

Amongst 'Our Selves'

A colonial encounter in Canadian academia

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Approaches to experience

Interpretative or reflexive anthropology has raised important questions about 'the research process': about the nature of subjectivity in the doing of fieldwork and in the production of ethnographies. As a result, a central aim of the ethnographic research process is now to 'attempt different textual strategies to convey . . . more complex understandings of their subjects' experience' (Marcus and Fischer,

1986: 43). This effort is premised on the idea that 'every version of an "other," wherever found, is also the construction of a "self," and the making of ethnographic texts . . . has always involved a process of "self-fashioning"' (Clifford, 1986: 23-4). Thus, 'interpretative anthropology . . . operates on two levels simultaneously: it provides accounts of other worlds from the inside' while it simultaneously 'reflects about the epistemological groundings of such accounts' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 26).

These concerns with 'the production of anthropological knowledge' (Rabinow, 1985: 5) and with 'anthropology as a hermeneutic enterprise' (Keesing, 1987: 161) are not without their critics. Rabinow has argued that 'ethnography is also a set of social and historical practices located in institutions' (1985: 9), one of the most important being 'the academic community' (1986: 252). Keesing has argued cogently that 'cultures are webs of mystification as well as signification' (1987: 161).

The concerns and insights of reflexive anthropology enable me to present here an 'ethnography of experience' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 43), an experience which I see as a 'colonial encounter' within the Canadian academy. My concern is to describe the nature of subjectivity in the inevitable 'self-other relationship' and to provide, therefore, a 'cultural critique' on 'issues at home' (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 137).

At the same time, I have found that to be reflexive in a 'colonial situation' requires that I incorporate the critic's views, particularly Keesing's idea that knowledge is '*distributed and controlled*' (1987: 161). In addition, the colonial character of my ethnographic experience has led me back to an older generation, to Fanon (1967) and Memmi (1965) who described so well the dialectical relationship between colonizer and colonized. It is an approach which, in some ways, is analogous to the reflexive idea of 'intersubjective sharing' between ethnographer and subject (Marcus and Fischer, 1986: 97).¹ It also fits Rabinow's suggestion, following Foucault, that in addition to notions of exploitation and domination ('who controls whom'), power also includes 'subjection', that is:

. . . that aspect of a field of power farthest removed from the direct application of force. That dimension of power is where the identity of individuals and groups is at stake, and where order in its broadest meaning is taking form. This is the realm in which culture and power are most closely intertwined (1986: 260).

The 'ethnography' of this paper derives from an experience in which I was, simultaneously, 'anthropologist' and 'native', self and other, ethnographer and subject. I argue that this simultaneity emerged out of a

process of subjection and colonization, and that the resulting juxtaposition of my different subjectivities was crucial both for the process and for my insights.² I present this ethnography through a 'textual strategy' which delineates a context and a discourse. My general aim is a cultural critique of 'our selves' in the academy.

The context

In the fall of 1988, a Department of Anthropology in a Canadian University was given a new tenure-stream, assistant professor's position. Its University required that the Recruitment Committee consist of a Dean's representative from the Faculty of Arts and Science, three tenured members of the Anthropology Department and a tenured anthropologist from another university. The function of the Recruitment Committee was to review applications and to prepare a shortlist of four candidates who then would be interviewed by the Department as a whole. From this short-list, the appointment would be made.

The Department placed ads in the *Bulletin* of the Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT), in *University Affairs* and in the *Newsletter* of the American Anthropological Association (AAA). The ads stated that the Department was seeking 'specialists' in reflexive or interpretative anthropology and/or in development anthropology. The ads in the Canadian journals also stated that 'this ad is directed to Canadian citizens and permanent residents'.³

I was asked to serve as the External Member of the Recruitment Committee. I was to spend two days at the University in March of 1989. On the first day, I was to review the applicants' files; on the second day, I was to take part in the deliberations of the Committee.

I arrived at the University and was taken immediately to lunch by several anthropologists. It was then that I learned who also was on the Recruitment Committee when someone handed me a list of its members. Glancing quickly at it, I was rather pleased to see that I knew them all fairly well—some more intimately than others, of course—as former fellow students, as colleagues and as professional acquaintances. All were tenured and all were at least in their early forties.

