloniality is facing a crisis of the 'means of enunciation', given that in its current manifestation it is tantamount to the global projection, from the bully pulpit of the metropolitan academy, of the subjectivities of a few intellectuals of Third World origin (including their admirers and followers of dubious authenticity from

elsewhere), which are attuned to the cultural requirements of global capitalism. The latter carries the double burden of creating and then of subverting the postcolonial intellectuals. However, the Western academy, which is the principal site for the production of postcolonial discourse, is also implicated in the process of self-subversion, as the diasporic interstitial space – a kind of virtual reality – that is located within its multicultural margins, has licensed its inmates to recreate the world according to their utopic muse; and to transform intellectual activity into primarily a mode of consumption of the ideational surplus generated within that very space in pursuit of the discursive reconstitution of selves and not the transformation of societies. All is not yet lost, however, as postcolonial thought is an ‘episteme-in-formation’, as Hall (1996) puts it. For it to achieve political effectiveness, as it matures toward its end-formation, however, it will have to provide an affirmative answer to the following:

The question is not whether or not this global intelligentsia can (or should) return to national loyalties but whether or not, in recognition of its class position in Global Capitalism, it can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology, and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product? (Dirlik, 1977: 76).

In the meanwhile, postcolonial thought, which was inaugurated by an insurrectionist élan against the dominant Western episteme, at least in its historiographical moment, has, since its elopement with poststructuralism and its dissemination to other terrains, embarked upon an ambiguous adventure in which it is no longer certain about its initial desire to decolonize itself and seems to be dissipating the liberating potential of its intellectual capital into an apolitical textualism. The end result is an intellectual *cul-de-sac*, characterized by a dichromatic analytical spectrum: on the one hand, the fetishism of colonialism and its effects as the exclusive source of its problematics; and on the other, the demonology of Eurocentrism as the cardinal focus of its analytical deconstruction.

Opting Out: Negotiating an 'Interstitial Passage'

In light of the above discussion, asserting a postcolonial positionality is clearly to engage in a reified, stylized discursive operation driven by institutional exigencies confronting those who are seeking entry into a *priori* established social categories made available to them by their host academic institutions in the metropolitan center. For those inhabiting spaces for which a postcolonial status is either not a meaningful designation, or is overridden by more pertinent and urgent considerations, what status should they claim for themselves? Clearly the answer will depend on the particular location and political motivation of the concerned actor. Nevertheless, to illustrate a particular course of action I refer to my own choice: my positionality is informed by my provisional location as an anthropologist-ethnographer, and as someone unable and unwilling to contrive away (as advocated by the postcolonial credo) his attachment to those embarrassing foundationalist fossils, and inconvenient primordial polarities such as national origin and other historically constituted and ethnicity-based baggage.

Accordingly, wedged, as I am in an 'interstitial passage' between two equally inhospitable intellectual cultures threatening a malignant synergy – i.e., the privileging of a renegade discourse by, at least the most prominent of, my postcolonial precursors, and the intrinsic hegemonic reflex of, and the perceptual pathologies it induces in, my anthropologist colleagues from the metropolitan center vis-à-vis the Other – I take abode in an interior space of 'transcendental homelessness' (*à la* Said).⁵ In this way, I am freed of the psychic angst associated with the postcolonial syndrome, namely, the act of intellectual surrender, or what Bourdieu (1998) calls 'doxic submission', through a process of self-acculturation and discursive complicity in the pursuit of metropolitan institutional integration and cosmopolitan upward mobility; and more importantly I am relieved, as Dirlik puts it, of the 'self-inflicted if not self-serving agonies of identity' (2003: 118). From there, and in the pursuit of the activities associated with my current disciplinary location, I would engage my fellow 'natives', not armed

with a panoptic gaze in search of self-defining difference through the exploration of otherness, but imbued with a genuine quest for understanding through a non-hegemonic encounter between our historically constituted cultural selves and across our primordial polarities.

Moreover, a reciprocity principle would (1) underpin my ethnographic practice in order to ensure that the end product has a practical effect or a degree of material effectiveness on the social conditions of those studied; and (2) inform the subsequent abstraction process of my anthropological reflections, so that it does not become an opportunity merely to display the breadth of my semiotic repertoire or the scope of my interpretive virtuosity, but reveals the depth of my ethical sensibility and the genuineness of my political and cultural commitments. In this way my research product could serve as 'resources of hope' for the improvement of my research subjects' lives (devoid of any condescending missionary intent), and not merely to fulfill, the exigencies of making a living in an academic institution. Furthermore, beyond my disciplinary location, this positionality entails the adoption of an agnostic relationship with one's milieu, which is similar to a permanent host-guest relationship vis-à-vis one's permanent or momentary place of dwelling: whether it is one's primordial abode through birth, or adopted one through migration. As the critical self-reflexive attitude that this entails would prevent the discursive participation in, through an unconscious assimilation of, the hegemonic impulses fomented by the ethnocentric provincialism intrinsic to all societies and cultures, which reinforces hierarchy and condones domination. Perhaps the best way to explain what negotiating this 'interstitial passage' entails is to refer to Said's notions of 'filiation' and 'affiliation': the former refers to an ascriptive cultural identity incarnated as a passive by-product of one's national cultural inheritance; while the latter is an achieved identity through the autonomous selective appropriation and internalization of the cultural heritage of the world (cf. Damrosch 2005). Indeed, Said explains how he straddled the two thus: 'I traversed the imperial East-West divide, entered into the life of the West, and yet retained some organic connection to the place I originally came from' (1994: 336).

Lastly, I hope that I am not risking double excommunication by espousing such heretical verities, as I eschew the subversive programme, turned into a cheerleading one, of my fellow postcolonials, and repudiate the extractive intellectual practices and scholastic ethos of my fellow disciplinary inmates.

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Endnotes

1. See Robert Young (2001) for a history of the permutations of postcolonialism, and in which he proposes “Tricontinentalism” as a substitute term. However, this term has problematic revisionist ramifications, since it is a collective abstraction that herds beneath it as one expressive totality the politics and discursive practices of leaders of African liberation movements (e.g., Cabral, Fanon etc.) and the protagonists of Deconstruction theory (e.g., Derrida, Lyotard, etc.). This is partly because these protagonists were of Franco-Maghrebin origins. Moreover, Deconstruction is seen as a continuation of the liberation struggle, since it is ‘a procedure for intellectual and cultural decolonization within the metropolis’ (p. 416).
2. During a brief chat with the late Edward Said at a dinner held in his honour at Exeter University on the evening of 18 April 2001, he exclaimed in feigned surprised, ‘It’s still around? Where do they go?’ This was after I told him that I was doing anthropology at Sussex. How could anthropology still be around after my devastating critique of it, he must have been wondering. And what Third World country was allowing these practitioners of symbolic domination on behalf of empire, yet portraying themselves self-deludingly as advocates of a utopic relativism, to roam around their cultural domain, he seemed to be asking.
3. Hoy defines this notion as an ‘authoritarian and dogmatic position that assumes that the set of true beliefs is everywhere and always largely the same, and that it is also identical to one’s own beliefs’ (1982: 6). This means that these ‘atheoretical cultures’ are denied the right to their own epistemological sovereignty.
4. The discussion of postcolonialism that follows is partly inspired by Dirlik’s

(1997) comprehensive critique.

5. Quoting Said (2002: xxxiv), out of context, this space could be defined as follows: 'unaccommodated, essentially expatriate or diasporic forms of existence, those destined to remain at some distance from the solid resting place that is embodied in repatriation.'

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