

THIRD PRIZE IN ESSAY CONTEST ON THE
"FUTURE OF ANTHROPOLOGY"

COLONIALISM AND THE POISONING OF EUROPE:
TOWARDS AN ANTHROPOLOGY OF COLONISTS¹

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In his *Discourse on Colonialism* (1956[1972]), Aimé Césaire warns Europeans that the dehumanizing and destructive effects of colonialism are not only experienced by the colonized. We must also consider, he argues, their effects on the colonists themselves and on Europe at large:

First we must study how colonization works to *decivilize* the colonizer, to *brutalize* him . . . to awaken him to buried instincts . . . and we must show that each time a head is cut off or an eye put out in Vietnam and in France they accept the fact . . . a gangrene sets in . . . a poison has been instilled into the veins of Europe and, slowly but surely, the continent proceeds toward *savagery*. (Césaire 1972:13)

This paper outlines a new "anthropology of colonists" responsive to Césaire's concerns and asks how research on colonists will shape the anthropology of colonialism and the discipline in general.

Scholarship in the anthropology of colonialism has already turned to studies of colonists, examining the agents of capitalist enterprises (Stoler 1985; Mintz 1985), the development or imposition of new ideologies through missionary activity (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991), and the diversity of and conflicts within colonist populations (Prochaska 1990; Stoler 1989a, 1989b, 1992). This body of research, in conjunction with that underway on the impact of colonialism on the colonized, will yield increasingly holistic and sophisticated understandings of specific colonial histories. The revolutionary potential of the new focus on colonists will not be realized, however, until the problem of colonist formation—i.e., the historical emergence of the social category "colonists" and the development of colonist cultures and mentalities—is tackled directly. This is a project of larger relevance to studies of domination and violent behavior across the disciplines. More significantly, it is a research direction which will merge into or even lead the way for a renewed and more critical anthropology of Europe. Finally, by highlighting a research population of largely "dominant" status, this project confronts problems of dominance and cultures of oppression, issues that increasingly face anthropologists, particularly as they more honestly reflect on the politics of their own profession (see articles in

Fox 1991), and thus offers a fresh approach to the contemporary concerns of power, representation, and the future role of the anthropologist.

ANTHROPOLOGY AND COLONIALISM

The striking contradiction between anthropology's close relationship to and long silence about colonialism has been pointed out by social scientists for decades. In his introduction to *Africa: Social Problems of Change and Conflict* (1965), Pierre van den Berghe criticized Africanist anthropology for its "benevolently protectionist antiquarianism." While he considered anthropologists to be less ethnocentric than most African historians, he found that they were nevertheless probably "more strongly committed to the preservation of the status quo, regarding the continent as a vast ethnographic Garden of Eden" (van den Berghe 1965:2). Furthermore, in part due to the legacy of British functionalism, few anthropologists acknowledged that the colonial situation was "a conflictive one *par excellence*" (van den Berghe 1965:2). They handled contacts between Europeans and Africans within the limited framework of acculturation or culture-contact theory, and as van den Berghe (1965:3) wrote, "the political, economic, and racial dimensions of the problem were often blissfully ignored in spite of their central importance." This silence is all the more damning because of the discipline's close historical ties with colonialism. As Asad has argued (1973:17), it was largely through the colonial encounter that anthropologists had access to cultural and historical information about others, for colonialism sustained the physical proximity between observing Europeans and the subject non-Europeans upon which fieldwork depended for its existence. Because fieldwork until the 1950s was carried out among people "conquered by our own governments," anthropologists often had personal or professional stakes in the outcome of colonial encounters (Gough 1968:403), an obvious disincentive to examine the less attractive aspects of such encounters. Acknowledgment of this intimate relationship between anthropology and colonialism has served as a catalyst for many of the recent "revolutions" in anthropological thought. Unequal power relationships involved in knowledge production were rarely acknowledged in pre-World War II ethnographies, and knowledge claims deriving from such a problematic encounter were later challenged, leading, in part, to a "crisis of representation" (Marcus and Fischer 1986:7-16). There has been a pervasive loss of confidence in the ethnographer's ability to represent others, a growing realization that we can only tell a partial story, and the consideration by some of experimental writing strategies (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986).

