Does Theory Travel?  
Area Studies and Cultural Studies

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The crisis in Area Studies is the subject of much recent debate.¹ But what this crisis is, how to define its causes, and where to situate solutions are more often assumed than considered. I want to suggest that the crisis has at least three facets. The first and most apparent manifestation of the crisis is economic: funders are increasingly reluctant to provide money for Area Studies endeavors—especially when the area in question appears to have little economic importance for the great powers, and Africa certainly fits that definition. Universities are increasingly reluctant to support Area Studies programs. University administrators seek to rationalize International and Area Studies by pursuing interdisciplinary ventures, such as Global Studies. In some university settings, departments have used the crisis in Area Studies to reassert their hold on graduate education by setting up barriers to students who should have courses on geography, culture, politics, and economy, and who should do some work in more than one discipline.

The second facet of the crisis in Area Studies is simultaneously conceptual and psychological. I think of it as a crisis of self-confidence in which guiding assumptions about the definitions of the units of analysis, such as cultures and regions, are increasingly deemed to be wrong or irrelevant to social processes such as migration or cultural flows—which are perceived to be more important in some determining sense than the local and geographically restricted phenomena that are the conventional subjects of Area Studies. As a result, social and cultural phenomena that have been traditionally documented and analyzed by Area Studies specialists are considered to be irrelevant for understanding today’s world.

The third aspect of the current crisis is political: debates over the nature and future of Area Studies or the shape of Global Studies provide an arena for contesting values and definitions about what is significant to experience and examine and, by implication, what the academy should promote. I was recently asked to comment on a project for a major endowment to be raised under the rubric of "global education." The donor is restricting its scope to Europe and Japan, on the grounds that the dynamic economies of these regions make their culture and society
fit topics for inclusion in the curriculum. The consequence of such initiatives is the construction of a political economy that determines how resources are allocated within the university and how hierarchies of culture and society are organized on a global basis. This last element—in particular, the political process through which values are organized and images of self and other are produced—makes Cultural Studies an important body of literature that can explain some of the problems in Area Studies.

Cultural Studies is an interdisciplinary movement that challenges the ways in which the disciplines have divided up the world. Much of the work done within the orbit of Cultural Studies focuses on the intersection of culture and politics. By refusing to draw the customary distinctions between canonical works of art and popular culture, it raises questions about implied hierarchies in the study of culture or the exclusion of the cultural element in studies of power. When Cultural Studies focuses on international or cross-cultural issues, it tends to describe hybridized art forms or cultural flows. Studies of the cultures and histories of peoples living on the African continent have not figured prominently in Cultural Studies, but the African diaspora has been a major topic. Because African topics are so marginalized in the humanities and in many of the social sciences, such as economics, Cultural Studies would appear to be a friend of the defenders of Area Studies.

Issues narrowly connected to politics and economy, however, tend to dominate the debate about the crisis in Area Studies and about the implications of the crisis for Africanists. In the previous issue of *Africa Today*, for example, problems of economic development, democratization, and political stability were the primary concerns of the authors. Yet there was an epistemological dimension underlying the overt issues discussed. The papers focused on the social sciences and examined the crisis, real or imagined, along two axes. The first distinguished between models that stress context, culture, and history and those that seek universalizing explanations—a familiar theme, as a number of papers observed. The opposed camps of Area Studies specialists and the confident advocates of modernization theory are but an early form of today’s debate. Now we come to battle clothed in methodology, advocating science in the face of interpretation, or arguing for specificity in the face of universal generalizations. I once thought that these methodological debates had been resolved before World War I, by Max Weber among others. When it comes to the social sciences, Marx was right. History does repeat itself, first as tragedy, then as farce—or, as Robert Bates says, “caricature.”

The other axis is, of course, the global-local debate, which also has been a high-priority item for the funders. This debate is well represented on the social science side of the continuum, where methodology is not as
contested as the specialization and location of cause and effect. But even
the softer social sciences and the humanities have advocates of global-
ization. Angelique Haugerud's introduction to the previous issue cites a
reviewer of Bates's article, who points out that in disciplines such as
anthropology and history, the move away from Area Studies is "not a
move to 'social scientific' approaches." The reference here may be to
Cultural Studies, which tends not to deal with texts or peasants but to
focus on contemporary arts, hybridity, marginality, and resistance.

