The Imperialism of Categories: Situating Knowledge in a Globalizing World

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Category Imperialism Encountered

In February 1957 Lloyd Rudolph and I set forth into the "heat and dust" villages of Thanjavur district, South India, with 10 Indian graduate students from Madras Christian College.[1] Our objective was to conduct a survey on political consciousness. Six hundred urban and rural Tamils scattered across three districts constituted the random sample we had selected from the first electoral rolls of recently freed India. V. O. Key, that witty and groundbreaking doyen of electoral behavior analysis, had enticed us into survey research. Upon our return, the Michigan Survey Research Center provided a methodologically intense summer.[2]

We were part of a wave of comparativist political scientists who had been motivated in the 1950s and 1960s by the proliferation of new nations following decolonization. Gabriel Almond, a senior participant in this move, wrote that political scientists moved into Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America "with all of the energy and commitment of pioneers who wanted to be the first to observe these new experiments in politics, or to observe primordial and traditional societies with the curiosity and fascination that we associate with anthropological field work."[3] Energy, curiosity—and a dose of liberal condescension.

We had tuned in early to the liberating part of survey research. Survey data freed political scientists from the formalist/legalist approaches that characterized the institutionalism of that time. Survey results told us what the citizens thought they were experiencing and doing. It gave us access to the electoral behavior and political attitudes that shaped the practical meaning of political institutions. We imagined we were plumbing the true underpinnings of the Indian experiment in democracy. What we had not counted on was that American ideology, America's hegemonic Lockean liberalism, would shape the very concepts and methods we used to acquire knowledge about an unfamiliar society and its politics.

When our bewildered interviewers returned from their first foray into the villages of Tamil Nadu, they complained of a radical disconnect between their training experience, modeled on best U.S. practice of that time, and their field experience. They had been led to expect that the mise-en-scène for the performance we call an interview placed the interviewer with his clipboard in the kitchen or living room of a suburban home, where he would record the personal opinions of the housewife within—a simple two-person interaction. This model highlights the assumptions of methodological individualism that characterize survey research as practiced in the United States. Respondents are singular. They respond one on one. Our interviewers did not expect the village woman, surrogate for the U.S. housewife, instead of compliantly revealing her preferences, to rearrange the staging and enlarge the cast: husband, father, and sons, and daughters appeared, sometimes joined by village notables. Responding to a survey question became a matter of collective deliberation, a veritable seminar. The experience instructed us that in village India the individual was not the unit of opinion. Indeed, the singular, private, and personal were alien to the life worlds of Indian towns and villages.

Survey research also operates with radically democratic assumptions: all opinions, like all votes, are assumed to have equal importance and equal weight. They evidently did not in 1957 India, although, in the succeeding decades, that difference has been dismantled. Our interviews were conducted at a time when caste hierarchy and patron/client relationships carried over into political relationships. The lower castes had not yet realized the leverage their numbers would give them in democratic elections.

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The lower castes soon learned to use their numerical advantage to trump the status and economic power of the middle and upper castes. So the local knowledge that we then encountered, that the opinion of the leading landlords and the caste and village headmen yielded an accurate reflection of village attitudes, was not misplaced.

Our 1957 Madras survey introduced us to the problem of exporting homegrown concepts and methodologies to alien places, where, as we would say today, the "other" lives. As social scientists entered new research arenas—and in the 1950s that meant nations newly liberated from colonial rule after World War II—they brought with them the concepts and methodologies that had been developed in connection with political research at home. "I had a sense of mission," wrote Gabriel Almond, "in bringing to the study of foreign political systems the theoretical ferment and methodological innovation which had already gone far in transforming the field of American political studies."[4]

Using Anglo-American concepts and methods in new research arenas was unavoidable. They were our tool kit, our means for entering complex and unfamiliar non-Western environments. Without concepts and methods we would not know where to look and what to look for. The question was, and still is, to what extent were those concepts and methods amenable to infiltration, adaptation, modification, and transformation by the forms of life and worldview of the alien other? To what extent were the tool kits we brought with us from the United States capable of bridging differences between civilizations, cultures, and worldviews between the Western observer and the non-Western observed?

Early in our research in India, Lloyd Rudolph and I coined the phrase "imperialism of categories."[5] It was meant to designate the academic practice of imposing concepts on the other—the export of concepts as part of a hegemonic relationship. Categories crafted in a dominant sociocultural environment are exported to a subordinate one. The imperialism of categories entails an unselfconscious parochialism of categories: scholars from a dominant culture, sometimes called the center, travel to a distant and lesser place, sometimes called the periphery, where they apply "universal" concepts. The trouble is that the concepts have been fashioned out of the center's materials—in our case, out of Anglo-American clay.

