WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE A THIRD WORLD ANTHROPOLOGIST?

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The first thought that came to mind upon this pertinent and yet difficult question was to recall Goethe's *Faust*. Let us quote this famous theatrical monologue and then reflect upon the tragic fate of this complex character who ended up, like most of our contemporary intellectuals in the "West," "East" and especially in the Third World, by selling his soul to the devil in order to enjoy temporarily, certain earthly pleasures.

> I've studied . . .
> From end to end, with labor keen.
> Yet here, poor fool with all my lore
> I stand, no wiser than before,
> And see that nothing can be known!
> This knowledge cuts me to the bone
> . . . .
> I cannot pretend aught truly to know,
> I cannot pretend that as a teacher
> Might help or convert a fellow creature.
> Besides, I've neither lands nor bold,
> Nor earth's least pomp or honor hold.
> No dog would bear such an existence.
> Therefore, from magic I seek assistance.
> . . . .
> And bandy empty words no more!
> . . . .
> And freed from the fumes of lore that swathe
> To health in the dewy fountains bathe me.
> Alas! My prison still I see!
> That is my world – if such's to call a world!
> And do I ask, wherefore my heart
> Falters, oppressed with unknown needs.

One has to give credit to Faust that he at least realized – which is the beginning of wisdom – that after years of hard work he had acquired only enough knowledge to know that the more he knows the more he becomes convinced that he still does not know. Many contemporary anthropologists should reflect upon these existential torments of Faust and also upon the finality of any knowledge, which is power; and power either over nature or society can be used for positive or negative purposes. However, our anthropologists seem to have acquired "pure" and "all-encompassing" knowledge about the "savages," "primitives," "barbarians" and even the marginal peoples of "complex societies," to know not only the "nature" of "culture and its biological prerequisites" but also, and paradoxically, the "nature of man!"

At any rate, I shall come back to this subject. For the moment I will try to reflect on the original question. I think that such a question requires a personal answer derived from and/or based upon my own experience as a former peasant, a migrant worker, a militant in a nationalist movement, a student of anthropology and a professional anthropologist, compelled by circumstances to abandon a discipline that I still cherish deeply, despite the critical remarks and serious reservations which I will make later about its general orientation, methodological flaws and epistemological shortcomings. However, it must be made clear that another Third World anthropologist, coming from a different class background and having dif-

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ferent experience and hence political consciousness, might respond to this question otherwise. We are products of our upbringing but as scientists we are compelled by our professional ethics to "search for the truth," as Franz Boas stressed. Only if we constantly endeavor to transcend our social, ethnic, national or racial backgrounds can we attain true "universality."

I was born and raised in a peasant mountain community. At the age of 16 I was forced by the prevailing socio-economic conditions to migrate to the city in search of wage labor. Since my father and older brothers were fervent nationalists, I followed in their footsteps by joining the Algerian Peoples Party, which was the only nationalist movement that demanded the total independence of the country from the colonial power. When the young militants of this party launched the War of National Liberation on November 1, 1954, I joined the ranks of the Army of National Liberation (ALN). Among other things, I served as a liaison officer between the executive committee of the National Liberation Front (FLN) and the northern Constantine military zone. I have also experienced several years in colonial jails in which I received most of my basic education as well as the most dehumanizing of human political practices: torture. Paradoxically, once the independence of the country was obtained, an internal crisis broke out which forced me into exile in Europe. There I became convinced, along with some friends, that in order to transform our country, as well as the region as a whole, we must undertake serious study so that we might understand not only the human condition but also, and particularly, the socio-cultural reality of the society we intended to change. I began then preparing a university degree in economics and philosophy. However, when I came, later on, across the works of Peter Worsley, Eric Wolf, Marshall Sahlins, Lawrence Krader and particularly Leslie White and Barrington Moore, I dropped economics and philosophy in favor of anthropology and social history. For my PhD degree in anthropology I specialized in four topics: the origin of the state, economic anthropology, peasant societies and cultures, and the Middle East and North Africa as my geographic area of specialization.