In what follows I examine the crisis in Area Studies as it is perceived
from a Cultural Studies point of view. I ask whether Cultural Studies can
be used in non-Western contexts, and I describe some of the Third World
scholarship that offers an alternative to Cultural Studies.

The Crisis in Area Studies

The study of literature, the arts, religions, social organization, and culture
has been even more a staple of Area Studies than have politics and eco-
nomics. The arts and the humanities disciplines that study the arts partic-
ipate in the crisis of Area Studies as much as the social science disciplines
examined in the previous issue of Africa Today. In the arts and humani-
ties disciplines as well as in the social sciences, the confident assumption
that Area Studies is an important and valued enterprise in need of sus-
taining and nurturing no longer holds true. I often have the feeling that
Area Studies is treated as if it were an exhausted genre. Yet Area Studies
as an enterprise is rather young if we exempt the long-standing traditions
of studying Oriental languages and religions. Many of the founders of
branches of Area Studies are still living, writing, and teaching. The first
Ph.D. dissertation ever written in art history on African materials, for
example, was submitted in 1958 by Roy Sieber at the University of Iowa.
Sieber retired only two years ago. Many fields covered by Area Studies
still await major surveys of research results, and we simply do not know
what the achievements of inquiry in these areas might be.

Yet in other ways, Area Studies has experienced an explosion of
knowledge and publications that makes it impossible to command bod-
ies of knowledge that have accumulated in the past forty years. It is no
longer possible to be an anthropologist and an Africanist, as it was when
I was a graduate student. One can only be an East or West or Southern
Africanist. Yet culture lag persists and graduate students are asked to
take their exams in African ethnography. New faculty, often unable to
answer the most basic questions about many parts of the continent, have
to teach Peoples and Cultures of Africa.

Nor do many faculty and students know much about the places they
study. The Rockefeller Foundation now provides funds for African grad-
uate students to improve the quality of their proposals. The report on training in African Studies that preceded the establishment of the workshops found that there was little actual Area Studies training and advising going on, even at the major universities, and that what methodology was taught was often inappropriate. Political scientists were trained to work on national voter surveys when they planned to work on land tenure in Zaire, and African literature students were not asked to examine the literature on orality and writing.

At the same time that the local knowledges produced by Area Studies have become more difficult to teach and use in research and training, Area Studies and its alternatives have fallen out of favor. Area Studies aspires to produce nuanced, culturally rich, context-specific studies of times and places that are little known. A guiding assumption of Area Studies could be expressed in the poet Blake’s axiom that “General Forms have their vitality in particulars and every particular is a man.” Other times, places, cultures, and societies are presumed to have a logic organizing them or a set of local knowledges animating their practices that make them initially unintelligible to externally based observations. Knowing otherness is rightly considered a matter of grasping details, but that is only part of the process of intercultural translation. Area Studies has the capacity to teach us that actions are not only caused by external factors but are also internally processed by agents. Hence actions are also the products of rationalities that need to be discovered and explained in terms of context and situation.

I use “rationalities” in the plural here. Societies—all societies—are plural. They have more than one incommensurate rationality available to their members. The plurality of ways of being and modes of understanding available even in one time and place make intracultural and cross-cultural understanding possible. We share some aspects of how we process and make the world intelligible, just as some other aspects are not shared. Both intracultural and cross-cultural understanding rely on our capacity to contrast what we do share with what we do not. Understanding is all in the details, and understanding those details can be a life’s work. I believe that Area Studies holds out the possibility of producing nuanced and deep accounts of other cultures, societies, times, and places, and I worry that the crisis of Area Studies will deny many cultures and nations that possibility.

This attitude has come under such severe attack that to advocate it in some academic circles brands one as a defender of colonialism or worse. The critique of representations that has rightly shown how historical, cultural, and political factors organize perceptions of otherness has only rarely attempted to examine exemplary studies that break the bounds of ethnocentrism, Eurocentrism, and so on. As a result, much of
the work being done in the humanities, some social sciences, and the arts refuses to engage with other times, spaces, cultures, and histories. It is not the sort of enterprise that energizes either graduate students or funders. The oddest result of the overkill in this critique is that scholars working in Area Studies are perceived as lacking agency. The work produced in the last fifty years is sometimes perceived as a reflex of the politics of culture, and the authors of such work are not deemed capable even of acts of resistance. This is, of course, a standard complaint made about the image of the other in works produced by Area Studies scholars.

