

James Clifford, *Returns: Becoming Indigenous in the Twenty-first Century*. Harvard University Press, 2013 (Pre-copyedited version)

Chapter 1

Among Histories

Indian agency has often been read as a demand to return to a utopian past that never was. Another emendation would suggest that we know very well such a return is impossible: instead the conversation is about a different kind of today, where we are present in the world like anyone else. We always have been trying to be part of the world.

-- Paul Chaat Smith (2009: 101)

Indigenous people have emerged from history's blind spot. No longer pathetic victims or noble messengers from lost worlds, they are visible actors in local, national, and global arenas. On every continent, survivors of colonial invasions and forced assimilation renew their cultural heritage and reconnect with lost lands. They struggle within dominant systems of power that continue to belittle and misunderstand them. Their very survival is a form of resistance. To take seriously this resurgence of native, tribal, or aboriginal societies we need to avoid both romantic celebration and knowing critique. An attitude of alert openness is required, a way of engaging with complex historical transformations and intersecting paths in the contemporary world. I call this attitude realism. Its sources and methodology, primarily historical and ethnographic, will emerge in this and subsequent chapters. Realism is never simple description. It is a narrative process assembling "big enough histories"—big enough to matter but not too big. Indigeneity today is such a story. It unfolds, in Stuart Hall's words (1989: 151), on "the contradictory, stony ground of the present conjuncture."

The word "indigenous" is a work in progress. Derived from old Latin, it means "born or produced from within." The word's primary meanings suggest nativeness, originating or

growing in a country: not exotic. Forty years ago it would most frequently have been applied to plants or animals. Now, paradoxically, this word featuring extreme localism has come to denote a global array. It is a general name for human societies throughout the world that were often called "primitive," "native," "tribal," or "aboriginal." "Indigenous" is a protean word, evoked today by groups of differing shapes and sizes in a variety of social contexts. What is at stake is always an assertion of temporal priority, of relatively deep roots in a place. Relatively deep roots--because people who claim indigeneity have often come to their present home from elsewhere. The arrival may, however, be lost in the mists of time, with the claim of anteriority expressed as a story of autochthonous origins: we are born of the land, its original, chosen people.

Casting oneself as indigenous, and others alien, is never an innocent act. The violence done by invoking "native" priority is trenchantly noted by Mahmood Mamdani (2002), writing about Hutu constructions of Tutsi in Rwanda. Mamdani believes the racial/ethnic figures of native and outsider to be a particularly damaging legacy of colonialism in Africa. Francis Nyamnjoh (2007) and Peter Geschiere (2009) explore the ambiguous and often mischievous uses of tribal anteriority in African contexts of competition for power and resources. And Amita Baviskar (2007) provides a cautionary view from India, where Hindu nationalism can co-opt the politics of indigeneity. These examples reflect specific national situations, colonial legacies and current struggles for advantage. They remind us that assertions of priority and ownership, in a world of movement and exchange, are always claims to power.

This does not mean, of course, that such assertions are never justified, especially in response to imperial invasion or state dominance. Some critics have suggested that contemporary indigenous assertions are inherently exclusivist, potentially fascist. And no doubt indigenous invocations of blood and land can trigger ugly associations. But one should not be too quick to draw negative conclusions. Communal aspirations and claims to sovereignty take diverse forms; and nationalist claims by the disempowered seeking liberation and autonomy are obviously different from the systematic policing and cultural assimilation imposed by states. Moreover, if the essences and traditions invoked by indigenous activists sometimes seem to repeat older colonial primitivisms, as dismissive critics like Adam Kuper (2003) have argued,

they do so at another moment and for new purposes. Indigenous movements need to be located in shifting hegemonic power relations (Friedman 2007), tracking how histories of conquest, survival and emergence intersect with new regimes of power and enticement, emerging forms of identity.

The term “indigenous” typically refers to societies that are relatively small-scale with deep attachments to a place. Applied to diverse peoples, the name does not refer to cultural similarity or essence but rather to comparable experiences of invasion, dispossession, resistance and survival. Indigenous, in this definition, makes most sense in places like the Americas, Australia, the Island Pacific and the Arctic. It is less relevant for most of Africa and much of Asia. There, where settler-colonial histories are not sharply defined, it is difficult to identify unambiguous “first peoples.” But elsewhere one finds clear examples of the indigenous as I use the term: Aborigines in Australia, Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand, the Ainu of Hokkaido/Sakhalin, and the “Indian” tribes of North and South America. It would not be difficult to list hundreds more. Indeed, the United Nations now supports a permanent forum that maintains just such a list. A growing number of non-governmental organizations are agitating for the rights of these embattled, small populations struggling for living space within, and sometimes across, nation-state borders. None of the societies in question is without internal frictions, discrepant elements, and disputes over authenticity and belonging. In this they resemble every other mobilized social group.

Indigènitude

During the 1980s and 90s, a new public persona and globalizing voice made itself felt: a *présence indigene*. The reference, of course, is to another dramatic emergence into wide arenas of cultural performance and political influence: the *Négritude* movement of the early 1950s with its famous journal, *Présence Africaine*. Negritude was an alliance of black activists--Léopold Senghor, Aimé Césaire, Leon Damas, Suzanne Césaire, and others--who recognized commonalities of culture, history, and political potential. A half-century later we might speak of *indigènitude*, reflecting a similar process of rearticulation. Traditions are recovered and connections made in relation to shared colonial, postcolonial, globalizing histories. Like

negritude, *indigènitude* is a vision of liberation and cultural difference that challenges, or at least re-directs, the modernizing agendas of nation states and transnational powers.

Indigènitude is performed at the United Nations and the International Labor Organization, at arts and cultural festivals, at political, and in many informal travels and contacts. *Indigènitude* is less a coherent ideology than a concatenation of sources and projects. It operates at multiple scales: local traditions (kinship, language renewal, subsistence hunting, protection of sacred sites); national agendas and symbols (Hawai'ian sovereignty, Mayan politics in Guatemala, Maori mobilizations in Aotearoa/New Zealand); and transnational activism ("Red Power" from the global sixties, or today's social movements around cultural values, the environment, and identity, movements often allied with NGOs). *Indigènitude* is sustained through media-disseminated images, including a shared symbolic repertoire ("the sacred," "mother earth," "shamanism," "sovereignty," the wisdom of "Elders," stewardship of "the land"). The images can lapse into self-stereotyping. And they express a transformative renewal of attachments to culture and place. It is difficult to know, sometimes even for participants, how much of the performance of identity reflects deep belief, how much a tactical presentation of self.

Indigenous presence and globalizing neo-liberalism both emerge in the 1980s and 1990s, and they are evidently linked in important ways. This coincidence troubles any inclination toward simple celebration. And it raises important questions of historical determination. I argue below that the convergence cannot be rounded up with periodizing terms like "late capitalism" or "postmodernity." Nor can we draw a simple link between political-economic structures and socio-cultural expressions, claiming that one element (in this case, indigenous resurgence) is a result, or a production, of the other (neo-liberal hegemony). We will see how ethnographic perspectives complicate this kind of causal account, making space for local agencies and contributing to a non-reductive, dialectical realism. In contemporary systems of government, wide latitudes of freedom to be different are allowed, indeed encouraged, but within limits imposed by national projects and the protection of capitalist accumulation (Hale 2002). These limits are not the same everywhere and take "variegated" forms (Ong 2006). New and revived orders of difference can be supported in zones of exception, niche markets and commodified cultural exchanges. Indigenous cultural resurgence and political self-determination find room for maneuver in these relatively autonomous sites. Indian gaming in the United States is an

obvious example. And there are other quasi-independent zones of tribal sovereignty; special accommodations for resource extraction, hunting and fishing, and for the control of “cultural property” in museums, art markets, and other public performance sites.

In contemporary globalizing worlds, loosened imperial and national hegemonies offer opportunities for indigenous communities. People who for generations have been struggling to reclaim land, gain recognition, and preserve their heritage, now participate in wider political contexts, and they profit from markets in art, culture and natural resources. Since the 1970s in many places, indigenous populations are expanding rapidly as people rediscover lost roots (Sturm 2010, Forte 2006). But the new expansiveness does not occur in a free space outside of power. Indigenous vitality requires a degree of tactical conformity with external expectations and at least a partial acceptance of multicultural roles and institutions (Conklin 1997, Povinelli 2002). Economic success--tribal gaming, resource development, or commerce in art and culture--can bring significant increases in wealth. But it also encourages new hierarchies, communal divisions, and dependency on external markets and capital resources (Dombrowski 2002). Whatever material progress has been made over the past few decades is unevenly distributed. Indigenous populations in most contemporary nation-states remain poor, lacking adequate health and education, at the mercy of predatory national and transnational agents of “development.” The modest, but real, gains in control over land and resources achieved by native groups in recent years are fragile, always susceptible to reversal by overwhelmingly more powerful majority populations. Intractable double binds—for example an assumed contradiction between material wealth and cultural authenticity--are imposed on tribal people aspiring to something more than bare survival in settler colonial states (Cattelino 2010).