Others, meanwhile, have turned their attention to a historical analysis of the unequal power relationships themselves, examining the formation of local cultures within the larger context of empire building and international trade (Roseberry 1988:163). Influenced by developments in the social sciences

considering interconnections between Western and non-Western economies, anthropologists have forged a diverse "political economic" research orientation, and these studies often involve a conscious examination of specific cases of colonialism (for a review, see Roseberry 1989). Until recently, however, much of this work either ignored the colonists altogether, suggested that colonist populations were unproblematic or homogeneous, or relegated them to the background as part of an abstract force, the colonial "state," "policy," etc., which was imposed on local peoples or cultures (Stoler 1989b:135; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1991:10). This displacement of colonists to the background may have been initially necessary to limit the field of study to a manageable size, but it is a tack which cannot be maintained indefinitely. It too easily leads to a naturalization of European domination, to an assumption that all Europeans are equally powerful and comprise a monolithic block—"The West," as a fixed point relative to which others' histories developed. This approach errs in attributing to the West too much stability and power and in the process reproduces aspects of earlier nationalist and heroic histories of colonialism in which the West was viewed as inevitably and permanently triumphant—a strange orientation for anthropology in an era of decolonization. These problems are avoided with more truly holistic studies that consider as well the agents of colonialism.

THE "COLONIAL SITUATION"

Sociologist Georges Balandier early on noted problems with partial studies of colonial settings. In a piece reprinted from his 1951 *Sociologie actuelle de l'Afrique noire*, he observed that while some anthropologists had considered individual processes occurring in a colonial environment (the effects of money on local economies, for example), they had yet to consider these processes as constituting a whole (Balandier 1965:36). In contrast, he felt that any study of societies affected by colonialization that aims to be holistic can only be so in reference to this "complex which may be called the colonial situation" (Balandier 1965:36).

Balandier's piece presents an early blueprint of a holistic anthropology of colonialism. He maintained that scholars should consider all of the various groups thrown together by the colonial situation, including colonists, who, he noted, were not a homogenous bloc but were divided into rivalrous factions or clans, often with divergent motivations and policies; national minorities or foreigners; people of mixed descent; and the complex and ethnically divided colonized society. He especially found to be significant certain aspects of the colonial setting typically ignored by his contemporaries, such as the domination of a numerical majority by a numerical minority and the not unrelated existence of more or less overt conflict (Balandier 1965:38, 45). Political and legal institutions maintaining a disequilibrium in the favor of colonists were highlighted as central to the colonists' dominance (Balandier 1965:38). He

also called attention to the significance in such settings of ideologies with a "more or less avowed or manifest racist bias" and noted that while some racisms were brought from Europe, others arose in the colony (Balandier 1965:42, 50).

The holistic approach envisioned by Balandier has been adopted by others since, and work along these lines has been fruitful.² Anthropologists have begun to conceptualize colonists and colonized as internally divided parts of a whole and in doing so have been able to recognize that boundaries between colonist and colonized were not fixed, natural, or unchanging, but vacillating social constructions (Cooper and Stoler 1989:610). Stoler's work (1989a, 1989b, 1992) analyzing the intersections of gender, "race," and class distinctions emphasizes especially the anxieties associated with group boundaries and with liminal social categories. She also examines colonial racism, demonstrating that racism often served to bind colonists together and to create a sense of colonial community, and suggests that internal divisions between colonists may have augmented the intensity of racist practices and attitudes (Stoler 1989b:138). She maintains that racist ideologies were also part of a class-based logic and sometimes served as directives to keep lower-class Europeans in line. Following Balandier's lead, anthropologists and historians also have begun to outline in detail the ideological apparatuses that helped establish or maintain rule, such as bureaucracies involved in classifying colonial subjects (Anderson 1991; Cohn and Dirks 1988) and in developing and administering colonial legal systems (Cohn 1989; Fitzpatrick 1980; Lazarus-Black and Hirsch 1994; Moore 1986).