The alternatives to Area Studies are in even worse shape. Who now advocates the sort of universalizing and utopian thinking that perceives the nations of the Third World as achieving modernity and industry by the end of even the next century? We are currently experiencing a crisis of the state in the Third World, accompanied by the bankruptcy of attempts to fit all societies into one pattern of development. On a daily basis, news stories demonstrate that the “winds of change,” despite having brought political independence, have failed to also bring cultural autonomy, social stability, and economic development. The result is that both Area Studies and Development Studies, often antagonistic to one another, now share the status of discredited academic movements.

This is not a good state of affairs. I believe that Area Studies has much to offer. I believe that the direction of world history, more so than the critique from Cultural Studies, has produced the crisis of Area Studies. I think that Cultural Studies also has much to offer a revived Area Studies program. Nor is the crisis of Area Studies necessarily a bad thing. Crises often create the sort of environment that produces position papers. Crises provoke the search for alternatives, and a number of attempts are currently being made to merge the deep and important knowledge produced by Area Studies with other approaches and alternatives. Funders increasingly ask that research be comparative, that it address problems of globalization or emergent nationalism, that Area Studies be made more relevant. This is not a new state of affairs. The insistence on relevance has always been with us, but the terms through which relevance is defined have been changed by the course of history. A colleague of mine is now a distinguished African philosopher. He often tells the story of being refused a grant for graduate study in Europe by a German foundation on the grounds that philosophy was a luxury that African nations could ill afford. History has taught us that they could ill afford strong states and development projects. I prefer notions of relevance that ask what Area Studies can get from Cultural Studies. Surely one answer is that humanistic work is essential to producing a strong civil society.
Cultural Studies: Can It Travel?

Cultural Studies has a great deal to offer Area Studies, if only we could figure out what Cultural Studies is. Although it is a protean and elusive entity, seeming to take whatever shape one wants it to, I think that we can give some definition to Cultural Studies and its goals. Cultural Studies resists the high-low dichotomy, which has deep roots in Western cosmology, as Carlo Ginzburg has shown. It emphasizes the importance of studying popular forms of culture and acts of resistance. It opposes itself to studies of “high” art forms and the implicit connoisseurship that leads to uncritical canonization of works of art. Cultural Studies has enabled many academics to better appreciate cultural products that are not part of the Western canon. Of course, this is a move that is not unique to the academy. World culture, world musics, and Third World and minority literatures have become important and significant to a broad range of people. Globalization and the cultural flows made possible by the interconnections that migration and new media of communication allow have opened up new paths for the arts, and the patterns of circulation on these new paths challenge ideas about canonicity and cultural heritage. More than the conventional disciplines, Cultural Studies has made the case for studying these processes of production, reception, and, especially, circulation—just as Cultural Studies shows us that studies of globalization should not be left to economics and political science.

Yet there are problems associated with the ways in which Cultural Studies examines cultural production, circulation, and reception. Cultural Studies, especially American Cultural Studies, often takes the implicit point of view of the avant-garde in the arts. It celebrates exotic arts and cultures by assimilating them to the ethic of certain kinds of artists. In doing so, Cultural Studies tends to avoid problems of translation and difference that Area Studies has successfully grappled with for a long time. The gain in appreciation of how culture circulates is often counterbalanced by a loss in the understanding of how culture is produced or received. Complex motives associated with religion, different ideas about the person, or complex subject positions are simply ignored in the celebration of the hybridity and creativity of diaspora aesthetics, for example. Traveling performers and their transcultural audiences are made more prominent than the village artists who work one day and perform another. International and global arts, culture, and forms of interaction are often portrayed as simply more significant than rural and peasant peoples whose resources they use to produce transcultural arts, diasporic consciousness, and so on. We may live in a global world, but that global world lives off the cultural and economic work of the peoples of this world who do not have the wherewithal to travel.
It is troubling to me professionally and personally that the great mass of Third World peoples—especially rural Third World peoples—are simply left out of the Cultural Studies equation, or are treated as an appendage to the cultural activities of minority and Third World peoples who work and live in urban and Western metropolitan centers. Perhaps one reason for the neglect of Third World rural peoples in Cultural Studies has to do with how Cultural Studies situates processes of cultural production, circulation, and reception. There is a kind of analytical sleight of hand here, which seems to say that if we know the global we have explained the local.