None of this is unprecedented. Today’s indigenous movements extend long experiences of resistance and cultural survival, as well as tactics of pragmatic accommodation. These deep histories, grounded in place and kinship, take new forms in political mobilizations and in the creative “second lives” of heritage. We will probe these “returns” to tradition more deeply in Part Three. The challenge facing realist accounts of indigenous cultural politics is to acknowledge the new command performances and commodifications of identity politics while simultaneously tracing the persistence of older practices: oral transmission, forms of social

continuity and intercultural negotiation, embodied experiences of place. A tension, a lucid ambivalence needs to be maintained. Something is always being gained, something lost. During the 1980s and 1990s, for example, native assertions of cultural property rights created new conditions for the possession and display of valued artifacts in museums and private collections. Michael Brown (2003) weighs the potential, and especially the danger, of claiming culture as property. This way of “having a culture” was lucidly explored in Richard Handler’s critical ethnography of Quebecois nationalism (1988). But owning culture is always a matter of both giving and holding back. In non-innocent ways. This becomes very clear in Nicholas Thomas’s incisive re-coding of artistic/cultural “possessions” in a Native Pacific idiom of gifts and exchanges (Thomas 1999). Kimberley Christen (2005) and Jennifer Kramer (2006) explore specific modes of possession and sharing, the pragmatics of secrecy and revelation in circulating heritage and art. In their different contexts, one Australian Aboriginal the other Northwest Coast Canadian, these scholars acutely show how struggles over culture become central to the changing terms of tribal autonomy and interdependence. Cooptation coexists with transgression, governance with transformative potential. Here, as elsewhere in the contemporary spaces of recognition and multiculturalism, ambivalence becomes a kind of method.

Obviously the present conjuncture of neo-liberal hegemony—like all hegemonies, incomplete and contested--holds both opportunities and dangers. This is nothing new for the many indigenous people who are accustomed to maneuvering in the cross-currents of colonial and neo-colonial power. Their transformative survival has required selective assimilation, resistance, transgression and concealment. They have always had to reckon with diverse audiences. Today these range from ancestors and family members to state agencies and NGOs, from the spirits that inhabit sacred places to business partners in boardrooms, from anthropologists to tourists. The indigenous presence of the 1980s and 1990s thus extends many particular histories of survival while it achieves unprecedented visibility on national and global stages. Here are some of the better-known public manifestations.

--In 1969 a group called “Indians of All Tribes” occupies the former prison of Alcatraz an island of San Francisco Bay, declaring it liberated Indian Country. The “Red Power”

movement, inspired in part by “Black Power,” initiates a new image-conscious indigenous politics.

--1971. The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. In response to concerted indigenous pressure and the need to construct an oil pipeline a controversial land settlement creates powerful native owned development corporations.

--1975. “Melanésia 2000,” the first Melanesian cultural festival is held in New Caledonia. 2000 indigenous people participate, and 50,000 from other ethnicities attend this celebration of Kanak identity. Cultural festivals will henceforth become regular occurrences in the Pacific, bringing together performers from many islands.

--In 1982, *I Rigoberta Menchu* is published, quickly becoming a classic of international multiculturalism. Over the next decade Rigoberta Menchú Tum’s image undergoes re-articulation from a symbol of the peasant/poor of Guatemala to a figure of pan-Mayan and increasingly pan-Indigenous identity.

--1992 sees hemispheric protests against the Columbian Quincentenary, rejecting Eurocentric, expansionist history with its rights of “discovery.” In that year Menchú Tum is awarded the Nobel Peace Prize.

--In 1994, The International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples is voted by the United Nations General Assembly. The Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues, in existence since 1982, gathers momentum.

--During the 1990s Indian tribes in the United States extend their gaming operations, bringing new wealth, political influence, and controversy. More indigenous groups are active in economic development projects. Markets in Aboriginal, Northwest Coast, and other “tribal arts” expanded dramatically. Demands for repatriation of human remains and collected artifacts increase are increasingly common.

--1992 *Mabo vs. Queensland*. The High Court of Australia rejects the *terra nullius* doctrine underlying settler-colonial sovereignty, affirming the continued existence of Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander land tenure based on traditional occupancy.

--1997 *Delgamuukw vs British Columbia*. The Supreme Court of Canada recognizes the specific nature of Aboriginal land title and made increased space for tribal oral histories in court proceedings.

--In 1999 the vast, Inuit governed region of Nunavut is created in Northeast Canada.

--2000 sees the global circulation of striking images from the Sydney Summer Olympics. Indigenous presence is performed simultaneously in dances within and protests outside Stadium Australia. The world cheers an Aboriginal athlete, Kathy Freeman.

--In 2005, Evo Morales, a publicly identified Aymara Indian, is elected President of Bolivia. There and elsewhere in Latin America, popular social movements unite under the sign of the indigenous. Journalists working in Latin America begin to speak of “the poor and indigenous” where a decade previously they would have said “the poor” or “the peasants.”

These are only some of the more public manifestations of a strengthening presence. Ronald Niezan (2003) has written an excellent historical account of “international indigenism,” formerly an oxymoronic expression, now a political reality. He describes the relatively recent emergence of loosely connected movements and their relations with international institutions such as the UN and the International Labor Organization, human rights and environmental NGOs, art markets, heritage productions, and many local and national arenas of identity performance. Since the 1970s publications such as *Cultural Survival Quarterly* and the yearbook, *Indigenous World*, have surveyed an extraordinary range of social, ecological, religious, and artistic struggles--on six continents and three oceans. Being indigenous today is an aspiration supported by international institutions and NGOs. Indeed the discourses of indigeneity seem to have attained a modular, highly mobile form. A close association of identity, culture and ancestral land now undergirds communal resistance to invasive state and

transnational forces from the Americas to Africa and China. The discourse also supports government approved regional and touristic development. In the Caribbean, whose original inhabitants were widely thought to have been eliminated, Caribs and other resurgent indigenous groups are claiming attention (Forte 2006). Afro-Caribbean people with established local roots are adopting indigenous rhetoric, along with American hip-hop and consumer culture (Anderson 2009).

The fact of global *indigènitude* is inescapable. But in affirming this public presence we cannot forget the culture enacted around campfires and kitchen tables rather than at festivals or rallies. Native life exists at multiple scales whose relations are not always harmonious. For example, clan-based groups or people with long established tribal governments may reject the new “indigenous” label, finding it irrelevant to their lives, meaningful only for university programs, transnational activists, uprooted urbanites. Any attempt to survey the social landscape of indigeneity confronts diversity and contradiction. In the United States, Australia and Canada a majority of indigenous-identified people now live in cities. There, as we will see in Chapters 2 and 3, older forms of social solidarity and cultural transmission are being rearticulated, performed in new contexts for different audiences. Inventive practices of urban indigenous life rely on circular migration to homelands and diaspora networking across distances. Heritage renewal and artistic creation use new technologies to re-route cultural connections. In her probing ethnography of urban Indians, Renya Ramirez (2007) writes of native “transnationals,” evoking the ways people actively link two nations, one tribal the other majoritarian.

It is premature, and no doubt ethnocentric, to ask what all these processes of pragmatic survival and cultural renewal amount to as a historical force. Where would one stand to make such a final judgment? When tracking emergent phenomena, an attitude of alert, critical receptivity is more appropriate. For the moment, we can recognize the presence—the transformative survival and growing vitality--of tribal, aboriginal, or First Nations societies. Their very existence challenges narrative assumptions that have long authorized Western projections of civilization, modernity, or progress.

Alter-Histories 1

For centuries the world was conceived, from a Euro-American vantage point, as divided into two kinds of societies. These were distinguished with terms such as “traditional” and “modern,” “oral” and “literate,” “cold” and “hot.” The latter was Lévi-Strauss’s famous distinction between small, tribal groups and the more change-oriented modern West. (Lévi-Strauss 1991: 125) Binary pairs such as these, once simply realistic descriptions, now seem clumsy simplifications, efficient mechanisms for distinguishing “us” from “them” and sorting everyone in time and space. This was the common sense of people who thought of themselves as embodying the future, for better and worse. Revolutions in science, industrial production and technology justified their world-view: a progressive, developmental history with Europe as its driving force. The world-view reached its apogee in the late nineteenth century with the rise of European nation-states, empires and industry.

This “tunnel vision” of history (Blaut 1993) has persisted through the twentieth century: a developmental common sense in which some people are on History’s cutting edge, others consigned to the past. (Fabian 1983) The progressive ideology was shaken by wars, economic depression, and by the racial violence, abroad and at home, perpetrated by those claiming the mantle of Civilization. (Lindqvist 1992) After the Second World War, a sustained economic boom made it possible to renew the Imperial vision, now dividing the planet into “developed” and “underdeveloped” sectors. Both the capitalist “First” and the socialist “Second” worlds saw themselves as agents of modernization in contrast to backward “Third World” societies. But when the post-war armed peace collapsed, as economic expansion faltered, and as globalizing connectivities became more ungovernable, the assumption of a linear path of development, with clear stages, epochal breaks and transitions, would be harder to sustain. Other histories, hidden by progressive visions of modernity, have emerged from the shadows.

Not so long ago, the diverse people we now call indigenous were almost universally thought to have no futures. They were “people without history,” destined to disappear. Progressive history was destiny: the all-too-efficient, destructive and reconstructive mechanisms of trade, empire, missions, contagion, schooling, capitalism, Americanization, and now globalization would

finish the job. This was just the way things were. But a contradictory reality, the fact that small-scale, tribal peoples do have futures, has been a surprise of the late 20th century, a source of “anthropological enlightenment,” in Marshall Sahlins’ phrase (2000: Ch. 15) Unexpected outcomes like this show that history isn’t herding us all the same way. And they provide a reminder of what may be the one inescapable fact of history: its continually revised openness.

No well-informed person now believes what was, for so long, taught in school: that Columbus “discovered America.” The hemisphere was discovered more than once, and from more than one direction. There are now serious doubts about the peopling of the two American continents exclusively by populations crossing the Bering land bridge at the end of the last great Ice Age. Among the candidates for early arrivals in the Americas being studied by physical anthropologists are people whose bodily features resemble most closely the Ainu. These pioneers probably came from the vicinity of Sakhalin Island along the coastline, on foot and by boat. None of this was part of recognized historical reality even fifteen years ago. And can anyone imagine that there will be no further surprises from archaeology, genetics or historical linguistics? The arrival of ships, armies, missionaries and microbes in the sixteenth century was certainly of epochal significance. But the way this meeting of worlds is framed has been transformed by both science and native activism. Today, the very idea of a “New World” makes little sense. For if one takes seriously the deep and ongoing indigenous histories of the Americas—the complexity of cultures and languages, of migrations and exchanges, the empires, wars, and urban life of the Inca, the Maya, the Aztecs—then teleological narratives of a civilizing modernity (triumphant or tragic) seem blatantly ethnocentric.