The inclusion of colonists into anthropologies of colonialism may raise questions about the purpose of this research and where it fits within the larger anthropological enterprise. Wenner-Gren conference participants asked about end product and audience: what sorts of ethnographies would be produced, who would read them, and to whom would they matter (Cooper and Stoler 1989:619)? Some will question if the stories of the colonists are worth knowing at all. If anthropologists feel they are still in a "filling-in-the-gaps" phase regarding the experiences of the colonized and that our attentions are better directed at these less-heard subaltern stories, conflict may occur if funds for such research must be shared with those studying colonists. This problem requires some serious consideration: I do not advocate conducting research on colonists at the expense of work on the colonized. However, I will argue that colonist-focused research is essential—to reinvigorate not only the anthropology of colonialism, but that of Europe as well.

COLONIST FORMATION I: GETTING THERE

An anthropology of colonists cannot take the participation of Europeans in the colonies for granted.³ Instead, colonist formation must be viewed as a problematic process with deep roots in European history. If we focus only on the horrors inflicted on the Americas, Africa, and Asia by colonialism, we may

forget that the numbers who rushed to these "new" worlds were not necessarily ready-made "dominators" but were often themselves victimized by rapidly changing economies or political institutions back home. Massive emigration does not merely indicate a realization that life is better elsewhere; it may mean that life is so bad at home that anywhere else would be better. Thus, we must ask about participation in colonialism: who took part, when, and why? These questions lead anthropologists to an examination of European emigration and its links to changes in regional economies, state formation, and internal colonialism. Because these topics require careful research of metropolitan cultures and histories, this project quickly blurs into a new kind of anthropology of Europe, one that considers the multiple linkages between capitalism and colonialism and the centuries of racism, genocide, and dispossession that comprise so much of European history.

An example from the French colonization of North Africa illustrates this point. Approximately half of the nineteenth-century colonists of Algeria were French; the rest were largely from Spain, Italy, and Malta. If we trace these colonists back to Europe, a pattern emerges. Many of the French colonists were poor, from failed vineyards in the south, or Corsica; most Italians came from Sardinia and Sicily; and Spanish colonists originated mainly in the Balearic Islands, Alicante, or Valencia (Barol 1967:97; Despois 1949:203-4; Jordi 1986:86). The colonists emigrated primarily from peripheral regions. Why were people leaving these areas at that time? In David Gilmore's review of anthropological research of Mediterranean societies, we find one likely answer. According to Gilmore (1982:188; see also Davis 1977:245), a major political economic issue for Mediterranean anthropologists have failed to examine is the near-universal abolition of agrarian communalism in the nineteenth century: "Every country in the area went through a period of accelerated change, either autochthonous or imposed by colonists, by which common lands were privatized, feudal protections and usages curtailed, and labor and land commercialized. In every case, these changes had a cataclysmic impact on rural society." Gilmore (1982:189) notes that "in North Africa, parallel historical processes were initiated somewhat later under French domination. . . . French policies deprived entire tribes of communal, crown, and religious trust domains, leading to their proletarianization." He highlights this topic as one that could lead to fruitful similarities between Islamicists and Europeanists. While Gilmore points to similarities between processes of land privatization/proletarianization in southern Europe and those in North Africa, he does not bring out the colonial connections. Not only were both regions altered by colonialism, but it appears that European-based disruptions due to catastrophic changes within agrarian economies led to such profound social change that masses of alienated peasants left, including a sizeable number for North Africa, where they may have served as agents for analogous processes there.

This example suggests a complex relationship between changes in nineteenth-century European land use, state formation, emigration, and, consequently,

between internal and external colonialism. Anthropologists working in the "margins" of Europe or examining processes of nation building that entailed the conquest and incorporation of new regions have already focused attention on internal European colonialism,⁴ a process that often led to massive emigration. It is rare, however, to find among such scholarship any that also traces the fate of dispossessed emigrés into colonial settings. Cooperation between anthropologists of Europe and of colonialism may yield interesting research questions along these lines. In the case of nineteenth-century Algeria, one wonders how the peripheral status of many Algerian colonists influenced the kinds of relationships they had with elite metropole representatives in the colony. Further, how did their status as recently colonized peoples in Europe influence their behavior as new colonists in North Africa?