My criticisms are really only a variation on a theme that we are now beginning to hear as the infatuation with Global Studies subsides a little. We are beginning to remember that the global is composed of multiple locals, and that each local context has its own pattern of articulation with a number of crosscutting broader systems. We need to remind ourselves that every relationship or pattern with global reach is also composed of many local elements. Even the new forms of electronic communication have local senders and local receivers. Peasant rebellions and “tribal” movements are often organized through and enabled by the use of tape recorders and even more advanced forms of electronic communication. People who have only sporadic face-to-face access to one another not only can communicate, but can also share art forms and political opinions. Although these new formations are the product of globalization, they remain profoundly local, even when the nature of the local community is rapidly changing as a result of the way it connects with other locales and actors. We will never understand what is going on if we examine it only from the global point of view. Local elements are determining as well as determined. The pattern of articulation between local and global in one geographical space like the Amazon is surely different from the pattern of articulation between local and global in the Kalahari, even when global processes affect the configuration of local spaces.

What is needed here are research projects that are locally based and comparative in scope. If we really want to understand global phenomena such as the new ethnic subnationalisms, we will have to find ways of developing research that takes place in Bosnia and Nigeria. We cannot afford to lose the knowledge derived from the specificity of place that is the hallmark of Area Studies. But we do have to recognize that place and time are more complicated and less unified than we once thought, and broken up in different ways. We should also recognize that the very complexity I am describing, the fact that the global is composed of many locals, means that we should be funding teams of researchers who will do long-term research on one or more locals and have a framework that is comparative and long term. What I am suggesting here is that we cannot do away with the sort of research preparation championed by Area Stud-
ies—knowledge of history, language, culture, and politics. What we need are people trained in Area Studies who develop projects that have a comparative framework. That is the only way we will be able to understand particular forms and patterns of articulation among the local, the global, and the many localities that make up global processes.

When Third World peoples who are not urban hybrid subjects are examined in Cultural Studies, they are often treated as if they are quaint museum-like displays—represented as living anachronisms, without knowledge of the broader world or much agency themselves. John Tomlinson does a good job of criticizing this point of view in his book *Cultural Imperialism*, in which he shows a picture of a group of Australian Aborigines sitting in the desert in front of a television—his way of demonstrating that the reception of technology is a taken-for-granted act of domination by the West over exotic others. Tomlinson describes images that communicate messages about their subjects that are all too familiar. Either they are the silent and dumbfounded recipients of something they cannot understand or, in other views, the repositories of a spirituality they cannot describe—peoples threatened in the same way that species of fish are threatened by pollution.

The problem here is that Cultural Studies simply does not take an ethnographic attitude to the people of other cultures. Hence it does not often think about whether the concepts it uses have to be altered in order to understand other times, places, and spaces. The concept of power is a case in point. Most work in Cultural Studies uses a kind of Weberian sense of power defined as a combination of force and domination. Yet in most African languages the concepts I would translate as “power” are far more connected to ideas about the person, capacity, and cosmology than to ideas about physical force. “To be able” is a better translation of the root idea associated with power, and it refers to different capacities of men versus women, elders versus juniors, or persons who hold power in ritual positions versus those who do not. In rites of spirit possession in East Africa, for example, women literally transform themselves into persons who have powers that men cannot imagine. Yet in everyday life they often are subordinate to men. This kind of cultural description, immersed in another culture and attentive to problems of translation, permits us to see distinctions such as “power over” versus “power to.”