Such historical narratives are being “provincialized” (Chakrabarty 2000). Since 1950, uneven and unfinished processes of decolonization have worked to de-center the West. There is no longer a place from which to tell the whole story (there never was). At the same time, connectivity in diverse idioms and media, and at many scales, has increased dramatically. This is the good and the bad news of globalization. As we search for a realism that can engage a paradoxical world of simultaneous connection and divergence, an attitude of alert hesitation is appropriate. Stuart Hall (1998) reminds us that a discursive linking of pasts and futures is

integral to the positioning of collective subjects. Thus, to imagine a coherent future, people must selectively mobilize past resources--historical idioms that take diverse forms and are expressed in unfamiliar idioms. To engage with these histories requires representational tact, a patient, self-reflexive openness that might be thought of as a kind of historical “negative capability.” The phrase derives, of course, from John Keats’ definition of the poetic attitude, an alert receptivity and willingness not to press for conclusions. A constant awareness of our own partial access to other experiences is required--tracking interference patterns and sites of emergence, piecing together more-than-local patterns. “Listening for histories” is more important than “telling it like it is.”

In this spirit, let us explore several indigenous ways of thinking historically, sites of translation where Western ontologies are challenged and potentially expanded. We enter a broad comparative landscape that has yet to be studied systematically, although the work has been admirably begun by Peter Nabokov in *A Forest of Time: American Indian Ways of History* (2002). There is a growing ethnographic literature on particular ways of historicizing, from the pioneering work of Renato Rosaldo (1980) and Marshall Sahlins (1981, 1985) to David Shorter’s beautiful *We Will Dance our Truth* (2009). How far we still have to go is indicated by a recent collection of essays, *The Many Faces of Clio: Cross-Cultural Approaches to Historiography* (Wang and Fillafer 2007). Virtually all of the twenty-five contributors are historians, and there is no mention of the growing anthropological literature on indigenous ways of narrating, remembering and inscribing “history.” The impressive volume’s “cross-cultural approach” is centered in Europe, with some discussion of East and South Asia. “The people without history” are still missing.

Listen, then, to the Hawaiian historian Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa, from her book, *Native Land and Foreign Desires*:

It is interesting to note that in Hawaiian, the past is referred to as Ka wa mamua, or ‘the time in front or before.’ Whereas the future, when thought of at all, is Ka wa mahope, or ‘the time which comes after or behind.’ It is as if the Hawaiian stands firmly in the present, with his back to the future, and his eyes fixed upon the past, seeking historical

answers for present-day dilemmas. Such an orientation is to the Hawaiian an eminently practical one, for the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge. (22-23)

This image of going backwards into the future is reminiscent of Walter Benjamin's famous "Angel of History," from his "Theses on the Philosophy of History." (1968) Benjamin's angel is blown into the future, while facing the past. But the differences are telling. Kame'eleihiwa's Hawaiian does not, like Benjamin's angel, confront the past as a ruin, a heap of broken scraps. Rather, she engages a generative, socio-mythic tradition, "rich in glory and knowledge." Most significantly, perhaps, there is no relentless "wind" of "progress" blowing the indigenous Hawaiian backwards into the future. Time has no single, violent direction, but tacks resourcefully between present dilemmas and remembered answers: a pragmatic, not a teleological, or a messianic orientation. The past, materialized in land and ancestors, is always a source of the new.

The Hawaiian is comparable to—but not the same as—Benjamin's materialist historian, for whom the junk heap of the past contains possible other stories, pre-figurations of outcomes different from the apparently inevitable reality of "what actually happened." Both look to the past to find a way, a path: one historical process is pragmatic and genealogical the other critical and messianic. Neither is about aligning past, present, and future in a series. The future is always unwritten. Let us be clear that Kame'eleihiwa is not invoking repetition or cycles of recurrence. This temporality is not the opposite of a linear historical progression. It might be better, instead, to think of looping lines of recollection, and specific paths forward. We find a different way of acting historically but no essential clash of epistemologies, no either/or choice: tradition or modernity, myth or history. For Kame'eleihiwa, the Hawai'ian past is about generativity not recurrence.

The Hawaiian sovereignty movement, of which Lilikala Kame'eleihiwa is a leader, mobilizes cultural and political traditions with deep, spliced and tangled roots. It has attained new momentum and visibility during the past several decades as part of the post-sixties indigenous context I have been evoking. Along with its more explicitly political activities, a dynamic

process of remembering is underway. This movement has many dimensions: intensifying taro cultivation in rural enclaves, reviving and adapting hula dances and rituals, renewing native knowledge and language in schools, mobilizing media for political actions, asserting a space for indigenous epistemologies in the secular University, connecting reggae rhythms with sovereignty lyrics. A renewed Hawaiian tradition does not, of course, simply repeat past ways. It is a practical selection and critical reweaving of roots. New gender roles show this clearly, as do engagements with Christianity, state politics, and transnational indigenous coalitions. The diverse strategies are connected through appeals to a common genealogy and they are all grounded by attachments to a homeland. In a living tradition, some elements will be actively remembered, others forgotten, and some appropriated from foreign influences or translated from analogous histories elsewhere. Differences of region, generation, class, gender, urban/rural location, and political strategy are sites of tension and mediation. What is at stake in this complex and inventive cultural politics is the power--always an incomplete power--to define identity and to influence the unequal political, social and economic relationships that constitute modern native Hawaiian life.

Kame'eleihiwa concludes that for the Hawaiian “the future is always unknown, whereas the past is rich in glory and knowledge.” A comparable perspective can be found in Australian Aboriginal orientations to “the Dreaming,” a process by which ancestral beings create the known world: a landscape of totemic sites which present generations renew through on-site rituals and the observance of customary “Law.” Deborah Bird Rose (2004) calls this the constantly renewed and renewing “source.” She goes on to say that the “temporal orientation” can be summarized as a sequence: “First the earth, then Dreamings, then the ancestors. We [Aboriginal people] follow along behind them, and our descendents follow along behind us.” (p 152) Rose provides an absorbing account of how conquest and Christianity attempt to impose a different historical temporality, a “180-degree shift,” reorienting Aboriginal consciousness toward a “future” of progress and salvation. This shift, when successful, transforms a “source” into a “past,” something left behind, perhaps eventually remembered in a museum. Rose details Aborigines’ resistance to the change, their continuing attachment to “country,” the spatial matrix in which the Dreaming and ancestral Law are lived.

It is worth emphasizing that the temporal movement toward ancestors, totemic Dreaming, and the earth, is not a return to the past. The Dreaming is generative, and thus the traditionalism of Rose's more eloquent Aboriginal interlocutors does not resist all change. Elders, men and women, are glad to use Toyota land cruisers, when available, for ritual visits to sacred sites. Kim Christen (2008), following Merlan's lead (1998), provides an excellent account of ongoing relations with "country" by town-based Warumungu women. Perhaps Rose's most hopeful chapter evokes the legacies of Aboriginal labor in cattle stations, what she calls a "non-linear twist" to the oppressive story of colonization (p. 94). She explores the arts of cowboy life, especially interspecies relationships and practices cultivated by both Aboriginals and settlers. These crossover capacities are not external to an Aboriginal way of living, an embodied cosmology, that opens new routes in a transforming myth-historical landscape.

For both Rose and Kame'eleihiwa, returning to a "source" is not a matter of going back in time. Turning-- turning and returning—in an expanded present might be better. Yet "present" is not quite right, for it misses an important sense of drawing from something prior, or primal, a past that is never past, gone forever. It is difficult to avoid terms like past, present, and future, concepts embedded in a Western historical ontology. But we need to use them, like Kame'eleihiwa, as words in translation, bridges to something else.

Ontologies

The Hawaiian's turn "back" is a way to move "forward," or perhaps in some other direction for which we need a different language. In any event, the genealogical turn is not a process of reversing time or repeating what has already happened. This non-recurrence provides grounds for translation with more familiar, Western historical senses of irreversible change. If "history" means anything, it means, at least, "no returns." Things happen just once in an irreversible sequence. Historical phenomena are real inasmuch as they are temporally embedded: developing, adapting, dying and being replaced, altering in relations with other phenomena. Space, in this temporalized ontology, is no longer primary: events in tenth century Mayan cities, in tenth century Europe, and in tenth century New Guinea happen simultaneously. Everything historically real (known or unknown, remembered or forgotten) exists on the same

chronological grid. And everything is slowly or rapidly developing, subject to irreversible changes.

This bald ontological statement raises questions that are fundamental for any attempt to conceive an enlarged historical realism. Let me be as explicit as I can. “Realism” means the descriptive, analytic, critical understanding of complex social and material phenomena in changing times. The definition is closer to the interpretive social sciences and the great theorists of literary realism, Lukacs (1963) and Auerbach (2003) than it is to the modern traditions of analytic philosophy or positivist science. The real cannot be separated from its representations which are embedded in specific historical moments and vantage points. “Historical,” as I conceive it, does not name an unchanging epistemological ground, but rather a starting point, a place from which to travel and translate. It is what the hermeneutic philosopher, Hans-Georg Gadamer (2004) calls a “prejudice” or prior condition of understanding. For Gadamer, presuppositions such as this are part of a tradition, not a fixed cultural inheritance something more like language, a mode of dialogical engagement. Our prejudices, our traditions, are always thrown into open-ended questioning and revision. We are not always aware of this exposure to others, to relationality over time. But the fundamental hermeneutic attitude has recently been sharpened and radicalized by a cumulative de-centering of the West. “History,” today, no longer belongs to one sector of humanity. And historical discourse turns out to be much more varied and idiomatic than previously recognized. It thus behooves us to “listen” cross-culturally with an open mind, not imposing strict definitions in advance.