From my first encounter with this discipline I found myself more or less in agreement with what I understood as its subject matter, its methodology, objectives, concerns and theoretical approach to the interpretation of social-cultural reality; I was moved by its romanticism about peasant cultures and societies (this both flattered and amused me). Indeed, a priori, what could be more attractive to a militant of the Third World – who belonged to its generation of *Bandong* (whose high hopes for changing the conditions imposed on the Afro-Asian peoples by the imperialist powers and illusions due to its incapacity to forsee the difficulties and pitfalls that lay ahead must be stressed) – than this new science of man? This science that seeks, among other things, the study of man's physical makeup but also the meaning, significance and function of his culture, appealed to me greatly. What could be more noble and exalting than a discipline that analyzes and compares in a very systematic and rigorous way, the characteristics, origins, evolution and current situations of *"all"* peoples, cultures and societies (their interactions, similarities and differences as well as structures, norms, customs, ideological systems, etc.)? It seemed to me that a science, which manages to combine diachronic and synchronic analysis of socio-cultural reality, could enable us to study thoroughly our biosocial past. The understanding of this past would permit us to comprehend the present objective conditions, a fact that renders possible the restructuring and transformation of our respective societies and

cultures and hence the reshaping and mastering of our future.

A Third World anthropologist like myself cannot simply indulge in the luxury of studying the cultures, societies and especially human conditions of the powerless and marginal peoples either of the Third World or other regions of the globe for the sake of knowledge but rather for the possibility – given the current world situation in which the powerful continue to prey upon, exploit and dominate the powerless – of changing and developing them. The anthropologists of advanced capitalist countries tend to think, subconsciously or consciously, that the underdeveloped nature of the communities they study, in relation to their own societies, is a natural and even normative acceptable condition. I am not suggesting that they should transform themselves into agents of change and revolution, but at least they must try to understand the causes, both internal and external, of what appears to them as backwardness. And the truth by itself may be sufficient to be "subversive" in the long run.

Indeed, the transformation of the cultures and societies of the Third World requires the understanding of local, national, regional and global objective conditions. Nonetheless I also believed, and still believe, that due to the asymmetrical nature of power relations prevailing in the contemporary world and the problems of Western social sciences, anthropology, despite its limitations, does possess the potential for becoming, if it liberates itself from its historical legacies, a genuinely revolutionary science. Indeed, it is capable of contributing to a desirable struggle for the eradication of ethnocentrism, chauvinism, racism and prejudice, and why not exploitation? As such, this discipline under different conditions might therefore foster, promote and enhance human freedom and dignity.

This is what I thought of anthropology at a certain phase in my life, as a Third World person who experienced want, political domination and oppression. In choosing anthropology as an academic discipline I harbored the illusion that my future research would contribute towards achieving, among other things, this overall objective, which I deluded myself into thinking at least the majority of Western anthropologists shared.

However, gradually I came to realize that the bulk of the anthropologists of advanced capitalist countries remain, to this very day, prisoners of its original orientation of "sin." Indeed, due to well-known historical factors, anthropology (and especially its forerunner, ethnology) was developed as a science specialized in the study of the so-called non-Western peoples and cultures in order to understand paradoxically the nature of man in general and the nature of these non-Western peoples and cultures in particular. Thus, from the beginning the anthropologists of developed countries were oriented to the study of "others," that is, the peoples and cultures of the present-day Third World. This situation complicates the professional life of a politically conscientious Third World anthropologist who comes from the "others" to be trained in a Western university in order to specialize in the study of the cultures and societies of these "others" of whom he is one himself. For instance, he is struck, from the outset, by the lack of attention that is paid to the specific conditions under which anthropological research has been carried out, both during the colonial and neo-colonial periods. Thus, willingly or despite themselves, the majority of Western anthropologists had up to now either participated in or benefited from a dominant-subordinate relationship that prevailed between their respective nation-states and the peoples and cultures studied. Indeed, from a sociology-of-knowledge vantage point, the conditions under which research is car-

ried out effect, distort and even predetermine the results of the inquiry of most Western anthropologists who had either denied, derided or belittled this serious methodological and epistemological problem. As a perceptive Third World anthropologist who lives and teaches in Europe noted, this asymmetrical power relation made