The title of one of Ashis Nandy's essays, "The Intimate Enemy," conveys the cultural violence associated with the imposition of alien categories. An alien culture is unwillingly ingested by the colonial, but can be neither fully absorbed nor regurgitated. It becomes part of his mentality, his way of thinking and judging.[6] Categories are transferred from the setting in which they were fashioned without being reshaped to fit the new context.

Categories are also modes of creating and controlling. Foucault showed us how categories embedded in discursive formations,[7] in speech forms, in instruments of sorting, registering, classifying, can function as quotidian modes of power. Ideal-typical dichotomies representing themselves as ways to analyze phenomena in systematic manner slip into stereotypes. The East is fatalist, says Max Weber; the West, agentic. The non-West conveys status by birth, says Talcott Parsons; the West, by achievement. The non-West is childlike, says John Stuart Mill; the West, mature. Dominant peoples use ideal types and stereotypes to control the dominated by ranking and creating cultural social registers. Feminist scholarship, which has taught us as much as any theoretical movement about the role of classification in sustaining subjection, has provided a rich array of examples, especially from nineteenth-century English literature: the hysteria of women versus the sanity of men; the idealism of women versus the realism of men. These dichotomies remind us that effective categories capture enough of reality to make them credible even while they falsify reality in the service of the necessary hierarchies of domination.

Lockean Universalism and the Other

Louis Hartz did not precisely warn us that American social scientists were unfit to understand foreign societies, but he did observe that Americans bore a particularly heavy intellectual burden as they approached the alien other. That burden was a Lockean universalism that taught that the self and the other were the same because they shared a common human nature. The assumption that all persons share a common humanity is one of the normative glories of liberalism. It asserts the equal worth and common reason of all humans. But the presumption of sameness obliterates difference when it erases the markers that distinguish cultures and peoples and create identity and meaning. Survey research concepts and methods in 1957 took for granted that other cultures too were constituted by Lockean individuals.

Writing in *The Liberal Tradition in America,*[8] Louis Hartz explored the negative face of liberalism. He spoke of the moral unanimity arising from Americans' foundational belief in Lockean universalism, and of their irrational devotion to it.[9] Americans imagine the impulses and definitions of their worldview are universal because to them they appear self-evident. Hartz attributed this belief in the self-evident to American historical experience, an experience epitomized in the quote from Tocqueville that Hartz used to open his book: "The great advantage of the American is that he has arrived at a state of democracy without having to endure a democratic revolution; and that he is born free without having to become so."[10]

The experience of being "born free" means that Americans did not experience radically different ideologies and institutions. They did not have to struggle against feudal oppressions and feudal survivals or the absolutism

envisioned by Thomas Hobbes or Robert Filmer. They did not experience the status order and class differences that were the sediment of European history. Being born free without having to become so produces, in Hartz's view, a complacent liberalism, a liberalism unlike Europe's, which imagines itself as both revolutionary and embattled. According to Hartz, American liberalism lacks the "philosophic spark," the "sense of relativity," the self-consciousness and reflexivity of European liberalism.[11]

Having been born free, Americans assume that the whole world is eager for a similar condition. Hartz argues that the Lockean liberal consensus "elicits an impulse to impose Locke everywhere."[12] Locke becomes a fetish at international conferences; the Lockean impulse brings together Woodrow Wilson and Senator Joe McCarthy. "[I]n the twentieth century 'Americanism' has also crusaded abroad in a Wilsonian way, projecting itself headlong over the strange and ancient societies of Europe and Asia. An absolute national morality is inspired either to withdraw from 'alien things or to transform them: it can not live in comfort constantly by their side."[13] Americanism in this view is not only imperialistic, but also narrow-minded:

> It raises the question of whether a nation can compensate for the uniformity of its domestic life by contact with alien cultures outside it. It asks whether American liberalism can acquire through external experience that sense of relativity, that spark of philosophy which European liberalism acquired through an internal experience of social diversity and social conflict.[14]

Or will challenges by the alien other merely evoke the liberal hysteria manifest in the "red scare" after World War I, McCarthyism after World War II, and the Patriot Act after 9/11?