But for Gadamer there is no such thing as an open mind. Prior categories and assumptions align every conversation, every occasion for translation. They do not, however, exhaust or determine the outcome. The best we can do is to be conscious (to the extent that is possible) of what we bring to the encounter. In my present discussion, the discourses and practices that can contribute to an enlarged historical realism are very inclusive. Orality, genealogy, and presentism, usually excluded from the domain of “proper” history, are all permitted. So are embodied forms of memory and inscription (in rituals, in places, in relations with oracles, spirits, ancestors). The sole definitional criterion for admission to the translation zones of the

“historical” is the ontological presumption of non-repeating time. Real events happen once. And every repetition marks a difference. The historical practices through which this non-repeating time is inscribed, remembered, narrated, archived, and performed vary widely.

Kame’eleihiwa’s path is obviously not the “arrow of time” familiar to Western meta-historians, at least not inasmuch as an arrow points somewhere. Indigenous historical idioms reveal that non-repeating time can find expression in a variety of shapes, scales, and uses. Listening for histories thus means deconstructing the opposition of linear and cyclical times. Chronological time, in itself, leads nowhere. And if it forms a line it is not necessarily a straight one. Without narrative structure or teleological direction, mere chronology is meaningless—a relentless, unforgiving sequence of moments, everything appearing and disappearing without end. This is the time Lévi-Strauss thought myths existed to “suppress” (or at least to organize). And he further insisted, in a famous argument with Sartre, that history was no different from myth in this regard (1966). Indeed, as Hayden White (1973, 1978) has exhaustively argued, meaningful history, even of the empirical, academic sort, is pre-encoded, given shape and fullness (a feeling of “reality”) by figural condensations and narrative orders. Teleological versions of a unified, directional history have been particularly familiar and powerful discourses in the West (and not only there). These large-scale histories (perhaps it would be better to call them temporalized cosmologies) selectively gather up all nonreversible changes into a general line of “progress.” This capacious form can be filled with a wide variety of contents: the “civilizing processes” of imperial and class hierarchies, all the “-izations” (industrialization, modernization, secularization, urbanization, westernization, globalization); and of course the cumulative visions of the monotheistic world religions and the guaranteed momentum of various messianisms (fundamentalist visions of “redemption,” radical Left expectations of “the revolution”).

But not all senses of historical development are teleological, not in the sense of projecting a coherent end point or destiny. It is possible to register non-repeating paths in an interconnected, unevenly changing, multi-directional present. This “linearity”—if the term still applies—imagines parallel and intersecting histories. Its ontological foundation is the deep, developing time imagined by Charles Darwin. Darwin’s time is a directional history “coming from but not

going to.” It allows for multiple developing lines, tangled and crosscutting, a bush perhaps, rather than an arrow of time. There still can be no returns, and all destinations are temporary.

It is good to recall how recently this endless historicity came to be a reality (a very contested reality) for a significant minority of Europeans—during what Loren Eiseley (1958: 330-31) has called “Darwin’s Century.” Eiseley writes of “the unique and unreturning nature of the past” and “the emergence of the endlessly new.” This radically temporal ontology was hard to accept in the late 1800s. It still is. We still work to contain the relentless series, aligning it with progressive visions (idealist and materialist, utopian and dystopic), with dueling periodizations, projected futures. And we create structures to save time, using all manner of memorializing and collecting practices: museums, monuments, dictionaries, photographs, ruins, the lieux de mémoire analyzed by Pierre Nora (1984). But there is no escaping history’s open-endedness and the certainty that whatever story makes sense to us now will before long be re-contextualized, made partial and incomplete. The certainty of this uncertainty is based on the secular reality that non-repeating, developing time can never be perfectly aligned, or finally saved.

Reararticulating Postmodernity

I have raised the question of how the indigenous “presence” of the 1980s and 1990s is related to the emergence of neo-liberal hegemonies. In this context it is impossible to separate indigenous mobilizations from broader patterns of identity politics. To be sure, the social struggles and inventive processes at work often have deep pre-colonial, pre-capitalist roots: they retrieve and activate traditions that are grounded in particular ancestral places.

Indigenous performative energies and counter-cultural visions precede, and potentially exceed, national and transnational systems of regulation. But native cultural traditions and social movements do not exist in isolation, however much they may at times assert their sovereignty and independence. Like other identity-based social movements they are enmeshed in powerful national and transnational regimes of coercion and opportunity. We need, therefore, to sustain a tension around issues of determination. This involves an ability to entertain complexity and ambivalence. It also means holding a place for transformative

potential: what Kum Kum Sangari (2002) has called “the politics of the possible.”

Ethnographic-historical realism works to represent material constraints, intersecting histories, and emerging social forms, without imposing structural closure or developmental destiny.

In an influential discussion, Raymond Williams (1977) argues against direct, or mechanical, forms of political economic determinism, proposing instead a more supple “determination” of pressures and limits, material-cultural forces articulated contingently at multiple levels. He also distinguishes “epochal” and “historical” kinds of analysis. In the former, “a cultural process is seized as a cultural system, with determinate dominant features.” The latter “recognizes the complex interrelations between movements and tendencies both within and beyond a specific and effective dominance.”(Williams 1977: 121) Epochal thinking subsumes layered and contradictory components of economic, social and cultural existence within systematic wholes that are stages in a developmental narrative. In contrast, historical thinking is always grappling with the specific interactions of “dominant, residual, and emergent” elements in any conjuncture. These elements do not necessarily line up in a coherent temporal direction: residual indexing the past, emergent the future. Williams notes that in modernizing, secular versions of epochal thinking, religion was long assumed to be of waning significance. Yet many forms of religious practice today—the global reach of Pentacostalism comes to mind—can be considered both residual and emergent. The same can be said of indigenous social and cultural movements that reach “backwards” in order to move “ahead.” When these ancient traditions become effectively modern the whole direction of (Western) historical development wavers. Williams’ goal is to complicate Marxist historicizing, and he does so from within that tradition. But of course the simplifying, epochal thinking he rejects is not limited to Marxism. His alternative, conjunctural realism, which I call “ethnographic,” is of broad significance. And when the analysis leaves Europe for the variegated and contradictory zones of colonial and postcolonial contact and struggle, Williams’ sense of “historical” analysis is further complicated—thrown into unfinished, dialogical relations of translation.

I have proposed that “history” belongs, significantly, to others. Its discourses and temporal shapes are idiomatic and varied. A concept of “historical practice” can expand our range of attention, helping us take seriously the claims of oral transmission, genealogy, and ritual

processes. These embodied, practical ways of representing the past have not been considered fully, realistically, historically by ideologies that privilege literacy and chronology. Historical practice can act as a translation tool for re-thinking a central process of indigenous survival and renewal: “tradition.” Native claims for recognition, cultural rights, sovereignty, and land always assume continuity rooted in kinship and place. It is easy to understand this sense of belonging as essentially backward-looking, tradition as inheritance, as a residual element in the contemporary mix. However, when conceived as historical practice, tradition is freed from a primary association with the past and grasped as a way of actively connecting different times: a source of transformation. (Phillips 2004) A vision of unified History thus yields to entangled historical practices. Tradition and its many near-synonyms (heritage, *patrimoine*, *costumbre*, *coutume*, *kastom*, *adat*) denote interactive, creative and adaptive processes.

The challenge for ethnographic (Williams’ “historical”) realism is more than the task of creating multi-scaled, non-reductive accounts of changing social, cultural, and economic formations. It also grapples with questions of pragmatic, sometimes utopic, possibility. Realism must be attuned to what is emerging, what exceeds the familiar. The politics of identity, or rather of identifications, is difficult to contain. What possibilities does identity open up? How is it channeled by specific powers in particular conjunctures? In the early twenty-first century we confront a proliferation of cultures and identities. People claim membership and distinguish themselves by a seemingly endless, cross cutting and productive, array of markers. They locate themselves by place, nationality, culture, race, gender, sexuality, generation, or disability. The list can, in principle, be infinitely extended. The phenomenon is so widespread it invites systemic explanation. Can the proliferating claims be understood as products of a global historical moment and a political-economic structure?

Fredric Jameson (1984) and David Harvey (1990) established a powerful analytic tradition that shows no signs of waning. Rey Chow’s *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (2002) and *Ethnicity Inc.* (2009) by John and Jean Comaroff are two recent examples. Drawing on different materials, with distinct emphases, these scholars have linked the performance and commodification of identity to a historical moment: a global, systemic change that brings with it newly flexible and decisive restructurings of local worlds. While

accounts vary as to where, when, and how comprehensively the change occurs, most agree that the broad economic crisis of the early 1970s was a turning point. By the 1980s, neo-liberal hegemony would be consolidated in the form of increasingly transnational markets and flexible methods of accumulation. A new form of cultural production: postmodernism (Jameson) or postmodernity (Harvey). In this view, the invention and reinvention of identities is integral to a late capitalist, or "postmodern," world system of cultural forms. Capitalist globalization permits and even encourages differences, as long as they do not threaten a dominant political-economic order. Distinctive traditions are sustained, re-created, performed, and marketed in a theatre of identities.