I was told over lunch, several times in fact, that people were very concerned 'to find the best possible candidate for our department'. Hittings were few and far between, they said, and they did not want 'to waste' an appointment. I also learned over lunch that 50 percent of Department members were women and, although it was never explicitly stated, I received the message that affirmative action on gender was not expected. I also was told that applicants'

files had been open to all members of the Anthropology Department and that most 'had looked them over'. Two of my lunch companions went on to inform me that the Canadian applications were, as one of them said, 'abysmal'. They said that the Chair of the Recruitment Committee had already seen the Dean of the Faculty about this and had asked about the possibility of hiring an American. Apparently, the Dean had agreed—if this was what the Department decided to do.

Very soon after, when on my own in an office where I was to review the files, I looked over the Committee list and vaguely observed that I was the only one who was born, trained, and a professional entirely in Canada. The Dean's representative was a sociologist with much Third World experience—some of it in my own area. He was American born and educated, but now was a naturalized Canadian. Of the three anthropologists, one was American born and trained and, as I knew from the grapevine, she had remained an American citizen. One was English born, American trained, and a Canadian citizen. I knew that he had occasionally, and jokingly, expressed pride at being his own personal cross-cultural phenomenon. The last member was Canadian born and American trained; we had been undergraduates together.

With the published ad in front of me for reference, I tackled the candidates' files. They were organized into two boxes. One contained 27 applications from Canadians or landed immigrants. The other contained 51 applications: one was from Australia, one from Holland, one from England and 48 were from the United States.

As I worked through the Canadian box, I became increasingly surprised to find that I liked quite a few of the files. Indeed, in the light of the lunchtime conversation, I was rather surprised to pinpoint seven Canadian candidates who looked 'very good'. Somewhat guiltily, given the size of my honorarium, I decided then that it was pointless to read the American applications. In any case, I had been told at lunch that past Recruitment Committees had not bothered with the non-Canadians.

It was in this context that the Recruitment Committee met in order 'to find the best possible person'. Department members had been very explicit in telling me this, and I believe that it was a generally held viewpoint and a sincere one. Thus, by the time of the Committee meeting, everyone—including myself—subscribed to this idea. I also believe that my Committee colleagues remained genuinely committed to it throughout the meeting.

We sat around a table, with the boxes in the middle, our personal notes by our sides. What ensued is what I 'heard' and 'constructed' out of my recollections of the meeting the next day—after I had arrived back home.

I took no notes during the meeting. Therefore, the discourse below is indeed 'subjective'. It is not a record of what occurred, nor is it intended to be. It is a record of what I wrote down later about what I experienced.

The discourse

The discourse began as one which involved all of us equally as Committee members in charge of finding 'the best candidates'. It began as a discourse of 'we-ness'.

- Chair: Let's look at the Canadian files. Adams' is first.
 DT: He's not really reflexive.
 AM: He's not very interesting you mean. I agree.
 CC: It's a thin file.
 Chair: Okay. Scratch him. Allen.
 AM: He does ethno-history. We're not looking for that.
 Me: He also does native policy though. That might be useful from the development perspective. It's one of the areas you advertised.
 DT: But he doesn't have much else.
 Chair: We really need a reflexive type.
 Me: I see. Okay.
 Chair: Banks?
 AM: Another ethnicity person. Someone else who'll want to teach the ethnicity course. God knows we have enough problems with that already. We can't have too much overlap.
 DT: We really have problems with that.
 Me: But she also says that she does symbolic systems and ideology.
 Chair: That's just the old stuff. We're not looking for that.
 CC: You know the field best.
 Chair: Donaldson is next.
 AM: She's a real pain. She did an article for me; god was it awful! It took weeks to sort out. She's totally disorganized and she can't write. But, boy, does she send nasty letters.
 Me: Sounds pretty gruesome.
 CC: Every department should have one.
 DT: Let's move on. Finkel.
 Me: We don't need his areas.
 AM: Look, I know he does agrarian, and I know you people already cover that area. But there's very few people around who do Canadian rural stuff and political economy. And, he looks good. This could be a chance to get a good person.
 CC: That's not what our ad said.
 AM: He overlaps too much anyway.
 DT: Let's get on with it.