The Empire and Liberalism Suspended

In his *Liberalism and Empire,* Uday Singh Mehta extends the critique of liberalism beyond a parochial American context.[15] He tells us that not only John Locke but also James and John Stuart Mill, both officers in the East India Company, as well as their British compatriots, Jeremy Bentham and Thomas Babington Macaulay, did not confront the anomaly inherent in liberalism's exclusion of entire categories of humanity from doctrines for which they claimed universality. The great flowering of liberalism in nineteenth-century Britain paralleled the great years of the empire. Mehta shows that liberal doctrines were not only made compatible with illiberal colonial rule, but used to justify it. They did so on the basis of a theory of infantilism that was used to characterize that portion of humanity that had yet to ascend the maturity-generating evolutionary path that brought the Anglo-Saxon races to their civilized condition: "Childhood is a theme that runs through the writings of British liberals on India with unerring constancy. It is the fixed point underlying the various imperial imperatives of education, forms of Governance, and the alignment with progress."[16]

Nineteenth-century liberalism's understanding of the colonies, like much of twentieth-century modernization theory's understanding of new nations, depended on an historical anthropology of earlier and later that coincided with lower and higher, backward and advanced. A lower position on the historical timeline entails an absence of that reason which entitles to deliberation and self-government. As John Stuart Mill put it:

> Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion. Until then, there is nothing for them but implicit obedience to an Akbar or a Charlemagne, if they are so fortunate as to find one.[17]

This theory of historical infantilization served nineteenth-century liberalism as the justification of empire.

Mehta's countervailing presence is Edmund Burke, who rejected liberal universalism—the doctrine that all humanity is the same. If the universalism and historical evolutionism of nineteenth-century liberals anticipates modernization theory, Burke speaks for the epistemological position of contemporary area scholarship that credits and values difference. He upbraids a featureless and abstract liberal universalism for its failure to grasp how territory is marked by particular and specific histories and cultures.

> One of the striking features of Burke's views, in part because it contrasts so starkly with the classical liberal tradition, is the political and psychological significance he attaches to places. Individuals "belong to," "come from," and "live in" places. For Burke, these philological emblems capture a fundamental aspect of individual and collective identity . . . the normative force of history and location stems from their psychological centrality to identity formation.[18]

Unlike the liberals of his time, Burke saw the injustice of Protestant empire in Ireland and viewed the independence of America without regret. "[On Ireland], America and India, he [Burke] was at every point upon the side of the future," Harold Laski tells us, and "he was the first English statesman to fully understand the moral import of the problem of subject races."[19]

Burke parted company with his nineteenth-century liberal successors too "not because . . . he had a more 'realist' epistemology and prose that 'correspond' to or better describe the nature of Indians but rather because his thought . . . takes seriously the sentiments, feelings, and attachments through which peoples are, and aspire to be, 'at home'. . . . This posture of thought acknowledges that the integrity of experience is tied to its locality and finitude. . . ."[20] Burke acknowledges what liberals denied: "[T]he very things through which the strangers' singularity, individuality, social and political identity—in a word, their very 'modes of experience' rendered their lives meaningful to themselves."[21]

Burke finds a way between a liberal universalism that elides or denies all markings of place and attachment, on the one hand, and a cultural relativism that denies all human commonality and asserts the moral equivalence of all custom, on the other. Mehta has Burke envisioning a conversation or negotiation between two strangers, whose norms are mutually opaque, a conversation that "holds out the possibility . . . that through the conversation, which has as its purpose the understanding of sentiments that give meaning to people's lives, wider bonds of sympathy can be forged."[22] While the liberal assumption of human homogeneity eliminated the need to comprehend the meaning system of the other, Burke recognized and valued difference and made space for conversation and negotiation meant to bring strangers together.

Americans are not Burkeans. They are tone-deaf when it comes to the meaning systems of others. As a distinguished colleague said, advocating the elimination of a foreign language requirement in the graduate political science department at Chicago, "There is no need for it. Everything you need to know is in English."

Universalist Theory Travels Abroad

Max Weber and Clifford Geertz have reminded us that there are two types of models: models *of* and models *for*. The former is a heuristic, an analytic abstraction designed to guide inquiry. The latter is an exemplar to be emulated. In practice, there is often slippage. Models-of become models-for. It is hard even to name a model without making it into a model-for. Consider, for example, the simple concepts of modernity and tradition. Would those two words be understood as neutral signs at a cocktail party full of readers of the *New York Times?*

We summarize the set of concepts that dominated the new comparative politics of the 1950s and 1960s as modernization theory. As a coherent set of concepts, modernization theory has suffered severe criticism and countermovements, such as dependency theory of the 1970s and postcolonial critiques of the 1990s. But modernization theory's central premise and promise, the reproduction of the West through the replication of its stages of growth, endures as a theme in American social science and public policy. Its return in new guises reminds us that modernization theory continues to function as a model-for among scholars and policy intellectuals. Hence it requires revisiting. You need to know history in order not to reinvent the wrong wheel.