In postmodernity, according to the analysis, local communities are pressured and enticed to reconstitute themselves within a kind of global shopping mall of identities. When "culture" and "place" are reasserted politically, it will tend to be in nostalgic, commodified forms. Tradition persists as simulacrum, lived custom as frozen heritage, folklore as fakelore. We increasingly confront what Dean MacCannell (1992:158) calls "reconstructed ethnicity . . . new and more highly deterministic ethnic forms. . . ethnicity-for-tourism in which exotic cultures figure as key attractions." There is no dearth of self-stereotyping, more-or-less kitschy examples. And there is, certainly, a proliferating tendency to objectify, commodify, and perform identities—forms of cultural production enabled by the coalescence of multicultural pluralism with neo-liberal marketing. The title *Ethnicity Inc.* sums it up. But, as we will see, the critique leaves little room for contingent articulations or contradictory trends; and it can fall into a kind of complacent tough-mindedness that sees everything as an effect of systemic power. Globalization's paradoxical production of differences through interconnection, first highlighted by Harvey, is explained away. And a genuinely dialectical analysis of hegemonic forms and countercurrents, anticipated by Jameson, is narrowed to a symptomatic critique. (Clifford 2000)

In 1994, four years after *The Condition of Postmodernity* was published, the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas went public. Masked men and women, who seemed to appear from nowhere, declared war on global neo-liberalism, challenging its logics at virtually every level. The Zapatistas would quickly become famous, thanks to a charismatic (anti-) leader,

Subcomandante Marcos, a clear democratic message, and an ability to make connections at national and global scales. The movement has articulated “indigenous” localism with class politics, gender equality, Christian liberation theology, and Mexican nationalist populism. It clearly represents a new kind of social mobilization. But how new? And how deeply “Mayan?” Are these agrarian rebels *indigenas* or *campesinos*? Or both? Some observers see merely a new twist for an older Marxist guerilla practice. Others announce a truly “postmodern” movement.

I cannot engage, here, with the many complex and ongoing arguments about the social composition, local history, and political significance of the uprising. I mention the Zapatistas because they are a social movement importantly based on claims of locality and identity that overflow narrow identifications. They evidently partake of “the condition of postmodernity.” Savvy communicators and image managers, the Zapatistas brand their movement with recognizable images and symbols, and they encourage what might be called solidarity tourism. Indigenous localism is here the result of migrations by diverse native groups into an isolated frontier region. Settlers from the highlands and elsewhere in Mexico have cobbled together a multi-ethnic, progressive “Mayan” tradition in a new place, adapting its ideology to contemporary socialist and feminist ideals. And while all of this is accomplished with an eye to national and international recognition, the movement also sustains a commitment to democratic transformation at the local level. This complex, community-based process is obviously different from the marketing of locality and difference described by Harvey in places like Boston’s Quincy Market. Yet the Zapatistas do not inhabit a radically different world, and it can be difficult to decide whether they represent globalization’s dialectical negation or a niche within its landscape of governed diversities. At the present time their resistance to neo-liberal policies of coercive free trade and their expansive national populism appear to have been contained. A remarkable, ongoing experiment with indigenous socialism is limited to specific villages (“autonomous communities”). Yet these are potentially the seeds of something different, and the Zapatista movement has resonated with other traditions of locally based radicalism throughout Mexico and beyond (Stephen 2002).

The Zapatista movement is a dramatic example that complicates holistic visions of neo-liberal globalization or of postmodernity as the latest stage of Capitalism. Indeed, the whole language of “stages” now appears suspiciously uni-directional and Eurocentric. Many cross-cutting, counter-cultural histories disrupt the narrative. For example, Paul Gilroy (1992) traces alternate forms of modernity in the diasporic “Black Atlantic,” challenging premature, Eurocentric visions of totality while also rejecting primordial claims of ethnic or racial absolutism. Similar alternatives emerge from the tangled local, regional, and global histories called “indigenous” today: Australian Aboriginal art-production or Andean mobilizations around water rights, tribal museums in Alaska or land and language reclamations in Canada. To grasp the specific dialectics of innovation and constraint in these counter-cultures, a Gramscian analysis of changing hegemonies and struggles for relative power is far more historically concrete than before/after narratives of cultural loss, social assimilation, or inevitable economic subsumption. As we will see, hegemony is not domination, but rather a historical process: unfinished struggles, contingent alliances and accommodations in an evolving field of unequal forces.

Alter-Histories 2

Listening for alternate ways of thinking and doing history we turn now to a provocative example provided by the anthropologist Nelson Graburn (1998). It appears in the journal *Museum Anthropology* (a section devoted to “indigenous curating”).

Graburn is well known for his long ethnographic research with the Inuit of North East Canada. The region has been named and re-named, reflecting altered relations of power: from the Rupertsland/Ungava to Nouveau Quebec, to Nunavik. There are also a great many local names of varying antiquity. The protagonist of Graburn’s article, Tamusi Qumak Nuvalinga, was raised in igloos and tents and died in 1993. Monolingual in Inuktitut, he devoted many years to constructing a dictionary, which he hoped would preserve the native language and support its use in schools. He also created a “museum” which he called “Saputik” or “Weir.” It opened in 1978.

A Weir is not exactly a “dam,” which blocks a stream. More like a strainer, a weir as Tamusi knew it was a barrier of stones that could trap fish without completely holding back the river’s flow. By temporarily blocking the stream, enough fish could be speared and dried to supply fall and winter foods. This technology of capture for purposes of survival provided an image for collecting and remembering. Tamusi’s “weir” was a two story faux igloo, made of wood. The structure contained clothes and possessions of loved ones, dog sleds (but not snowmobiles), soapstone carvings (a relatively new art form that has become a source of Inuit pride), 1950s and 60s photographs of Inuit people, and upstairs, a recreated igloo interior with old and newly commissioned furnishings. A traditional world was gathered, but not a recreated “pre-contact” life. These were things from the recent historical past, objects of cultural value that needed to be saved now. According to Graburn, the Weir reflected a new historical awareness: “Tamusi envisaged time as a river carrying everything irrevocably out to sea to be lost forever.”

We should be clear that this is not a first-contact story, a sudden impact or a “fall” into modernity. Tamusi’s epiphany, carefully historicized by Graburn, is a response to accelerated change in the 1960s and 70s. Before that, Inuit had experienced an extended period of relations with explorers, traders, missionaries, anthropologists, and Canadian government officers. For much of the 20th century the Inuit regions had enjoyed relative prosperity (trade in furs, especially white fox pelts) plus the elimination of starvation and some diseases. Technological changes (guns, wood houses) were compatible with traditional subsistence patterns and social structures. For Tamusi, traditional life was something like the negotiated “middle ground” described by the historian Richard White (1991) in his seminal book on early frontier relations. A relative balance of power could be sustained, with Inuit drawing on Canadian resources selectively and to a significant extent on their own terms. This balance would be disrupted in the 1960s, a time of declining trade, increased government and missionary intervention, wider schooling for the young, and language loss.

Tamusi’s response to the changing situation was a local history museum. The Weir preserved personal or familial objects of value, in the process of becoming “cultural” treasures or collective “heritage.” Graburn links the museum to Tamusi’s Inuktitut Dictionary (another kind of “weir”). And the work is also inseparable from his leadership in a cooperative movement to

resist a Hudson's Bay Company trade monopoly and to hold off a giant Quebec hydroelectric project in the 1960s. Graburn describes "a long struggle [by Inuit] to keep the economy under their control in the Cooperative and to ensure the education of their children in inuktitut." (p. 25) This was not the last-gasp movement of a doomed culture, but a continuing struggle within and against potent structural forces, national and capitalist. Thus Tamusi's gathering of Inuit heritage must not be thought of as a native version of "salvage" collecting (in the manner of early 20th century anthropology) where cultural disappearance and political defeat could be taken for granted. The Weir actively re-constitutes a "selective tradition" (Williams 1977, Ch. 7), identifying, retaining, and retranslating critical sources of identity, in the midst of change.

Graburn has much to say about subsequent developments—particularly the spread of indigenous curating practices in museums and cultural centers throughout Nouveau Quebec/Nunavut. He traces a general tendency toward articulating wider "ethnic" cultures, performed for diverse audiences: native, national and touristic. Taumusi's project thus prefigures the identity politics that are integral to indigeneity today: new forms of autonomy and dependence, renewed traditions and capitalist development projects. The ultimate outcomes of these engagements, I have been arguing, cannot be read off in advance. They are specific articulations, historically open-ended. Thus any presumption of a singular line of development needs to be held in suspension to make conceptual space for intersecting historicities, a genuinely dialogical present.

In many indigenous societies, autochthonous origin stories coexist with historical narratives of a past that came before and was different from the present. For example, Island Pacific cultures remember emerging from the land while also recalling the heroic landfalls of ocean-going ancestors (Bonnemaison 1994). Inuit oral traditions tell about entering their present homeland and displacing its prior inhabitants, the Dorset People (a migration 700-900 years ago confirmed by archaeologists). More recent changes are also grasped through a genealogical sense of "coming from but not going to." (Graburn personal communication). Such stories narrate the changes brought by trappers, whalers, and explorers, foreigners who came and left. These "middle ground" histories register the new--the arrival of guns, commerce, houses, diseases—but without the sense of a qualitative break, a feeling of cultural loss. Genealogical

histories confirm and explain a present: how we got here from somewhere different; what from the past defines us now. And while there is a non-repeating direction to history it is one that keeps us who we are, as we change. Genealogy is thus not a story of abandoning the past for a whole new future: Westernized, Christian, or modern.