- Chair: A course on Canadian farmers is not a burning need here, Marilyn. Hart?
- DT: She's a real weirdo. She belongs to some transcendental group and floats around wearing robes and reciting mantras.
- Me: How do you know? I mean, her work does look like something you're looking for.
- DT: She's nuts. We don't need people like that.
- CC: I agree. Why hire trouble.
- Me: You're probably right.

The 'we-ness' of the committee began to dissolve for me—as I slowly became aware that I was simultaneously engaging in another discourse within myself. This was a silent, private commentary on the public discourse as it progressed and, importantly, as I took part in it. This dissolution for me from we-ness to dual-ness, however, did not signal an 'objective' split between myself and the other members of the committee. Rather, it signalled a dissolution of my self—of my identity—into two selves. On the one hand, I remained an anthropologist on a recruitment committee which was looking for the 'best person' for a job. Throughout the public discourse which followed, I took part in this search with my 'self' as anthropologist. This 'self' I signify below as 'Me/self'. On the other hand, with the dismissal of the Canadian ethnographer and ethnography, I realized with a start that three of the seven Canadian candidates on my shortlist had been summarily removed from consideration. Through 'Me/other' I took part in a private commentary and discourse.

- Me/other: *There must be two sides to this mantra story. I wonder what it is. But if Hart's as freaky as she says. . . . They are really running through these Canadians. Three of my seven are gone. There's something going on here. A hidden agenda? What? Whose?*
- AM: We have enough problems without nuts. Let's move on. Jameson.
- Chair: He hasn't done any teaching.
- CC: But he's been doing consulting work in development for years. I've heard you people complain that you're not applied enough and not market-oriented enough. And you have advertised for an applied person.
- Chair: He's not an academic.
- Me/self: You know that there've been no academic jobs for people. He's probably been making do for years, waiting. And he's a whiz on applied. At least he looks it.
- AM: He has no publications.
- DT: And no teaching.
- Me/self: Yeah, well—he's certainly not an academic. You're right.

- Me/other: *But what was this guy supposed to do for the last ten years? Why am I holding this against him?*
- Chair: Kennedy.
- DT: He gave a terrible paper at the CES. I also heard that he's not that good.
- Me/other: *On paper, he was my first choice. What is going on here?*
- Me/self: How can you say that? We have no documentation of that.
- DT: He really is a twit.
- Me/self: I really would like you to explain.
- DT: Look, his degree is from Alberta.
- Me/self: So?
- AM: C'mon. Alberta?
- Me/other: *Well, it's true. Alberta isn't Berkeley.*
- Me/self: Go on.
- DT: *The paper was terrible. It was awful.*
- Me/other: *What can I say? I didn't hear it. But I think I had better say something. But what?*
- Chair: Let's move on. Maine. She is a royal pain. She came to see me. We had a chat. She's very narrow in her interests. She couldn't possibly teach an Intro course.
- Me/self: She has a very good reference from a John Smith.
- CC: Who's he?
- AM: Never heard of him.
- Me/self: Well, I don't know him either. It's from New Brunswick. Not exactly the centre of the world.
- DT: Forget it.
- Me/other: *I have only one Canadian left on my list. I must say something.*
- Me/self: You know, I think that we may be penalizing Canadian candidates because we know them or we know people who know them. They're in our network, so we hear about their kinks.
- Chair: So? We're only discussing what we know. Let's move on.
- Me/other: *Then what else could be happening here? Think. Don't get upset. You're a guest here.*
- Chair: Niven.
- AM: Too much overlap. Another one on gender relations.
- Me/self: But he must be okay. You've had him teaching part-time here for the last three years. And he looks good on paper. He's got a book out.
- Chair: But we don't need his areas.
- Me/self: I understand. But look, we've really eliminated most of the Canadians. Since there's no one in reflexive, why don't we look again at the applied and development people?
- Chair: There's no one there.
- CC: Nothing.
- Me/other: *God, they've got a point!*