Yet another problem inherent in much of Cultural Studies is the absence of a concept of society. This is far more a product of American Cultural Studies than it is of the British or Australian versions. I note that Cultural Studies emerges out of different disciplines and sites in different national contexts. In the United States, Cultural Studies both emerges out of and resists American Studies. As such it exhibits some of the flaws and obsessions of its disciplinary origins. The American variant
is much more literary in the narrow sense than is Cultural Studies in Britain and Australia. It exhibits the same resistance to Marxism and materialism that American Studies does, and displays less interest in other cultural formations than Australian and British Cultural Studies do. Multiculturalism, race, and gender studies are far more the hallmark of the American variant of Cultural Studies, but their accounts of diversity still conceive of power and society in the same narrow terms. Other times, places, and cultural formations are not organized by American obsessions with race and British obsessions with class. A black student remarked recently after watching a Zairian film in a class on African popular culture that the surprising thing about the film was that everyone in it was black and that race was irrelevant to the content of the film.

I much prefer the British version of Cultural Studies that was associated with Stuart Hall and the Birmingham school because it contains notions of society and social institutions that are distinct from the global concept of culture used in American Cultural Studies. British social studies would be a more accurate term, but not a felicitous phrase for the way in which British work exhibits a sociological imagination. The problem here is that the word “culture” operates differently in British Cultural Studies and American Cultural Studies. In the British and Australian approaches, “culture” refers to such aspects of social life as expressive culture or popular culture, and it is examined through the twin lenses of social and historical processes. In the American school, “culture” is a complex whole, exhibiting patterns and characteristics of a way of life, even if the people whose way of life it describes are an avant-garde, marginalized, hybrid other. In such classics of British Cultural Studies as Paul Willis’s Learning to Labour, ideology and sense of self are connected to social institutions, such as the class and educational systems. The way in which American Cultural Studies and some Feminist Studies focus on resistance and often use acts of resistance as instances of “having agency” is a case in point. I doubt whether this is so much a problem in British Cultural Studies.

Resistance is, after all, only one form of agency. Social theory and even ordinary language can tell us that. In British Cultural Studies, agency tends to be examined as it emerges out of social structures and institutional matrices. If we take agency in its classic sense, as having an effect on the world, we can say that British Cultural Studies and social theory in general usually see agency as emerging out of society and against the grain of society at one and the same time. In American Cultural Studies, agency tends to be defined from a cultural and individual point of view and described in a way that turns a property of action into a possession. People are described as “having agency,” treating it as if it were a commodity. Tony Bennett once remarked to me that when British Cultural Studies was transformed into American Cultural Studies, the
British were stunned by the libertarian visage of their American cousins.¹¹

The social can be further broken down into institutional complexes. People act in terms of social systems that both enable and constrain their actions, and key aspects of those systems are what C. Wright Mills calls "the cultural apparatus," including such significant features of society as the media, display settings such as museums and world fairs, and other institutions that include forms of ritual and play.¹² In many societies, these situated activities provide settings in which identity is fashioned and challenged. By situating identity in context and examining it in association with institutions, British Cultural Studies has been able to avoid some of the more extreme forms of identity politics, in which voice and authenticity are presumed to belong only to the oppressed.

An example of the kind of conceptual tools I find most useful in Cultural Studies of the British variety is Stuart Hall's breakdown of the communication process into the triad of production, circulation, and reception.¹³ Originally used as a framework for media studies, Hall's triad has greater uses. It disconnects communication from specific cultures and enables research that can show how ideas and images are made in one context, become associated with other ideas and images of diverse origins, and are received in multiple contexts and in terms derived from different and often unconnected cultural idioms. The patterns are socially derived throughout the process. Culture plays a role as a resource used in social processes such as interpretation, interaction, negotiation of identities, the imposition of authority, and so on. One might say that this is Cultural Studies of society rather than simply Cultural Studies.

The contrast here is not only with American Cultural Studies but also with Raymond Williams's concept of structures of feeling, which points to ways in which distinctive cultural forms organize diverse cultural material to present a subjectively experienced cultural whole.¹⁴ Williams's structures of feeling point toward an almost Arnoldian concept of culture, a kind of nineteenth-century idea of the whole. This is not surprising, since Williams was greatly influenced by his teacher F. R. Leavis's concern for British sensibilities that were being made unauthen-
tic by rampant capitalism and commodification.¹⁵ I am not the first person to argue that Williams was attempting the impossible task of joining a radical, romantic right-wing critique of capitalism to a Marxist frame of reference. American Cultural Studies seems to me often to have the same problems without the saving grace of the materialist's concern for politics and economy. That may be why American Cultural Studies seems libertarian from a British perspective.