In Tamusi's figuration of time, the river's destination is the ocean, a place of no return, where everything mixes and loses form. One thinks of the entropy Lévi-Strauss so poignantly portrayed in *Tristes Tropiques*. (1955) Here, world history takes the form of a Fall, from difference into sameness. Everywhere the future is convergence, undifferentiated homogeneity. Whether told as a lament for vanishing cultures or as a celebration of progress, the story is familiar. The new inexorably displaces the old. But does it? What else is going on? Tamusi's "ocean" is clearly an image for lost difference. But is it one of historical destiny? If the river and the weir mark, as Graburn says, "a new consciousness that we may label modernity," (p.) are we speaking of some whole new modern consciousness and sense of the real? An epochal replacement? Or rather, as I think Graburn's contextual account allows, a process of re-articulation and translation? To posit too sharp a break is premature. It may also be ethnocentric. All-or-nothing, before-after transformations into modernity tend to assume that people change only to become like us. An ethnographic-historical realism grapples with a less determined process of transformation, occurring within specific social, economic and political relations of power. It attends to the ways newness is articulated in practice, how difference and identity are translated, performed for different audiences. This can make it hard to say with certainty that this sense of time is emergent, another residual. Indigenous cultural politics often express the new, the way forward, in terms of the old. Tamusu, after all, called his technology of temporal capture a "weir" not a "museum." Changing is always a process of "looking both ways" (see Chapter Six). Whatever development or sense of direction history may exhibit, it is composed of overlays, loops, and intersecting temporal paths.

Considered in this light, Tamusi's "Weir" project is not elegiac, or museological in the familiar Western sense. It is linked to local cooperative movements, to land and language reclamation initiatives, to the emergence of "Inuit" identities and cultural projects. Its work of cultural salvage is part of a transformative continuity: the future-oriented traditionalism of First

Nations, their native arts and renewed assertions of sovereignty. In Northeast Canada, Inuit activism has led to the creation of the large, semi-autonomous region, Nunavut, along with a proliferation of neo-traditional institutions, discourses, art forms, and social movements. This is no longer the “middle ground” context of igloos, tents, dogsleds, hunting rifles, traded furs, and Inuktitut monolingualism, the world Tamusi’s generation grew up in. But it is not an undifferentiated modernity either--all of us flowing the same way, down the same river.

Ethnographic Realism

Two recent research projects, one from southern Mexico the other from Guatemala, offer examples of a historically and politically attuned ethnographic realism. With different mixes of optimism and pessimism they provide grounded alternatives to system-centered, top-down conceptions of power and cultural process. *Histories and Stories from Chiapas; Border Identities in Southern Mexico*, (2004) by R. Aida Hernández Castillo is based on fieldwork in and around the Zapatista frontier zone. It follows the twists and turns of a small Mayan group’s survival and re-identification during the last half of the twentieth century. Charles Hale, in a series of critical essays (eg. 2002, 2005) leading to a complex ethnography (2006) probes indigenous and Ladino responses to neo-liberalism and the politics of identity in Guatemala

On the Mexican side of the border, where Hernández Castillo did her research, language loss has been pervasive, and until recently Mam individuals tended to blend into the “mestizo” populace, their social and cultural assimilation seemingly assured. A finer-grained ethnographic lens, however, reveals a complex history of negotiated adaptation and distinction sustained through changing political climates. Hernández Castillo describes tendencies toward cultural renewal and Mam identity politics that were underway well before the indigenous-identified Zapatistas went public in 1994. The Mam populations she frequented, in the Lacandon forest and also in the Chiapas highlands, are not active rebels. Many are Jehovah’s Witnesses. A key interlocutor (and cultural revival leader) is a longtime Presbyterian church activist and supporter of the PRI, until recently Mexico’s ruling party. Women’s movements are relatively autonomous elements in the identity mix.

Hernández Castillo tracks a persistent, contradictory and inventive politics of survival. Focusing on changing religious affiliations and womens' activism, she shows how Mam people have both resisted and accommodated government models of "modernization." This is a history of becoming "modern," but not, or not only, on terms dictated by the State. During the 1930s, if one were to benefit from the land redistributions of revolutionary Mexico, it was necessary to speak Spanish, to suppress local culture. State policy forced incorporation on these terms, and compliance was both substantial and strategic. Several decades later, Mam groups—displaced by land shortages in the highlands to lowland plains and then to frontier regions in the Lacandon rain forest--adopted Protestant religions as ways to change, to be modern. In the process they were also able to maintain a certain distance from the assimilationist state, a distance that would later find new forms of expression in revivals of cultural tradition and indigenous rights. People who had lived as "mestizo" would re-emerge as "Mam."

State policy remained part of the process, as the ideal of a mestizo Mexico gave way to a policy of multiculturalism. In the 1980s, government organizations arrived in Chiapas actively encouraging peasants to recover their identity, especially their indigenous traditions and languages (political autonomy or sovereignty were not part of the message). Culture, and the respect that comes with identity, were now seen as integral to a balanced social and economic "development." Incorporation in the nation would be achieved through a managed diversity. But, as before, while government policy and institutions promoted and directed change, they did not control it. The strong diversity (*autonomía*) claimed by the Zapatistas and echoed by indigenous militants elsewhere in Mexico was certainly not part of the official program. And more subtly, in the Jehovah's Witness Mam community of the Lacandon Forest where Hernández Castillo did fieldwork, distinction would be articulated through Christian millenarianism, through links with religious centers in New York City, and through a growing interest in revived native traditions. Mam language radio broadcasts began to re-connect dispersed populations. Traditions, selectively remembered, could be consistent with Protestant norms. Ethnic crafts were revived, in part, with the idea of encouraging eco- and cultural tourism.

The emergence of Mam identity politics, as described by Hernández Castillo, is emphatically not a revivalist story of people returning to origins, rediscovering who they really are. Her book traces a hegemonic process, a history of communities working pragmatically for survival and distinction within and against shifting terms of national incorporation. The account is also not one of recruitment by contemporary multiculturalism, a system managed by the neo-Liberal state or by transnational markets. Global capital and the state are active forces but not determining structures. One could, of course, view the growing interest in Mam cultural performances, and especially the prospect of cultural tourism in the Lacandon rain forest, as commodifications of identity and place, processes integral to the “postmodern condition.” They could be understood in the context of the global, neo-liberal market for diversity recently surveyed by John and Jean Comaroff (2009). There are certainly anecdotes that could be cherry-picked to fit the diagnosis. But Hernández Castillo’s historically detailed ethnography makes abundantly clear how reductive such accounts would be, how many local roots and routes, how much entangled, dialectical agency would vanish from sight.

Hernández Castillo shows that Mam survival (always a process of change and transformation) has been engaged with state projects through most of the 20th century. In the neo-Gramscian language of Stuart Hall (1986b), it is a politics of shifting articulations (dis-connections and re-connections). Based in Guatemala, Charles Hale also uses Gramscian tools to trace the historical convergences and tensions of indigenous mobilization and neo-liberal governance during the 1980s and 90s in Latin America. His long-term ethnographic work is focused on Ladinos in Guatemala, but his theoretical and comparative range is broad. In his interventionist essays, particularly, he tracks the consequences of neo-liberal reforms for mobilized Mayans as well as other indigenous groups in Latin America. Hale shows how policies of rights and recognition open spaces for cultural revival and identity-based social movements. These offer opportunities for previously marginalized populations to mobilize, to establish a cultural and political presence. But neo-liberalism also circumscribes possibilities, manages and tries to incorporate the new forces. In Guatemala, Hale tracks the efficacy of distinctions between “good” and “bad” *Indios*: rights-based, cultural expressions of indigeneity versus radical, political claims to sovereignty or autonomy. Liberal policies and

institutions, both national and transnational, work to channel indigenous mobilizations into the former category, thus limiting their transformative potential. The analysis is persuasive and far-reaching. Similar critiques of human-rights regimes and the politics of cultural recognition come from Africa (Englund 2006, Geschire 2009) and Australia (Povinelli 2002). We recognize local versions of Harvey's globalizing "condition of postmodernity"--flexible, multi-cultural, market-driven. But Hale's ethnographic sensibility keeps him attuned to something more.

In a situation where Marxist revolution is not a realistic possibility and "cultural rights" are a focus of hegemonic struggle, he poses the fundamental question:

In the present resolutely postrevolutionary era, cultural rights organisations are likely to occupy an exceedingly ambiguous space: attempting to exercise rights granted by the neoliberal state, while at the same time eluding the constraints and dictates of those very concessions. The Gramscian notion of articulation, in these cases, becomes the analytical watchword: *will the subjugated knowledge and practices be articulated with the dominant, and neutralised? Or will they occupy the space opened from above while resisting its built in logic, connect with others, toward "transformative" cultural-political alternatives that still cannot even be fully imagined?* Especially on a terrain as volatile and dynamic as indigenous politics in Latin America, it would be imprudent to allow theory to run out ahead of grounded analysis in response to these questions. (Hale 2002: 499, emphasis added)

The good and bad news are inextricable. Neo-liberalism opens possibilities for identity-based social movements while also powerfully channeling diversity and transformation. But Hale goes further, leaving room for an excessive politics of the possible, for "'transformative' cultural-political alternatives that still cannot even be fully imagined."

The "grounded analysis" Hale recommends is simultaneously ethnographic, historical and political. In his richly detailed, probing ethnography of Ladino neo-racism (which I cannot do

justice to here) he also evokes psychic dispositions and habits that exist in tension with social categories. Like Hernández Castillo, Hale recognizes that socio-cultural survival and identity (re)formation are active, relational processes, and that “spaces opened from above” are also being created from below. Interpellations and articulations occur simultaneously, in specific fields of force. Moreover, the future is indeterminate, because postmodernity isn’t the end of history or neo-liberalism the last hegemonic settlement. To say this is not to deny structural inequality and determination. In Guatemala and elsewhere in Latin America new forms of social, economic, and cultural power are being imposed, negotiated, resisted, and appropriated. Hale sees limited room for maneuver by subaltern groups. But while throwing cold water on romantic notions that indigenous cultural renewals are necessarily counter-hegemonic, Hale also sees the possibilities opened by neo-liberal regimes of rights and multiculturalism. He looks and listens for emergent phenomena--potential sites of radical re-articulation.