> possible the kind of human intimacy on which anthropological field work is based, but ensured that that intimacy should be one-sided and provisional. It is worth noting that virtually no Euro-American anthropologist has been won over personally to the subordinate culture he has studied; although countless non-Euro-Americans, having come to the west to study its culture, have been captured by its values and assumptions . . . The reason for this asymmetry is the dialectic of world power . . . for the structure of power certainly affected the theoretical choice and treatment of what anthropology objectified – more so in some matters than in others [1].

A Third World anthropologist, being aware of this situation and knowing that it was and still is the essential cause of the distortions and misrepresentations perpetrated by the First World anthropologists, ought to underline its extreme importance. Because even the knowledge obtained under normal conditions filters through a dominant Western "cultural framework and discourse," which violates, as a result of built-in selective mechanisms, the nature of the non-Western socio-cultural reality. In other words, Euro-American-centrism and the arrogance of power behind it transformed the non-Western world into "a subjective mirror of the occident." Thus, the bulk of Euro-American scholars, regardless of their respective academic disciplines, let themselves, knowingly or unknowingly fall victim to a process of "reevaluation" of their own culture and society, and "devaluation" of the non-Western cultures and societies they observed, interpreted and analyzed.

What strikes a Third World anthropologist who continued to refuse to be ensnared by an anthropological romanticism and hence believes in the possibility of change, progress and development, is the fascination, even obsession of the majority of the anthropologists of advanced capitalist societies and their students with the "exotic," "barbarous," "archaic," "savage" and "primitive" peoples, cultures and societies. They seem to wish to freeze their evolution and transformation in a state of "sub-human otherness," that is, in their "pristine" or "aboriginal" stationary stages for study as if they were zoo animals. Their strong wish was expressed to me by an American PhD candidate in anthropology as recently as 1973 in the following terms: "I would like to find a primitive community that is really pristine and aboriginal in all of its cultural characteristics for the object of my fieldwork research. I would like it to be really primitive."

This spontaneous confession shocked me deeply because it revealed to me that the early focus of anthropological research on what is considered as the non-civilized segments of humanity continued to prevail, even during the United Nations Second Decade of Development of the Third World, (1970–80). Such a statement indicated also a disturbing dialectic: the anthropologists of advanced capitalist countries cannot consider themselves as such without the continuing existence of the "primitives" who provide the raw materials (cultural data) with which to build their own professional careers and enhance their social functions within their own societies. In other words, anthropology as a science taught in the universities of the "civilized" First World implies and even requires the existence and perpetuation of underdeveloped cultures and societies. To put it more bluntly, it seemed to me that the primitive communities exist only in relation to advanced nation-states, whose anthropologists study them, not for their own sake but for the purpose

of making sense of Western society and culture. Sahlins – who was, despite our theoretical divergences, one of the most excellent teachers of anthropology I ever had, whose stimulating lectures and seminars, coupled with his sincere friendship, made my long journey through American academia one of the best experiences of my life, expressed it most perceptively in a recent review article. He stated that one of Margaret Mead's "virtues," and also true of the majority of Western anthropologists, was "the common anthropological conceit out of which she made a career, to the effect that the ultimate value of studying other cultures was the use we could make of them to reconstruct our own – a heady kind of intellectual imperialism, as if the final meaning of others' lives was their significance for us" [2].

To paraphrase Malinowski, Western anthropologists "discovered" and tried to "create" primitive cultures; this would seem to signify that the majority of them have bowed to the "demand" of their own societies which are not interested in making sense out of the primitive nonsensical "shreds and patches" but rather in understanding the past evolutionary stages of so-called Western man who situates himself at the highest stage of socio-cultural evolution. This state of affairs led a friend of mine, a Palestinian-American anthropologist, to denounce the "phony universalism" of the bulk of Euro-American anthropologists, who, according to him, "are mining Third World cultures" in a manner similar to the mining of other mineral resources by their respective multinational firms for the insatiable needs of developed societies.