It is important to think through which form of Cultural Studies is tied to Area Studies. It would be easy to put on the clothing of Cultural Studies and still do Area Studies divorced from political economy. All we
need do is shift our focus from the poor to the middle class; celebrate cultural flows and how they are made distinctively Indian, Chinese, Kenyan, and so on, and ignore the majority of the peoples of those countries or those who have their own cultural productions, live under conditions not of their choosing, and have their own sense of how the global cultural system operates.

Still some of the problems associated with using Cultural Studies in Area Studies cannot be derived solely from the difference between British and American Cultural Studies. They have to do with attitudes toward concepts and theory. Edward Said has written two powerful papers on the subject of “traveling theory.” In the first, he took a relativist stance and argued that when transferred to other cultural contexts, theory lost its power to evoke and explain and had to be radically revised.\(^\text{16}\) Writing more than a decade later, Said argued that there are really two ways in which theory travels.\(^\text{17}\) In the first, it is imposed as a grid on other times and cultures; in the second, it takes much of its specificity from other settings because it is used only as a way in for interpreting other settings.

There is a difference here between using theory for open-ended exploration versus explanatory claims that close out other options. This is a criticism that has been voiced more than once in the history of Area Studies. Albert Hirschman’s classic article on “paradigms lost” makes the same complaint against development theory without history.\(^\text{18}\) Even what Joan Scott calls the “mantra” of race, class, and gender can help us understand other ways of life, or alternative ways in a particular setting. By treating race, class, and gender not as fixed categories but as rough approximations of how people are organizing their lives we can use theory for open-ended exploration. The central point is that Cultural Studies is not an antidote to the cultural arrogance that we have encountered often enough in Area Studies. It too often reproduces the arrogance in trendy clothing. The assimilation of otherness to the same (which is a worse sin than creating an exotic other) is hard to combat and is a danger inherent in the uncritical use of any theory.

**Has the Third World Already Invented Cultural Studies?**

A cursory reading of the book reviews in any Area Studies journal will show that Cultural Studies may even dominate some subfields, carrying with it the problems I have mentioned. But far more important, in the sense projected by the literature that uses Cultural Studies, is that this is a First World enterprise. In Cultural Studies the primary reference to a Third World body of materials produced in and for a Third World audience is to Gayatri Spivak’s discussion of Subaltern Studies.\(^\text{19}\) I am always
stunned by the way in which Spivak's transformation of a postcolonial historiography into poststructuralism is taken as the last word on the subject, as if Guha and his colleagues were writing in Hindi!

Spivak honestly provides us with an Indian reaction to her work by reprinting an interview conducted in India. The first question her interlocutors asked was whether she privileged diaspora and exile in a way that made the native Indian intellectual appear as living in a cultural backwater. This is precisely the question I asked myself about the Third World in general and its rural peoples in particular when I read the emphasis on hybridity, multiple localities, and time zones that were so prominent in Williams's paper. Any good Bakhtinian knows that hybridity and conflicting complexity are part and parcel of the constitution of all selves and others, even in one locality and at one point in time. In any case, even the dispersed live in one place at a time.

Hybridity, complexity, and even Cultural Studies have been produced in the Third World, under conditions of scholarly existence far more difficult than those found in the First World. Important and original, the work of these Third World scholars exhibits some of the features of a robust traveling theory that Said advocates. Of course this work is connected to work produced in the West. Many of the same influences and theoretical paradigms are used. The tools of literary and social studies are applied to the same kinds of materials, ranging from texts and archival materials to cultural forms and performance studies. There are also some remarkable convergences in this body of work, which has been produced out of different disciplines and on different continents.

In India, the Subaltern Studies group of historians have examined how the diversity of Indian political and historical experience has been obliterated by nationalist historiography, which unwittingly reproduces colonial and imperial ideas and tropes about what is culturally and historically significant. In Africa, philosophers have critiqued the ways in which writers and politicians have replicated colonial and imperial ideas about African cultures, mentalities, and development. The African philosophical literature seeks to find sources for self-criticism internal to African culture and has recently moved to critique the state-based abuses of power in the "postcolony." And in Latin America, popular culture has been systematically examined to see how it reproduces ideas and attitudes derived from the corporate and governmental culture of the economic center.