For example, if the racialized opposition of “Ladino” and “Maya” in Guatemala were broken down in the name of a pluralist democracy, new possibilities for alliance would need to be created. Could “mestizo” identity be reinvented, embraced by those willing to cross ethnic and racial divides? Hale explores the possibility of “mestizaje from below,” no longer an assimilationist national norm but now a subversion of the divisive categories of neo-liberalism’s managed multiculturalism. In urban settings, large numbers of poor people and youth refuse the identity categories offered by the state, often acknowledging indigenous ancestry but searching for a place “between.” And ladinos seeking coalitional connections with Mayans may think of themselves as “new-mestizos.” Another hopeful trend: In Nicaragua and Honduras, territorial units or *bloques* have been formed by coalitions of indigenous and black groups. These locally controlled regions, zones of relative autonomy, exist in complex tension with norms imposed by the state and by development agencies such as the World Bank. (Hale 2005) Hale detects these nascent possibilities throughout Central America, but he recognizes that they carry no guarantee of radical change or a progressive outcome. He concludes that the old political maps—Marxist, nationalist, developmental, or liberal--are of limited value, and often a hindrance, in today’s “uncharted territory.” (Hale 2002: 524)

Ethnography like that of Charles Hale and R. Aida Hernandez Castillo works without a determining map. Multiple maps are needed, intersecting and sometimes contradictory. In this conjunctural perspective “identities” are relational, social processes of identification. But if there is nothing primordial or permanent about being indigenous or ladino, black or white, Indian or settler, this does not mean these social positions are illusions, or without power. It means that social and cultural groups exist in historical change and contingency, constantly reckoning themselves among others. Mam identity, like the *autonomía* of the Zapatistas, is a relative status, sustained in embattled conditions. In this it resembles the diverse forms of sovereignty increasingly claimed by native groups in the Americas. (Biolsi 2005) The best ethnographic/historical research, such as that by Jessica Cattelino (2008) on Seminole gaming or Circe Sturm (2002) on Cherokee blood politics and tribal identification, tracks specific continuities, tensions, and contradictions through Gramscian fields of force. It is a kind of historicizing that avoids linear, before-after meta-narratives, attending to overlays and negotiations that are simultaneously constrained and inventive. Keeping conjunctures open and complexly determined is not a product of post-structuralist methodology, a theoretically driven deconstruction of historical, or explanatory orders. It is a decentered realism, multi-scaled and non-reductive: determinations without determinism.

Realism—after poststructuralism and decolonization--presupposes a fractured, contestable narrative perspective. There is no longer a standpoint from which to definitively “map” particular, local stories in an overarching sequence, no narrative of human history, of enlightened progress, of economic development, or of a disseminating global system. In the early twenty-first century the grand, explanatory narratives have been decisively de-centered. This is now a familiar observation. But we are not left with the predicament my late colleague John Schaar characterized as “all power to the fragments”—nothing but small histories, local visions. For “the local” has never been anything but the opposite of “the global,” both ideas equally abstract and ideological. We can, concretely, explore everything in between. I have argued that realism works with “big enough,” more-than-local, narratives: histories that travel and translate, but without cumulating in a coherent destiny, progressive or apocalyptic. We thus rely on processes of juxtaposition and mediation, generalizing but never general. “The

whole,” Adorno famously wrote, “is the false.” (1974: 50) And so is the fragment. Realism works self-consciously with partial histories, alert to their contradictions and constitutive tensions. As we have seen, ethnographic studies of historical transformation like those of Hernandez Castillo and Hale find ways to critically inhabit, not explain away, the paradoxes of postmodernity.

Alter-Histories 3

Let us listen to one more resonant example of indigenous historical thinking (Pullar and Knecht 1995). It is a quotation I stumbled on about fifteen years ago, using it to conclude an essay about history that prefigures my present speculations (Clifford 1997b). The quotation has stayed with me. I asked then, and I still wonder, what kind of a “big enough history” it could be telling.

Barbara Shangin, an Alutiiq elder is speaking sometime in the 1970s, on the Alaska Peninsula, near Kodiak Island:

Our people have made it through lots of storms and disasters fro thousands of years. All the troubles since the Russians are like one long stretch of bad weather. Like everything else, this storm will pass over some day.

We can, without too much difficulty, read these words as narrating a recognizable history: the colonization of Alaska and its consequences. I don’t think Barbara Shangin is saying that Alutiiq people will eventually go back to what they were before capitalist modernity, in the form of Russian fur traders, began to integrate Alaska in the late 18th century. At least as I interpret her, she assumes that the bad weather brings irreversible changes—some of which, like the Russian Orthodoxy that has taken root as a genuine native religion, are of enduring a kind of return, without going backwards in time. The weather cycles Barbara Shangin evokes are thus not un-historical repetitions, but structuring patterns for transformation, for continuity in change. Temporally deep stories such as hers narrate an indigenous *longue durée* reaching before and after colonization. This “reach,” anachronistic and prophetic, is fundamental to

contemporary native ways of telling history. We listen to Barbara Shagin's words as more than wishful thinking: she is making realist claims in a distinct historical idiom.

But perhaps it would be better to speak of a distinct "historical ecology." The Tongan writer, anthropologist and visionary, Epeli Hau'ofa (see Chapter Six), suggests as much in a luminous meditation on Island Pacific forms of memory. At times he seems to be extending Barbara Shagin's vision. Hau'ofa affirms that indigenous histories have deep roots in oral traditions and in place, in the inhabited land and ocean. Real history, history that matters, does not suddenly begin with, colonization, missionaries, literacy, and global development. The scope of history is more encompassing. Oral, place-based, modes of recalling and moving in historical time, work through cycles. Barbara Shagin's "weather" is always different and the same, always returning, always innovating.. Hau'ofa refers to Kame'eleihiwa's evocation, discussed earlier, of the Hawaiian past "in front," and the future "behind." And he asks, with characteristic humor: "Is this, then, the case of the dog chasing its tail?"

He answers in the affirmative, continuing in a passage that could be a commentary on Shagin's vision of change.

Where time is circular, it does not exist independently of the natural surroundings and society. It is important for our historical reconstructions to know that the Oceanian emphasis on circular time is tied to the regularity of seasons marked by natural phenomena such as cyclical appearances of certain flowers, birds and marine creatures, shedding of certain leaves, phases of the moon, changes in prevailing winds, and weather patterns, which themselves mark the commencement of and set the course for cycles of human activity such as those related to agriculture, terrestrial and marine foraging, trade and exchange, and voyaging, all with their associated rituals, ceremonies, and festivities. This is a universal phenomenon stressed variously by different cultures. (Hau'ofa 2008: 67)

Embodied, emplaced, ritually performed senses of time are present, Hau'ofa affirms, in every society. But technologically advanced, urbanized worlds make it difficult to stay connected to

homelands and their rhythms. In Island Pacific societies, “Most of us who are urbanized and living in accordance with the demands of the contemporary global culture still maintain relationships with our nonurban relatives and are therefore entangled in the tussle between tradition and modernity, however defined.” To represent this tussle, with its changing historical processes of attachment and distance, “we could use the notion of the spiral, which connotes both cyclic and linear movement.” (p. 69) At issue is not just a way of remembering, but a historical practice, a way of surviving, continuing to live: “We could go further and incorporate this notion [the spiral] in the formulation of an Oceanian ecological ideology, tying linear development to natural cycles, with a view of guiding the application of modern technologies on our environment. Our long-term survival within Oceania may well depend on some such guidance.” (p.72)

Hau’ofa’s “spiral” is a figure for indigenous thriving, for transformations and returns in endless, genealogical development—a profoundly relational process. And the resonance of his image is wide. We have never lived in an “arrow of time” history with a clear direction. We live in swirls of contemporary, coeval times: histories going somewhere, separately and together. The concatenation cannot be mapped on a single plane. As I have suggested, it can only be represented through a partial realism of juxtaposed “big enough” histories.

Barbara Shagin’s historical “weather” is always different and the same, an image perhaps of indigenous historical epistemology and practice. Like Hau’ofa’s “spiral” it gives a shape to transformations and returns in developing time. In their visions of history swirling, moving in more than one direction, the two narrative forms are profoundly realistic. Moreover, their “ecological” sensibilities are of obvious importance in more-than-local contexts. Given the crises facing an unequal, overpopulated, environmentally ravaged planet today, the survival of small societies who maintain, or at least aspire to, some degree of social balance and responsible local attachment is, in itself, an achievement. But is this a “big enough history”-- big enough, that is, to matter? What difference does it make for all those crowding into cities? Will indigenous projects, in new contexts of articulation, somehow aggregate, becoming a

more-than-local, globalizing force? And why would one want to ask such a question? Is not local survival enough?

Hau'ofa (2008 [1993]) has eloquently argued that remaining local and small is not now, and has never been, a strategic option. People will connect with one another through travel, trade, technology, kinship, migration, invasion and conflict. (He stresses that, paradoxically, this is especially true of island societies.) While it may be necessary, at times, to look inward, to build defensive walls, to cultivate one's garden, this has never been a long-term survival strategy. Interdependence and movement are historical realities that indigenous societies inflect, and partly control. They do this through interactive social processes of articulation, performance, and translation.

Articulation, Performance, Translation

Historicizing with Harvey and Jameson we confront a changing capitalist world-system that works through differences, that rewards and governs cultures and identities. Indigenous social movements unfold within these flexible structures. But I have argued that this cannot be the only, or the final, moment of analysis. And indeed, both of the thinkers just mentioned reserve a crucial place for "utopian," radically transformative visions (Harvey 2000, Jameson 2005). No doubt all global-systemic approaches run the risk of functionalist reductionism, where difference appears derivative of, or "produced" by, structural power. Conversely, ethnographic approaches too easily slip into nominalism. Devotion to specificity and detail can become a mantra-like objection to all generalizing analyses: "It's more complex than that..."