- Me/self: Then, maybe you should consider changing the areas. Why not get a duplication? Why not firm up what you already do well?
- DT: We've got to have a reflexive person. That's where it's at . . .
- CC: . . . and we're desperate.
- Chair: And that's what we've advertised.
- AM: Interpretative anthropology is really important . . .
- Me/other: *They're right!*
- DT: . . . and we need someone to do it.
- Me/self: Look, if your students want the reflexive stuff, and I know that ours are also asking for it, well, they can go to Simon Fraser. Or McGill.
- AM: Yeah, Marilyn. But they're just a bunch of Americans. So what have you gained?
- I suddenly realized that I had become defined by my colleagues as an opposition working against the public weal. 'I' was against 'them'. As I was disengaged from, and was no longer part of, the 'us/we', and as 'I' rebelled' against 'them', I experienced my two selves in a different way: what I said and what I thought became the same. Yet, it is crucial to recognize that 'they' controlled the language and agenda of this phase of the discourse; and their central metaphor was 'Canadian [incompetent] versus American [competent]'. 'I' communicated using 'their' metaphor.
- I: There is a Canadian anthropology. I know there is. I'm just not sure how to describe it. Maybe it's being expressed in the interests of these applicants?
- Chair: No it's not. There's nothing there.
- CC: Absolutely nothing. It's dismal.
- I: There has to be something! It's just that we've just dismissed them all. I know that Alberta isn't Berkeley, and that we don't know some of their referees and that they have these personal kinks. But that's only because we know them personally.
- AM: We know the Americans too.
- I: You can't know them. How can you compare the size of the networks?
- DT: What does it matter? The Canadians are second-rate.
- I: Well, what if you re-advertised and included people without their PhDs yet? Most departments could do with some young blood.
- Chair: We want a really top person. Anyway, it's too late.
- I: Look, an American probably won't stay. They have no commitment to Canada. They move on as soon as they can and you could lose the position.
- AM: How do you know that?
- I: I suppose I don't really.

- Chair: Let's move on to the American files.
- I: I don't think this Committee can do that. It has not been done before. There's no precedent.
- Chair: It has been done.
- I: That's not what I've been told.
- Chair: [Turning to AM] When we hired you, you were the best of both.
- I: You advertised for a Canadian.
- Chair: The ad only said that they would be given priority.
- I: Okay, okay. But you only advertised in journals where Canadians were likely to see it. You didn't advertise in England or in Scandinavia. If you're going to hire a foreigner, don't you want to hire the best one? You have to advertise for non-Canadians. You shouldn't hire an American just by default.
- Chair: We can't advertise everywhere. It's too expensive.
- AM: In any case, if someone is interested in a job in North America, they'd read the *Triple A Newsletter*.
- I: This may surprise you, but the United States isn't the centre of the world for everyone. British anthropologists don't read the *Triple A Newsletter*. None that I know anyway.
- DT: That's their problem.
- Chair: Let's get on with this.
- I: Won't there be problems with immigration if you try to hire an American?
- Chair: That's not true any longer with Free Trade. That's what I'm told. So let's move on.
- I had exhausted all possible arguments. Several had been contrived in any case and all had been seen as obstructionist. I had abused the hospitality of colleagues and I had intruded far more on the hiring process than I ought to have done as an external. The Committee moved on to the American files. I contributed nothing to the subsequent discussion. Amongst the comments which I heard were:
- DT: He gave a fantastic paper at the 'Triple A'.
- CC: She's from Chicago too.
- Chair: A letter from Geertz!
- AM: Looks terrific. Amazing this reflexive stuff. Just what we're looking for. . . .
- The Committee's shortlist contained three Americans and one Canadian.
- The experience**
- I spent a great deal of time the next day thinking over what had happened. I had entered the meeting with a shortlist of 'interesting'

Canadian-born and, in some cases, Canadian-trained candidates who fitted a given job description. I then had colluded in their dismissal because they were second-rate or redundant. I had begun with the assumption that I was academically competent to assess anthropologists and to define my profession. By the end of the meeting, I was unable to do either. I had come to the meeting as 'a Canadian'. I left it as an angry, anti-American.