Despite this, even Third World anthropologists like myself, who have been trained in the West, are not encouraged to study "exploitation" or even undertake diachronic analysis, partly because of the fear that they might uncover in colonial tombs ghosts that would "delegitimize" the historical and material foundation of the hegemony of advanced capitalism over the Third World countries. Indeed, during the academic year 1973–74, I had the privilege and honor of receiving a grant from the Middle East and North African Center of the university where I was studying, for fieldwork to be carried out both in France and Algeria on the causes and consequences of labor migration. My research was to be centered on an Algerian rural district, called a *douar* in Arabic, made up of three peasant villages and two hamlets, and then migrant workers in eastern France.

Three days before my departure to the field the then director of this center, a well-connected member of the Middle East studies network in North America, and former chairman of the anthropology department, sent me an official letter in which he spelled out the guidelines that I was requested to follow. Among other things this "manager" of funds provided by The Ford Foundation stated bluntly that

> The grant is given to support original field research to be incorporated in your dissertation for the doctorate at this institution. A doctoral dissertation is expected to be an original contribution to knowledge and, particularly for an ethnologist, to reflect extensive fieldwork among the populations studied. I mention this because an historian or political scientist could take your topic and develop it on the basis of extensive archival research and/or the perusal [sic] of newspaper files and ephemra [sic]. As a doctoral candidate in anthropology, these sources will be of very secondary consideration in your work.
>
> I spell this out because the French character of your early education has left you with a taste for rhetoric and it should be emphasized that you are not being funded to prepare a political position paper or to put together a synthesis of the philosophic wafflings of various European writers on colonialism. What is expected, as would be the case with any student in this program, is that you will identify a meaningful sample of Algerian workers in France, presumably in the north, and will collect case data on them of a particular and concrete character. For instance, you do not need to rediscover the fact that these workers are exploited [sic]. What you need to do is find out exactly what this means, in work hours, life-style, and hard francs for Mohammed A. and Mustafa B. and Musa C. And then you need to determine the

> concrete character of conditions for their specific families in their particular communities of origin in Algeria. You do not need to demonstrate that Algeria was exploited by the French for their own ends and interest [sic].

Thus, I was actually ordered in this very explicit manner to study only a small group of migrant workers in complete isolation from the historical, social and economic context of colonialism and imperialism by focusing on their life style and to ignore "exploitation." In the course of my fieldwork I came to realize that even the study of lifestyles, toilet training and other such trivia, cannot be explained adequately without taking into account the overall historical and institutional multifaceted dimensions affecting the lives of peoples under study. For instance, while I was in the field in eastern France, from August 26 to September 29, 1973 alone, twelve Algerian workers were assassinated across France by vigilante groups. On December 14, a bomb was put in the Algerian Consulate in Marseille in the waiting room where the workers stay while their identification cards and various other papers are processed by consular clerks. It killed four people and wounded one hundred. The French police have never made a single arrest in connection with these crimes. This atmosphere is bound to affect the existence of the population being studied and therefore cannot be ignored.

As for the causes of migration itself: I found that between 1869 and 1954 the colonial power confiscated 37 percent of their lands and imposed special taxes in cash referred to in French as *"impots arabes"* whose constant increase averaged over 10 percent per year. Thus, in 1868 the per capita land ownership amounted to 2.78 hectares, by 1954 this had fallen to 0.6 hectares as a result of colonial plunder and demographic growth. How could I, or anyone else, ignore such a determinant factor underlying the process of migration from the district under investigation?

Finally, during my fieldwork in these peasant communities I discovered that the impact of the War of National Liberation was so strong that it could not be dismissed even by a non-Third World anthropologist. The district lost 7 percent of its 1954 population in the war. 4.3 percent of the casualties were innocent civilians murdered in cold blood and 2.7 percent died in action as members of the liberation army (ALN). In the fall of 1956, the district was completely destroyed and the livestock either killed or seized and consumed by the colonial army. The inhabitants were driven by force of arms into a "regrouping center."