Modernization theory arose out of a confluence of structural and functional systems theory of the kind pioneered by David Easton in political science and Talcott Parsons in sociology. Both were macro, totalizing projects, aspiring to explain all. As Parsons told the Faculty Committee on Behavioralism at Harvard in 1954: "A long-term program of scholarly activity which aims at no less than a unification of theory in all fields of the behavioral sciences is now envisaged."[23] Inspired by an eighteenth-century Enlightenment perspective, modernization theory combined aspects of the macro-historical conceptual traditions found in nineteenth-century continental social science—for example, the work of Hegel, Marx, Comte, and Weber—with the twentieth century determinism of American behavioral science. For modernization theorists, world history moved toward a progressive future. It was driven by an inner reason, or dynamic, that moved in linear, or dialectic, fashion toward a climax represented by the industrialized West.

In this sense the West, and more particularly the United States, was seen to show the nations of the world their future. Modernization theory represented an extension of the liberal historicity I have already discussed—a scientized, objectivized version of the value-laden concepts of James and John Stuart Mill, with their view of world peoples as backward/advanced and uncivilized/civilized.

Parsons and Edward Shils's pattern variables proved a most seductive way to manage the bourgeoning project of modernization theory. They proposed a series of oppositional dyads to organize the social universe of the modern West and its traditional other: ascription/achievement, affectivity/affective neutrality, collectivity orientation/self-orientation, particularism/universalism, diffuseness/specificity.[24] The items on each side of this dichotomous construction were considered to be systemically related. The left side of the pattern variables represented the traditional world that was to be superseded; the right side, the modern world that was being realized. The teleological cast of the framework mandated movement toward a necessary future. The march of history offered only two possible outcomes: the high road to modernity and the dustbin of history. Nobody drove this agentless process. There was no suggestion of multiple modernities or traditions, much less their mutual penetrations. The Parsons/Shils pattern variables implicitly pitted Anglo-American institutions against those of the developing world and laid out a path by which progress meant the Anglo-Americanization of the colonial other.

The Parsons/Shils paradigm became hegemonic in the social sciences of the 1960s and 1970s. This model-for in the guise of a model-of promised closure. All possible permutations of action could be accounted for: "We maintain," wrote Parsons and Shils, "that there are only five *basic* pattern variables, and that, in the sense that they are all of the pattern variables which derive, they constitute a system."[25] The systems paradigm profoundly influenced the Committee on Comparative Politics of the Social Science Research Council, formed in 1954. Gabriel Almond, who chaired the committee, spoke for a broad theoretical consensus when he asserted that the concept of systemic coherence "codified my own implicit paradigm of the interdependence of the components of polities."[26]

Coherence had several implications. If the features of the "modern" system were interlocked and not detachable, "developing" polities or societies had no choice but to buy into the whole basket. There was to be no fashioning of a modernity inflected by particular histories, no picking and choosing. Not only were developing societies expected to transition to the predetermined ensemble of Western modernity, but they were also to discard the equally coherent contrasting features into the dustbin of history. Mixed states, hybrids and their occupants, were "transitional," incomplete, and unstable—either on their way to modernity or failures incapable of completing the journey.

Dichotomies are logical structures that suppress the intermediary ground where most of the world exists. Yet it was from intermediary ground that the multiple modernities of Western Europe and East Asia were created. There was nothing uniform about the history of those modernities, no master narrative that explained them all. The factors that led to the modernizations of England, France, Germany, and the United States were contingently, not systemically, related.

Our quarrel with the dichotomies was that they misunderstood how social change occurred. Most change occurs by adaptation and incrementally. Particular features of tradition persist, though often modified, into modernity. Tradition is not an unbreakable package; nor is modernity. The components of each are capable of recombination. Individualism may not fully replace collective forms of sociability and action. And despite the depersonalization wrought by modernizing processes, in many societies group solidarities and other forms of institutionalized affect resist affective neutrality. Particular mixes of timing and circumstance continue to mark the differences among modern societies. Adaptation has enabled a plurality of modernities.