Whatever had happened had touched my sense of person, profession and country. What was it?

The wisdom of the elders

Two decades ago, doing doctoral fieldwork in Guyana, I found that the least hospitable reception emanated from black, foreign-educated academics. The more vocal provided a not-unexpected reason: I was an agent of imperialism. I had no right to be there and no right to study their society. I could never hope to understand them in any case.

I found hospitality elsewhere and a fieldwork site a good distance away. I also found an explanation for that experience in the work of Fanon and Memmi. Was it not the period of 'revolt' in Guyana, when the colonized rebelled against the colonizer's definition of their selves by incorporating the dialectical opposite of the colonial definition? For a late 1960s doctoral student, Fanon and Memmi made the situation intelligible. But I always resented that I had been excluded—experientially, intellectually and personally.

Something about the Recruitment Committee meeting resonated with this earlier colonial encounter. As I went over, again and again, the discourse and as I slowly removed such artifacts as our concern for excellence and our concern with not duplicating areas, a familiar process emerged. It was the dialectic which creates two mutually dependent portraits—that of the colonizer and that of the colonized.

From the beginning of the meeting/discourse, my colleagues and I ('we') 'knew' five essential 'facts'. First, anthropology in Canadian universities is second-rate. (Was it not 'self-evident' that Alberta was no Berkeley and that Victoria was no Chicago?) Second, and as a result, references from anthropologists in Canadian departments are of questionable utility. (No one had 'heard' of John Smith but everyone had heard of Clifford Geertz.) Third, more reliable, therefore, than Canadian referees must be our own insiders' 'knowledge' of the particular candidates. (Did she not give a terrible paper? Is he not a pain?) Fourth, as a result of this knowledge, we 'discovered' through our discourse—and now 'knew' also—that most

young Canadian applicants suffer from personal and academic problems. (Young anthropologists who write nasty letters or who recite mantras surely will make poor colleagues. Apparently, Americans don't do such things and thereby make better colleagues.) Finally, the research interests of these young, Canadian anthropologists turned out not to be what anthropology 'is'. The concerns of the Canadian applicants fell heavily, in varying combinations, into the areas of political economy, ethnicity, native policy, ideological systems, gender relations and work. Clearly they did not know, or had not yet discovered, that anthropology today is what the American applicants were doing—namely, reflexive and interpretative modes.

We, the Committee, began our discourse with the premiss of the colonized: things Canadian were inferior. Our aim was to hire someone who was top-class. By definition, such a person could not be one of our inferior selves. Where then should such a person come from? Obviously from our superiors, from the colonizing other, from the United States. Only I dissented from the logic of this dialectic. However, it is crucial to recognize that I did so not because I departed from its premisses: I too 'knew', for example, that Alberta was not Berkeley. I dissented because it seemed inconceivable to me that in 1989 we could hire anyone but a Canadian. I was simply willing to settle for second-best—for someone like 'ourselves'.

It was this dimension, this double-bind, which gave the discourse its logic.⁵ I was the only Committee member who was committed to hiring a Canadian. Yet, I believed that Canadians were inferior, that 'corridor talk' was neutral and apolitical, and that American anthropology was Anthropology. During the meeting, my self had to split. I became a 'self' ('me/self') who agreed to the above five premisses at the same time that I became an 'other' ('me/other') who held on to the idea of hiring a Canadian and who engaged, therefore, in a silent, confused and uneasy commentary. When the oppositional context became explicit, however, and when the colonizer was given an identity as 'America', then I could rebel. This meant that I could recombine my two selves into an 'I': an anti-American whose single weapon was to enunciate, over and over, a counter-position which could never be acceptable to my colonized, subjected colleagues on the Committee.

A period of rebellion, according to Memmi and Fanon, may be followed by true revolution. It requires that the colonized 'rise above' their 'colonized being' and 'free' themselves by ceasing to define themselves 'through the categories of colonizers' (Memmi, 1965: 151–2). But where does one find a new self?

The day after the Committee meeting, as I thought about and recorded the discourse, I recalled the wisdom of another elder, my father. Amongst his numerous sayings, relevant to most occasions, was one which he used when confronted by arrogant medical doctors. 'You should always remember, Marilyn', he would say, 'that 50 percent of the doctors graduated in the bottom half of their class.'