The structural relationships between internal and external colonialism also merit further attention. Verlinden argued in 1970 that we should not think of the colonization of the Atlantic world as an unprecedented and completely original phenomenon. He pointed to special continuities between the medieval colonization of the Mediterranean and Levant and practices applied further afield in Africa, Asia, and the Americas (Verlinden 1970:ix). His work demonstrates the direct transfer of colonial techniques from the Mediterranean to the Americas, highlighting similarities between the internal administration of medieval and Atlantic colonial territories, the transplantation of certain forms of land ownership, and even the transfer of sugar production from early agricultural establishments in Palestine, to Cyprus, Crete, Sicily, and finally to the Caribbean (Verlinden 1970:8, 17-22), touching on regions and enterprises of considerable contemporary anthropological concern.

COLONIST FORMATION II: COLONIAL LIFE AND EUROPEAN "SAVAGERY"

[C]olonial peoples . . . draw a clear distinction between the European proper and the colonial European; after all, they have had plenty of opportunity of watching the one turn into the other. (Mannoni [1950] 1964:33)

Nowadays as soon as I hear someone shouting I can tell you exactly at what stage of questioning we've got to. . . . Now I've come so as I hear their screams even when I'm at home. Especially the screams of the ones who died at the police headquarters. Doctor, I'm fed up with this job. And if you manage to cure me, I'll ask to be transferred to France. (Fanon [1961]1963:265-66)

Our interest in the process of colonist formation cannot stop at Europe-based traumas but must continue into the colonies. There, we must heed the warnings of Césaire and others and consider how participation in colonial life

can brutalize the colonizer and how this brutalization may have shaped colonist cultures overseas and in the metropole.

The need for further study of the psychological effects of colonization on both colonizers and colonized was highlighted by Mannoni in 1950. Psychological studies in colonial settings were rare in his time and were often conducted in the "acculturation" framework, neglecting the concrete realities of specific colonial settings (Balandier 1965:52). Mannoni's work ([1950]1964), based on his perceptions of colonial Madagascar, was at its best in its attempt to expose the psychological needs of Europeans who chose a colonial existence. It was flawed, however, in its reduction of colonial personalities to two types and in his insistence that the "dependency complex" of the colonized was an antecedent, not a product, of colonialism (see Bulhan 1985:94; Fanon 1967:85). While flawed, his work led the way for further consideration of the psychology of the oppressed (cf. Fanon [1952]1967, [1961]1963; Memmi 1973; see also Bulhan 1985).

Colonizer psychology has received less attention since Mannoni, however. Fanon's "Colonial War and Mental Disturbances," an appendix of *The Wretched of the Earth* ([1961]1963:249-310) dramatically demonstrates the need for more work in this area. He writes of the psychotic disorders experienced by his patients during the violent decolonization of Algeria. His case studies of European police and army officers offer a rare exposure of the problems faced by individuals whose jobs included the daily administration or supervision of torture and of the dilemmas faced by the doctor responsible for their analysis and treatment. In his role as psychiatrist, Fanon is empathetic to the plight of these patients. In reproducing these case summaries, he calls our attention to the damage caused by violence on its agents and tacitly demands to know how such individuals can be healed when their illness derives from the larger social setting and their very livelihoods. Despite the obvious importance of these warnings by Fanon, Césaire, and others, scholars of colonialism have tended to avoid such troubling subjects (a notable exception is Tausig 1987).

Ethnographic study of living former colonists brings this project even more squarely into the anthropology of Europe. There have been complex changes in Europe since decolonization. Scholars often focus on aspects of the "New Europe" related to the growing populations of visibly different former colonized peoples whose arrival is often considered a starting point for racial strife and protofascist nationalist movements throughout the continent (see 1990 and 1993 special issues of *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 14 no. 3 and vol. 16 no. 3). Few have examined the less "visible" colonists who have also settled in huge numbers following decolonization, however. How has Europe changed with the return "home" of these "immigrants"? Can we view the widespread increase in right-wing or anti-foreigner activity as at least partly due to their incorporation into the population?

Some works demonstrate that an anthropological approach to these questions can yield significant results (Crapanzano 1985; Tausig 1987). We could

learn more about how it is that civilians can be trained to discipline, hate, or even torture other human beings, and how mass participation in such activities shapes cultures over time. The relevance of this research to similar problems worldwide is sadly self-evident.

CONCLUSION: POWER, REPRESENTATION, AND SITUATED KNOWLEDGES

An anthropology of colonists will not merely contribute to an increased self-awareness but will address questions of general interest in the discipline and other social sciences: the effect of violence and domination on its agents, the evolution and recycling of racist ideologies, and the linkages between internal and external colonialism, emigration, and European state formation.