New Generations of Universalism

New generations of universalism have washed over modernization theory. Rational choice and globalization bring similar assumptions to analysis. In the social sciences the propensity to imagine that the world is the same always and everywhere is most prominent among economists. When George Stigler and Gary Becker argued in "De Gustibus non est Disputandum"[27] that there were not any theoretically significant differences of taste among human agents, they articulated a liberalism that erased variation. By the 1980s, formal theory was migrating out of economics into political science in the guise of rational choice. It brought with it the universalism embedded in microeconomics. It also brought with it microeconomics' methodological individualism. It seems that rational individuals are universally motivated to maximize utility. While it is possible to model collective behavior, altruism, and public goods, it is hard to separate formal modeling from the methodological individualism and utility maximization to which it has been long wedded. These assumptions make it hard for rational choice to credit the prevalence in many societies of collective motives and collective actors and to recognize the importance of culture in determining preferences.

Rational choice's disdain for the collective and the particular does more violence than did modernization theory to scholarship that aims to distinguish and characterize cultures and societies. Modernization theory at least had a differentiated vocabulary to characterize the other—a vocabulary that recognized alternative social and ideal attributes. Rational choice inquiry and explanation replaces alternative formulations of motive and identity with a uniform, singular concept of utility maximization. According to Amartya Sen,

> A person is given *one* preference ordering, and when the need arises this is supposed to reflect his interests, represent his welfare, summarize his idea of what should be done, and describe his actual choices and behaviour. Can one preference do all these things? . . . Economic theory has been much preoccupied with this rational fool decked in the glory of his *one* all-purpose preference ordering. To make room for the different concepts related to this behavior we need a more elaborate structure.[28]

Theoretically most relevant to my earlier discussion of Lockean liberalism's universalism is the propensity for formal theory to attribute motives rather than investigate them. The assumption that actors' preferences and choices are determined solely by calculations of rational self-interest is problematic not only because it ignores the role of sentiment, passion, and commitment in behavior,[29] not only because "rationality" itself is scarce rather than ubiquitous, but also because it is diversely defined by different cultures.[30]

Area Studies as Countermovement

Modernization theory has encountered a number of countermovements, including dependency theory, globalization theory, and postcolonial criticism. The most articulate of these is dependency theory, which introduced the idea of exploitation into its understanding of development, or rather lack thereof.[31] Modernization theory did not notice imperialism and colonialism as significant variables in the condition of underdevelopment. When it had noticed them, it was likely to read them as positive factors. Modernization theory was relatively impervious to the international distribution of power, while dependency theory starts with that distribution. While modernization theory read developing countries as having failed so far to achieve certain attributes needed for development ("fault of the victim"), dependency theory reads them as not developing because of the exploitative thrust of colonialism or the differential distribution of power ("fault of the victor"). Modernization theory was an ideological construction of

liberalism and the right; dependency theory of socialism and the left.[32]

Area studies was originally a bureaucratic construction, an artifact of the cold war. In 1958 the National Defense Education Act funded area studies because Congress thought the country needed language and area knowledge to carry on the struggle against Communism. Area studies provided a vehicle for "stockpiling area experts"—a metaphor whose military ring was not accidental. The NDEA was to provide the sort of knowledge that was spectacularly lacking in the run-up to 9/11, when command of Arabic and knowledge of Islamic culture and politics might have connected the famous dots. That the NDEA did not achieve its goal, to override America's allergy to foreign languages and its disinterest in foreign societies, is apparent from the fact that the United States can scarcely field a Pushtu speaker to ask local tribesmen whether they have seen Mr. bin Laden lately. That the allergy remains robust is apparent from the fact that the Democrat-sponsored National Security Language Act and the Homeland Security Education Act languish in committee without Republican backing.[33]

Area studies legislation suffers from a contradiction. The narrative used to get the National Defense Education Act passed was bellicose; language and area knowledge were needed to defend against enemies or to preempt Soviet initiatives in contested nations. But the scholars who entered area studies, with the possible exception of scholars of the Soviet Union, largely brought to the task a benign curiosity and eagerness to understand the other. Academic entrepreneurs were happy to ride the bellicose wave into bigger departmental budgets for esoteric specialties that would not ordinarily be federally funded. Clever deans, collaborating with professors of Sanskrit and Arabic and Chinese, built programs of study and provided for academic appointments and fellowships for enthusiastic scholars eager to spend time among the other. The contradiction between bellicose and peaceable goals persisted relatively undisturbed until the war in Iraq ripped the cover off one section of area scholars, those studying the Arab Middle East. They were revealed as having an unsuitably positive view of the peoples and cultures of an area increasingly suspect among media-watching, soldier-sending Americans. It turned out that students of areas brought to their task sentiments and passions as well as cool observation and interpretation. And that understanding often lead to sympathy.