Presumably, what is true for medical doctors is also true for job applicants with doctorates in anthropology.

I no longer accept that a Canadian student from a Canadian university is a priori less able than an American. I no longer expect students from Canadian universities to have references from American big names. I have turned gossip and 'corridor talk' into discourse (Rabinow, 1985: 11) and I know that discourse can be ideological mystification (Keesing, 1987). Therefore, I am able to read files, make assessments and decide, after meeting a candidate, if he or she is a pain. Most importantly, and this is the crux, I no longer will allow either colonizing Americans or colonized Canadians to define the content and parameters of my profession. The research interests of my colleagues, and those of the Canadians who applied for that job, *constitute* and *must comprise* Canadian Anthropology. Surely it cannot be accidental that Canadian anthropologists, in the periphery of an empire, are concerned with the political-economic trajectory of power and exploitation in its various forms. Surely it cannot be accidental that it has been primarily anthropologists from the American metropolises who find it sufficient and necessary to explore the cultural circularity of 'personal others' and 'intersubjective sharing'.

From the past into the future

I have used the tools and insights from reflexive anthropology, its critics and the Marxist literature on the construction of the colonial 'personhood'. In this eclectic approach, I find commonalities with more general approaches to the reproduction of cultural hegemony as reviewed, for example, in Rebel (1989). Yet, I also find important links to more explicitly activist approaches, as for example, in Caplan's use 'of feminist anthropology . . . to argue that we can be both reflexive and political, that in fact, a feminist anthropology' denies the split between epistemology and politics' (1988: 10). In following Caplan, therefore, I suggest that the 'ethnography' which I experienced is neither personally idiosyncratic nor politically neutral.

Just after the passage of Free Trade legislation early in 1989, a major Canadian newspaper printed a four-column article with the headline: 'Who

should teach in universities? Pressure grows to scrap Canadians-first hiring rule.' The article noted that 'the fight is in full swing' as 'university administrators say they're only interested in the best teachers' but as 'university professors insist that . . . "the best" is too often defined as being from outside—generally the United States' (31 January 1989).

In this ethnography, I have aimed not simply to provide a reflexive analysis of colonial personhood and cultural hegemony. I have aimed also to provide a weapon for the fight.

NOTES

1. Not everyone would agree with this analogy. A premiss of some of the reflexive writers is that intersubjective sharing removes the asymmetry between self/anthropologist and other/native in fieldwork and writing. Moreover, whereas the reflexive approach postulates an endless hermeneutic circle of individual selves, Fanon and Memmi argue for a revolutionary rupture of the collective relationship by the colonized. Yet, I would argue that an analogy may hold on two levels. First, the dialectical quality of the relationship between anthropologist-native and colonizer-colonized is certainly similar. Second, it has been argued that the colonial nature (that is, the asymmetry) of the anthropologist-native interaction can be removed only with difficulty (Dwyer, 1982) if at all (Asad, 1986). If one accepts the the premiss of inevitable asymmetry, then the anthropologist-native relationship may be analogous to the colonizer-colonized relationship.
2. Despite the interesting analytical potential provided by such a situation, it is relatively unexplored in the literature to date. The position which has been described for feminist anthropologists is the closest analogy, for then the 'person' is simultaneously self/anthropologist/colonizer and other(female)/native/colonized (for example, Strathern, 1987).
3. I only learned later that this wording was required by the Senate of this particular University. I also learned later that for ads in foreign newspapers, if local legislation required it, then the phrase could be amended to: 'Priority will be given to Canadian citizens and permanent residents of Canada'. It was this amended wording which the Department had submitted to the AAA Newsletter—even though the more stringent description could have been used.
4. Following anthropological convention, all names of persons and institutions are pseudonyms.
5. Using Baleson's idea of the double-bind, Rebel suggests that cultural hegemony 'occurs . . . when socially engaged selves, already inherently split and de-centered . . . have to act in order to hold together *within* themselves a 'society' that has split and turned against itself in irreconcilable and mutually inconstructable social relations' (1989: 129).

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