There may be even more to be gained from turning the anthropological gaze more closely towards "ourselves." Anthropologists are faced today with constructionist arguments for *all* forms of knowledge claims: is increasingly popular (Haraway 1988:577). While some claim that the perspective from the position of the subjugated is more trustworthy, others feel there are no "innocent" positions (Haraway 1988:584). Donna Haraway (1988:589) calls for a recognition of the partiality of our vision, for a move towards more "situated knowledges." She does not abandon the notion that violence is always implicit in the will to knowledge, but she recognizes that we may end up in a postmodern paralysis if we let the fear of participating in this violence halt all research and action.

A major challenge still facing anthropologists is to position ourselves more honestly regarding our research. It is all too easy to mock past anthropologists for failing to acknowledge the power dynamics inherent in their research method and subject, but are we really doing any better today? Edward Said suggests that much of the theoretical work on textuality and discourse represents a seeking after a way to escape the colonial roots of the discipline. For him, this is a dead end; there is no structure of knowledge that now or ever has stood free of the various sociocultural and political formations that gave rise to it (Said 1989:210-11). He is struck by the fact that while a tremendous amount of text is devoted to the development of such theoretical escape routes, few address the sociocultural grounding of the discipline today. To be more precise, there is little discussion of American imperialism as a factor affecting theoretical discussion: "to practice anthropology in the U.S. is . . . not just to be doing scholarly work investigating 'otherness' and 'difference' in a large country; it is to be discussing them in an enormously influential and powerful state whose global role is that of a superpower" (Said 1989:213). Said (1989:216-17) also argues for the situated nature of all knowledge: "there is no vantage point outside the actuality of relationships between cultures, between unequal imperial powers, between different others. . . ."

when we consider the connections between the U.S. and the rest of the world, we are *Of* the connections, not outside and beyond them."

Where does an honest assessment of our vantage point as U.S. anthropologists lead us? This question is still largely ignored,⁵ although work in the anthropology of colonists can help by forcing these issues into the open in new ways. In the early years of colonialist anthropology, anthropologists failed to acknowledge the colonial situation. Later, when anthropologists turned to a conscious study of colonialism, few considered the colonists a topic of study. Now that colonists emerge as a legitimate research topic, this work primarily is carried out safely in the past. One wonders if ethnographic research among colonists is consistently avoided out of some subconscious fear of recognition of a realization of similarity. Perhaps, then, an anthropology of modern-day colonists will serve not only to forge more holistic understandings of colonialism and bring to the forefront insights regarding internal European failures, but will also help to shape the larger discipline by forcing us to place ourselves more honestly in the picture, to build truly "situated" knowledges.

NOTES

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2. A 1989 Werner-Gren conference had an overall goal of bringing metropole and colony into a single analytic field. See the special issue of the *American Ethnologist* devoted to conference papers (1989, vol. 16 no. 4).
3. While this paper focuses on European colonization, I do not mean to suggest that Europeans have been the only colonists worth noting. Colonization has occurred throughout human history, and we should not overlook the significance of the Arab conquests of North Africa and southern Europe, Muslim expansion into south Asia, or the Japanese conquest of parts of Asia, to name only a few examples. Variations on the research program outlined here could be conducted with these and other agents of colonialism in mind, and contrasts between these and European experiences could be revealing. I highlight European colonization because, as many have argued, the expansion of European powers overseas seems qualitatively different and resulted in dramatic changes worldwide linked to the spread of new modes of production (for a detailed review of this argument, see Wolf 1982).
4. This literature is large, and only a few key sources are cited here. See Koehn (1953) on German internal colonialism; McDonald (1989) on the incorporation of Brittany into France; Ruane (1992), who reviews work in many disciplines, on British colonization of Ireland; and Schneider and Schneider (1976) on Sicily.
5. The collection *Recovering Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Fox 1991; see also Escobar 1993) presents an important step in this direction. Discussions of the politics of anthropological research are usually found in theoretical treatises. Ethnographic writing, on the other hand, while more self-reflexive than ever, continues to elide most sensitive or embarrassing issues.

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