A combined approach synthesizing structure and process, "macro" and "micro" levels, the localized "thick description" of Clifford Geertz with the world historical "cognitive mapping" of Fredric Jameson, is the holy grail of socio-cultural analysis today. It confronts serious methodological obstacles and epistemological antinomies. Synthetic accounts tend to reduce one "level" or "scale" to another, creating wholes from selected parts, or setting up artificial foregrounds and backgrounds. As I argued some time ago, these rhetorical/analytic strategies

can only produce contingent syntheses, “partial truths” subject to refutation and revision by their constitutive exclusions. (Clifford 1986). Observations such as this were part of a radical critique of ethnography during the 1980s. Since then, variegated forms of holism and assemblage have been self-consciously pursued, ethnographic research governed by new assumptions and terms of engagement. (Ong and Collier 2005, Otto and Bubant 2010) I have myself experimented with an anti-synthetic realism, essays made up of juxtaposed representational styles and narratives that both complement and trouble each other. No sovereign method is available, only experiments working outside the frozen alternatives of local and global, structure and process, macro and micro, material and cultural.

It is widely recognized that global-systemic approaches simultaneously explain, and are cut down to size by, historical-ethnographic particulars. Conversely, micro-analyses are subject to larger, world-making energies and forces that open up the local and subvert any discrete “field” of analytic attention (Gupta and Ferguson 1997). We work among irreconcilable antinomies, entering the paradoxes and tensions of our historical moment with agendas that are positioned and relational, pushing against, while drawing on, partial perspectives. The result is a more realistic, because multi-scaled, dialogical and unfinished, understanding of contemporary socio-cultural worlds. This, at least, is my wager.

Approaching the complex terrain of contemporary indigeneity, I rely on three analytic terms: articulation, performance, and translation. They make up a portable toolkit for thinking non-reductively about social and cultural change. All are terms of process. The three tools--or perhaps better, theoretical metaphors--complement and complicate each other. They are used pragmatically and do not lend themselves to systematization. Let me dwell for a moment on each.

Articulation denotes a broad range of connections and disconnections—political, social, economic and cultural. Recall Charles Hale’s essential question, cited above:

Will the subjugated knowledge and practices be articulated with the dominant, and neutralized? Or will they occupy the space opened from above while resisting its built

in logic, connect with others, toward “transformative“ cultural-political alternatives that still cannot even be fully imagined?

The passage begins with the possibility that subaltern knowledges and practices will become tied to the dominant, neo-liberal/state program and thus can no longer contribute to significant change. Hale’s use of the word “articulation” indicates, not a necessary assimilation or loss of social or cultural identity, but rather an alliance of popular aspirations for recognition and autonomy with the agendas of state and transnational institutions: human rights regimes, NGOs, multicultural programs. Difference would not therefore be erased through articulation, but supported, even intensified, in forms that channel and contain it. This is hegemony at work: interactive and negotiated, but ultimately on terms dictated by the more powerful. Hale goes on, however, to suggest a counter-hegemonic range of possibilities. These too depend on processes of articulation. Is it possible, he asks, to “occupy” the spaces opened from above while also resisting their logics? Resistance, here, does not imply total rejection, for it is simultaneous with the activity of moving onto the new spaces. The word “occupy” also suggests a tactic rather than an inevitable outcome. This kind of selective engagement is well expressed by the language of articulation whose connections are always contingent. Articulation includes the possibility of dis-articulation, a process expressed in Hale’s phrase “while resisting.” Moreover it also makes space for re-articulation, as in the final clauses of the quotation where subordinate groups “connect with others” in unprecedented alliances, relations directed neither from “above” nor “below.”

The question posed by the passage, inherent to the process of hegemony, is arguably constitutive of the present historical moment in many parts of the world. It is an antinomy that defines the real and should not be resolved too quickly. Hale’s quotation marks around “transformative” sustain a fundamental uncertainty about what will count as significant, structural, change. The language of articulation helps us focus on structures of power and conditions of maneuver, on specific connections, without foreclosing possibilities of de-linking and re-connecting. It understands the world of cultural politics, its antagonisms and alliances, interpellations and resistances, as materially constrained and open to invention.

Performance is another key term that helps us grasp the ambivalent complexity of contemporary social and cultural processes. In much recent work identity politics is understood as a form of self-recognition and self-marketing in systems of neo-liberal tolerance. Performance is reduced to interpellation. Persons or groups are “called” or “hailed” to perform themselves as authentic cultural subjects. This recognition occurs in situations of empowerment that are circumscribed by state and trans-national regimes of governmentality. The latter term derives from Foucault, and the most sophisticated versions of this analysis, by authors such as Elizabeth Povonelli (2002) and Rey Chow (2002), are a concatenation of Marxist and Foucaultian perspectives. Cultural subjects discover themselves and make themselves legible for powerful audiences that dispose of attractive resources and coercive power. In this perspective, the staged authenticity of ethnic identification, the display of heritage, the branded localism of development projects, and the more or less calculated “acts” of cultural tourism are command performances. However, when Foucault is added to Marx it becomes more difficult to contain these performances within a specific hegemonic regime or economic system.

Foucault’s mobile and de-centered conception of power works through processes of subjectification--experiences of wholeness, empowerment, fulfillment, freedom. Viewed as social performances these subjective processes are excessive, both confirming and exceeding social or economic orders. Their political valence cannot be read off in advance. Freedom can stimulate either consumption or rebellion. Empowerment can be a matter of feeling good or of overturning social order. Moreover interpellation itself is performative. Cultural subjects “play themselves” for multiple audiences: the police, state agencies, schools, churches, NGOs, tourists; they also perform for family, friends, generations, ancestors, the tribe, animals, and the environment. Subjectivity is not simply a matter of turning toward power, as in Althusser’s famous fable (1972). It can also involve turning away, keeping secrets, using more than one name, being different in changing situations.

Attention to performance keeps us attuned to the specificity of acts and the role of discrepant audiences in sustaining identities. As we will see, particularly in Part Three, indigenous cultural expressions include all manner of arts and ceremonies, relations of “showing and

telling” (Strang 2000) that are fundamental to claiming power and resources: dances, emblems, pow-wows, cultural festivals, museum displays, Zapatista bus caravans. But these public manifestations can make us forget the more private celebrations: family potlatches, initiations and life-transitions, curings, memorials and exchanges. Myths and histories of clan and tribe are passed on quietly, when the time is right. Cultural knowledge is always both revealed and held back, shared and kept secret through specific roles and protocols. For example, Australian Aboriginal clan authorities decide what to circulate—in traditional exchanges as well as in modern paintings, websites, or tribal museums—and what to keep to themselves. Men and women control and ritually enact knowledge differently, managing the performances of initiation, of teaching across generations. These are forms of subject formation that take place significantly, though probably never completely, outside the reach of capitalist markets and ideological hegemony. Indigenous identities today are performative, enacted for different audiences at different times, with varying latitudes of discipline and freedom. In Part Two we will follow in detail the anticipated roles and subversive silences of “the last wild Indian in America,” “Ishi”—a man of many performances.

Translation is not transmission. For example, to see the spread of global (“American”) culture as a series of translations recasts its apparent diffusion as a partial, imperfect, and productive process. Something is brought across, but in altered forms, with local differences. *Traditore tradutore*. There is always a loss or misunderstanding along the way. And something is gained, mixed into the message. As Ezra Pound famously said, translation is “making it new.” Returning briefly to the Zapatista movement: Marxism has been translated into Mayan terms and thus made new, but now with women in the conversation (Hernandez-Castillo 1997). Subcomandante Marcos inventively translates a “politics of the possible” for the Mexican nation and for wider worlds. Out of sight, behind the masks, conversations take place between different “Mayans” as well as among other displaced *campesinos* colonizing the Lacandon frontier. In the “autonomous zones,” discussions are ongoing across languages, between generations, and among men and women. Translation is a term for cultural processes that are profoundly dialogic and, like articulation, without closure or guarantee.

The concept of translation, better than transmission, communication, or mediation, brings out the bumps, losses, and makeshift solutions of social life. The theory/metaphor of translation keeps us focused on cultural truths that are continuously “carried across,” transformed and reinvented in practice. We are less inclined to reify a correct or completed ideology: take it or leave it. And it is harder to naturalize a racial essence or an authentic cultural tradition: you belong or you don’t. Cultural translation is always uneven, always betrayed. But this very interference and lack of smoothness is a source of new meanings, of historical traction, as Anna Tsing’s seminal concept of intercultural “friction” (2005) and Donna Haraway’s “diffraction” and “interference” (1997) make clear. The challenge, as we have seen, is to recognize overlapping but discrepant histories that struggle for room to maneuver in a paradoxically systematic and chaotic contemporary world.

Do “indigenous” historical practices matter, at local, national, even global, scales? How important are they... really? The question—reductive and ethnocentric—cannot be avoided. It will be asked, often as a way to make tribal societies once again insignificant, residual, and disappearing. An adequate response, I’ve argued, must not replace one vision of unified history with another. It works at multiple scales and among discrepant histories, engaging with multiplicity and contradiction, inhabiting paradox. This alert uncertainty is realism. At the very least, to make a difference historically means to be going somewhere, claiming an original future. For small societies, flourishing is not a matter of catching up with purportedly more advanced economies and civilizations, but rather of multiplying the modalities of transformation, of continuity, of development. If historical time is not a single, directional flow, where are contemporary indigenous people going in an inter-connected world? What difference does their global “presence” make? The question is newly important, and newly uncertain.