In March 1962, when the peasants were released from the concentration camp, they found their former irrigated orchards turned into brush lands and forests. Not a single house remained intact. Thus, the basic capital necessary to initiate some appropriate economic activity was completely lacking. Being resourceless, only hoe agriculture was possible. Therefore, since the entire socioeconomic life of the communities had to be reconstructed, outmigration appeared again to the pauperized population as the only feasible economic alternative and hence the accelaration of the process of migration in the post-war period.

In addition to this, even the family structure has changed as a result of land colonization, taxes and demographic growth. Once the material basis of the traditional extended family was undermined, a process of atomization of the social organization was ushered in. Archival research showed that up to the 1920s the extended family prevailed in these communities. However, by 1974, the proportion of the nuclear families represented no less than 88.8 percent of the total.

My dissertation provoked the wrath of the Director of the Middle East and North African Center who was the self-appointed chairman of my thesis. This resulted in an

incident within the anthropology department.

Once I obtained my PhD, I taught two years in the United States and then joined the faculty of the University of Algiers. I found, upon my arrival, that not only the anthropology program with the Institute of Social Sciences, but also all anthropology courses were suppressed under the pretext that "ethnology is the colonial science *par excellence*" and "sociology is the best academic discipline for a developing country like Algeria." I was assigned to teach three main courses within the sociology department: theory of the social system, the sociology of developing countries, and social change. However, despite the fact that I like teaching these courses, I resented the banning of anthropology from the university. I felt that it was being scapegoated unjustifiably. My response to those who abolished the program of anthropology was "since most of the modern sciences such as chemistry, physics, engineering, geography, etc., have also contributed, directly or indirectly to the success of European colonization, you ought to be consequent with yourselves by also banning their teaching!" All sciences – including anthropology – can be used either to enslave, control, oppress, terrorize and even annihilate human life, or to liberate human beings from natural obstacles, want, fear, alienation, etc. and, hence, to make possible the realization of the intellectual potentialities of all peoples. Science by itself does not colonize. It is the rulers of the state representing specific interests who assign to its results and applications specific uses. Every scientific, and even to a lesser extent, human endeavor, could be utilized either to liberate or to dominate human beings, e.g., nuclear physics can illustrate this point clearly. It can be used either for peaceful purposes or for the production of terrifying thermonuclear bombs that are capable of devastating the globe. Are we then going to conclude that the teaching of nuclear physics should be prohibited?

In sum, a Third World anthropologist, like myself, is caught in an ambiguous and conflicting situation, which provokes tensions and contradictions that keep him in a constant intellectual and existential crisis. Thus, he is subjected to a double alienation: from the majority of scholars who constitute the international anthropological community and from an authoritarian bureaucratic environment within which he exercises his profession in his own Third World country; an environment characterized by a systematic anti-intellectual attitude of the regime. In a Third World country political power is omnipresent, omnipotent and dictatorial, a fact that plunges the intellectual into unbearable frustration. In either case a Third World anthropologist has to submit to the prevalent ideological assumptions and sterile conventions in order to be received into the citadel of the dominant order, as both a renegade from his background and an intellectual mystifier, or he continues to utilize his critical capacity and hence be subjected to strong pressures and castigations.

As for anthropological research, a Third World anthropologist should not imprison himself within the conventional Western framework. He must adopt a more fruitful multidisciplinary approach in order to reconstruct a complex socio-cultural reality of the communities investigated, taking into account endogenous and exogenous causal factors underlying the change or lack of change within these communities. According to Jairus Banaji, a Third World anthropologist ought to carry out "research into the genocidal practices of imperialism" in order to gain a truly scientific comprehension of social and cultural ensembles it has destroyed. This archeological conception of anthropology is unsatisfactory. A Third World anthropologist must be con-

cerned with the study of the past in so far as it can shed light on the present situation of the peoples studied with the view that this knowledge may contribute to the liberation and development of these Third World communities and states.

NOTES

1. Talal Asad (ed.), *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London: Ithaca Press, 1973), p. 17.
2. *New York Times Book Review,* August 26, 1984.

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