These Third World writings are increasingly influential in the United States and Europe, but they have never been brought into a single setting and compared. There are significant divergences, such as the different disciplinary sites out of which they work and the different ways in which they configure the relationship between center and periphery. Still the convergences are equally remarkable. All of these bodies of writing
seek to understand how the political relationships of the colonial era are now reproduced in ideas about culture, society, and personhood or in ideas about human and social rights and responsibilities. In sum, they seek to address how colonial culture has captured or seeks to capture civil society and how that relationship has been reproduced in the postcolonial era. In the first phase of African philosophy, for example, Western-trained African philosophers examined how both Western and African ideas about African mentalities reproduced the idea that there was little critical and individual thinking in societies held together by collectively shared "African" or "Bantu" philosophy. Increasingly they are turning to examine the abuses of power in the postcolonial state and to show how those abuses are underpinned by recourse to notions about the "primitive" nature of African thought. Subaltern Studies scholars have begun to examine not only historiography in India but also how history is used to justify political gestures, ethnic and religious violence, and so on. Latin America has seen some very interesting cross-fertilization with the development of a Latin American Subaltern Studies group.

One could ask why the critique of colonialism emerged out of the discipline of history in India and philosophy in Africa. This is a question that has interesting ramifications for thinking about Area Studies. There is a way in which African history, as it is practiced in Africa and the United States, is implicated in nationalist projects. Few of the current senior generation of Africanist historians have produced work that crosses the boundary separating colonial rule from independence. Independence is treated as an end of history, when the nationalist project triumphs and the common man becomes a citizen of the independent African state. To examine the history of independent Africa would require historians to question the nationalist project that has organized their professional lives. This is not easy. African philosophers, on the other hand, must emancipate themselves from ideas about tribal collectivities. Often they do so through a critique of Africanist anthropology of the 1930s and earlier. They also have to fight against prejudices that are no longer so prominent in other disciplines, such as history.

Most philosophy departments in American universities will not admit that African philosophy is a legitimate topic. The justification for this position is that philosophy is a second-order cognitive activity associated with critical thinking, and traditional societies do not exhibit the thinking about thought that is a second-order activity. African philosophers have yet to convince their colleagues in philosophy that there are independent critical thinkers in rural Africa. Nationalist ideas and attitudes have concerned them less. As they turn their attention to nationalism, they will have far less to fear than Africanist historians, since nationalism organizes and enables their professional lives far less. I suspect that like the Subaltern Studies group, they too will find that nationalist ideas
and movements exhibit an implicit acceptance of colonial ideas about African cultures and personalities. In India, it may be that the philosophers are so implicated in the project of finding philosophy in traditional Indian religion that they are unable to distance themselves from their project. This may be one reason historians have been more involved in criticizing nationalism and its claims. We very much need some intellectual work conducted in settings that bring together sympathetic Area Studies specialists and scholars working in the different Third World schools.

These approaches are all concerned with the same phenomena and use the same methods we find in Cultural Studies. Nationalism, globalization, theories on the nature of the postcolonial, and the relationships among various forms of culture—especially popular culture and official culture—are all the topics of scholars working in the Third World. The major difference between Cultural Studies and these Third World scholars is that the Third World scholars are less parochial. They read and use Cultural Studies, but the reverse does not happen, especially in the United States.

I may be guilty of overstatement here, but I think that if Cultural Studies is to be relevant and useful to Area Studies, two things must happen. First, Cultural Studies has to open itself up to the possibility of otherness, especially forms of thinking about the world that are organized in terms of different ontological assumptions about society, the person, and the cosmos. Area Studies has a great deal to offer Cultural Studies here. Second, Cultural Studies has to open itself up to Third World scholars who write about their subject matters, but from different subject positions, and who write with far more knowledge about the Third World than Cultural Studies has so far shown. Area Studies can be the intermediary in this enterprise.

Notes

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1. This paper was initially drafted at the request of the Ford Foundation as a comment on a paper written by Carolyn Williams on the subject “Cultural Studies and Area Studies.”


4. I include the “softer” social science disciplines that use ethnographic methods and study culture and expressive forms under the heading “arts and humanities disciplines.”


11. Personal communication.


20. Ibid., p. 67.