Area scholars were perceived as a kind of shadow embassy for the countries they studied. National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, Henry Kissinger advocated the transfer of area specialist foreign service officers out of countries they knew best because, he said, they went native. He was right about that, but wrong about their ability to serve the nation. Their long-term engagement with countries and regions provided an essential corrective to a grand strategy driven by presidential concern for the four-year election cycle, and to the detachment of the executive branch from time, space, and circumstance.[34]

Many area scholars are educated in ways that help them to overcome their Lockean universalism, their axiomatic adherence to the liberal consensus, and their American unanimity. They are trained Burkeans, sensitive to the "ancient constitutions" of the other, and suspicious of projects that claim to improve the condition of the other on the American pattern. Think of the storybook figure of Graham Greene's expatriate Englishman in some palm-fringed land—faintly alienated from his native land, speaking Fiji, knowledgeable that the local grocer is a supplier of heroin and the local butcher's son a woodland guerrilla—and you have an exaggerated version of the area scholar defected to the land of the observed.

But area scholars remain a thin exceptional voice in America. Niall Ferguson has proposed that America accept its destiny as a global hegemon, but learn how to be an imperial power from the history of the British Empire.[35] Faced with a need to stay the course in foreign lands, America is handicapped, says Ferguson, by Attention Deficit Disorder.[36] It must learn to serve in the spirit of duty and to recognize its civilizing mission. I am not very enthusiastic about Ferguson's project, but if I were, I would share his despair about Americans fulfilling the role of the British hegemon. In so far as British hegemony worked, it did so because the British accepted and incorporated difference. Britain's feudal past and the royal and aristocratic traces it left in the British mentality and structure of governance enabled the empire to skillfully fit British racism into local patterns of asymmetry, to reward native subalterns by successfully inserting them into the British system of rank and order.[37] Such cultural suppleness is more difficult for Americans, whose Lockean tradition prevents them from gracefully using inequality to their advantage. Lawrence of Arabia, the double agent of British and Arabian culture, is the model of British imperial imagination; the "ugly American," loaded with liberal designs, is the model of the American incapacity to imagine the other.

I want to return to my argument that area studies was in some respects a countermovement against the prevailing mentality in the social sciences as well as among the American public. Some area scholars explicitly distanced themselves from comparative projects because they considered "comparison" a disciplinary practice contaminated by cultural hubris, a way to put down the other. Whether in political science, economics, or sociology, comparison was about what third-world countries did not have and the first-world did. Comparison in the guise of a scientific practice became a way to shame the other.

What many area studies scholars had in common with Burke was their respect for the dignity, worth, and meaning of the other. That respect could not be enacted except via recognition of the specificity of the other. Area scholars

learned to enter into the life of the other, under certain circumstances to "become" the other. They resisted the practice of subsuming the particular *sub specie aeternitatis,* or treating local thought and practice as instances of some abstract universal.

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This characterization of the area scholar would hardly have proved credible to the most notable of the power-shapes-knowledge proponents, the late Edward Said. At the time he published his best-known book, *Orientalism,* he believed, in Aijaz Ahmed's effective summary, that "[a] nyone who teaches, writes about, or researches the Orient . . . is an Orientalist . . . Orientalism is a Western style for dominating, restructuring and having authority over the 'Orient.'"[38] Despite the fact that Said nuanced his position in subsequent writings,[39] this critique became common among postcolonial writers, both those who lived in the colony and who lived outside it.

Postcolonial theory bears a complex relationship to area studies. Postcolonial theorists often combine the critical edge of Marxist vocabulary with a respect for cultural determinants that Marx would have disdained. They are as likely to be found in English or comparative literature departments as in the social sciences. Postcolonial scholars disrespect and transgress boundaries. They are "post" colonial in that they attack the justifying prose of imperial and para-imperial authors—and often of all authors not of the colony. Heirs of Foucault and Said, they lament the corruption of power and the fatal intermeshing of power and knowledge. Some see area scholars, especially American area scholars, as the running dogs of corporate exploitation or the oppressive state. Some, however, see them as the perspicacious eyes of a postcolonial generation, willing to pay cultural reparations for the offenses of the old Europe and to counter the cultural imperviousness of a new United States.[40]

The language I used above (dignity, respect) suggests that what is at stake is not just an abstract methodological question, but rather a worldview and commitment. This is terrain on which area scholars and epistemological universalists meet and quarrel. Epistemological disputes in contemporary social sciences remind us that scholars invest their chosen modes of inquiry with a moral aura. At its extreme, area scholars regard any methodology that does not recognize specificity and context as immoral; they condemn as the gas pump strategy of research scholarship that takes a purely utilitarian stance toward area knowledge, exploiting it as the "raw material" of hypothesis testing. [41] Area scholars see the utilitarian researcher as alienated from the means of production.

Yet area scholarship has itself been under attack for inattention to comparative approaches that can generate general theories, especially theories of causality. Hypothesis testers castigate area scholarship for being lost in pointless exchanges about incommensurability, truths of my village versus the truths of yours, exchanges that yield anecdotal specificity but do not produce explanations. The standard area studies defense—that the researcher is exposing the unique qualities of the subject area—is countered by the assertion that even uniqueness depends on comparison.

Louis Hartz considers this issue in relation to his own, American, version of area studies. He damns American historians for hiding their insularity behind the claim of exceptionalism. Comparisons with Europe are not "to deny our national uniqueness, one of the reasons curiously given for studying America alone, but actually to affirm it. How can we know the uniqueness of anything except by contrasting it with something that is not unique."[42]

Area studies is under attack too from another generation of universalists—the globalists, many of whom see regional worlds converging on a single pattern. Some see area approaches as freezing existing regional and national identities when what matters is that those identities are now being transformed by global processes. Area studies, they say, emphasizes "relatively immobile aggregates of traits, with more or less durable historical boundaries and with a unity composed of more or less enduring properties." Such static aggregates must yield to the new mobility, which destabilizes the old national and regional objects of research, and focus on the new markers of fluidity: "trade, travel, pilgrimage, warfare, proselytization, colonization, exile and the like."[43] The recent vogue in globalization studies is welcome in so far as it highlights the transnational worlds that state-centric political science and some area scholarship have neglected. But globalization studies often fail to confront the society and politics of the other on the presumption that homogenizing global processes will make "local" knowledge irrelevant. Not yet. Those civilizational and cultural entities that area scholars examine are not going to lose their distinctiveness even when the natives wear jeans, drink Coke, watch television, and surf the Web.[44]

Situated Knowledge

If modernization theory and other universalist schemes, such as rational choice and globalization studies, use concepts and categories fashioned out of the Anglo-American

experience and deny difference by not recognizing the autonomy, authenticity, and agency of the other, what epistemology is likely to do so? The alternative to universal knowledge is situated knowledge. Situated knowledge recognizes time, place, and circumstance, and assumes that individuals and their capacities are marked by them. It proceeds from specificities and works upward to comparative generalizations, rather than downward from a priori assumptions. Theory construction for situated knowledge takes into account local knowledge and practice—how denizens perceive and interpret their world. Theory constructed from below produces different futures than theory constructed from above.

We may characterize situated knowledge by the way it makes projections about the future. Universalistic theories project a single history common to mankind, a common developmental path along which all humans will tread. Situated knowledge, by contrast, projects futures by reference to where a culture/society/polity is coming from. Its specificities dictate the next step. When Marx noted that men make their own history, but not any history they choose, he signaled the limits on historical agency. Those limits had for the most part to do with material determinants. The limits on agency that apply to situated knowledge are of a Burkean sort; they are limits posed by a country's "ancient constitution," that is, the sociopolitical patterns that become conventional. Marx shares modernization theory's projection of a single history for mankind. The way in which Burke thought of historical agency, positing that futures grow out of pasts, is compatible with multiple histories via multiple paths.

We can also characterize situated knowledge by the modes of inquiry it favors. Causality and meaning are at the center of two important contrasting modes of inquiry. Causality, or at least regularity—what causes what or what goes with what—calls for empirical knowledge. Meaning—how humans perceive and understand the world—calls for interpretation. If I wink, do I intend to let you in on a conspiracy? Am I trying to seduce you? Have I got sand in my eye? Do I have a tic? Meaning structures are important; simple facts do not speak for themselves.

Conceding that both empirical and interpretativist approaches are necessary for any inquiry, situated knowledge—knowledge marked by place, time, and circumstance—relies on the excavation of meaning. It is in the interest of a conversionary project—and much modernization theory, as well as its generational successors, was a conversionary project—*not* to attend sympathetically to alternative worldviews. Situated knowledge, less animated by a conversionary project, is committed to the validity and significance of local knowledge—to the way peoples understand their histories, social processes, and worldviews. Much of the work of area studies consists of interpreting these understandings. Situated knowledge thus makes visible and credible a variety of forms of life.

Conclusion

The American "impulse to impose Locke everywhere" on a world presumed to be eagerly waiting to receive it has by no means expired. It becomes more articulate as America moves gropingly, sometimes inadvertently and sometimes by design, toward becoming an empire. "The United States has adopted a new policy, a forward strategy of freedom in the Middle East," President Bush told his audience at the National Endowment for Democracy in November 2003. "The advance of freedom is the calling of our time; it is the calling of our country. From the Fourteen Points [Wilson] to the Four Freedoms [Roosevelt] to the Speech at Westminster [Reagan] America has put our power at the service of principle. We believe that liberty is the design of nature; we believe liberty is the direction of history."[45] The question is, will America's encounter with the other in the Middle East and elsewhere give Americans that "sense of relativity," that "spark of philosophy," that will enable them to recognize and negotiate with the unfamiliar and the strange it finds in other peoples and polities? Or will it merely intensify, as it often has, a liberal absolutism indifferent to difference?

Notes

1 Lloyd Rudolph's commentary contributed substantially to the substance and style of this article.
2 Rudolph and Rudolph 1958.
3 Almond 1970, 12.
4 Ibid., 11.
5 Rudolph and Rudolph 1967, 7.
6 Nandy 1983. "This colonialism colonizes minds in addition to bodies and it releases forces within the colonized societies to alter their cultural priorities once for all. In this process, it helps generalize the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity to a psychological category. The West is now everywhere, within the West and outside; in structures and in minds" (p. xi).
7 Power "is both much more and much less than ideology. It is the production of effective instruments for the formation and accumulation of knowledge—methods of observation, techniques of registration, procedures for investigation and research, apparatuses of control." Foucault 1980, 102.
8 Hartz 1955.
9 Ibid., 10.
10 Ibid, frontispiece.
11 Ibid., 14.
12 Ibid., 13.
13 Ibid., 286.
14 Ibid., 14.
15 Mehta 1999.
16 Ibid., 31.
17 Mill 1975, 15–16, cited in Mehta 1999, 70.

18 Mehta 1999, 160–61.
19 Laski 1936, 129.
20 Ibid., 21.
21 Ibid., 25.
22 Ibid., 22.
23 Harvard Faculty Committee Report 1954, 114. For a discussion of such projects see also Tilly 1984.
24 Parsons and Shils 1951, 77.
25 Ibid., 14.
26 Almond 1970, 276.
27 Stigler and Becker 1977.
28 Sen 1982, 99.
29 For a discussion of the effect of sentiment and passion on rationality assumptions see Elster 2000, 92.
30 Etzioni 1988, Chapter 8.
31 Frank (1966), Cardoso and Falleto (1979), and Amin (1980) were some of the influential players.
32 For a brief comment on the demise of dependency theory, see Velasco 2002.
33 Freedman 2004.
34 For an elaboration of this argument and its effects on U.S. foreign policy, see Rudolph and Rudolph 1980, 23–25.
35 Ferguson 2002.
36 Ferguson 2004.
37 For an overblown version of how the British used hierarchy and theater to govern the empire, see Cannadine 2001.
38 Said 1978; Ahmed 1991, 141–42.
39 "The first thing to be done now is more or less to jettison simple causality . . . We must not admit any notion, for instance, that proposes to show that Wordsworth, Austen, or Coleridge, because they wrote before 1857 actually caused the establishment of formal British governmental rule over India after 1857." Said 1994, 81. Instead, Said moves to a more Foucauldian, "capillary" view of power and knowledge.
40 For a report that well reflects some of the ambivalence of postcolonial critics, see Prashad 2003.
41 For a discussion of some of the issues see Lin, Pasquino, and Tavares 1998, 6–12.
42 Hartz 1955, 4.
43 The Globalization Project, University of Chicago 1997, 1.
44 For one assessment of the persistence among change observed 40 years later, see Geertz 1995.
45 The White House 2003.

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