

Knowledge and Conversion in the Making of Western History,  
a Philosophical Investigation

by

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Marketus Presswood

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of Doctor  
of Philosophy in the Department of  
History in the Graduate School  
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2023

ABSTRACT

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## **Abstract**

In academia in general, and in the humanistic social sciences in particular, there is a problem. The "cruel optimism" of concepts is a problem faced by every specialization, and every discipline (Berlant 2011). In the social sciences, and history especially, cruel optimism takes the form of an endless quest to prove that our concepts today are superior to the concepts of yesterday. If we work hard enough and get our methods just right, we will finally find pure, objective, true concepts to express historical reality. I use this dissertation to grapple with and ultimately subdue the cruel optimism of concepts. I employ discourse analysis, a method of analyzing knowledge as the imprint of dynamic relations of force and friction between institutions and human beings. Rather than seeing our social scientific concepts as the result of methodical research applied to a critical mass of archival documents, I see them as the result of power relations that are used to control reality as much as they purport to describe it. My materials are documentary sources—published social science scholarship and declassified intelligence reports. My conclusion is that we can use our concepts in a way that releases us from the dread of cruel optimism, so long as we see them as "snapshots of processes" (Levins 2006) rather than things in themselves.

## **Dedication**

To Nana Abba (1933-2017).

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## **1. Introduction**

Knowledge is a social act. It derives some of its power from its purchase on the description of reality, some of its power from its precision in explaining past events, and some of its power from its ability to accurately predict future events. Like other kinds of power—the purchasing power of money, the power of the electric battery, the horsepower of the combustion engine—this power of knowledge works upon the world in order to change it from a given initial state. Knowledge-power bends reality to human will, and more. It works also upon mentalities—it packages and shares mental states, it transmits information across space and time to other human beings. In other words, knowledge-power changes people. It convinces them to believe in certain things about their environment and about themselves. Knowledge-power sculpts the outer and the inner worlds of the human condition.

Naturally knowledge-power inflects politics. It can be used to convince one man to kill another. It can be used to absolve the killer of his crime, reckoning that the killing was done in the name of national security. It can be used to blame the victim for being killed, for being a terrorist threat to that same nation. We do many things with our knowledge related to the control of reality and other human beings, as well as the channeling of our destructive and constructive capabilities. This dissertation concerns one of the many well-known uses of knowledge-power in human history: the conversion of the other into something that resembles the self.

This conversion is connected to power: it is a technique for getting Hegel's bondsman to not only recognize the lord who enslaves him, but also to want to be like the lord in order to gain his recognition. In general, projects of conversion create knowledge of the other as something deficient in relation to the self, but also as something mutable. With the right methods, disciplines, and ideas, otherness can and should be overcome in the journey to the self. This presupposes that conversion-knowledge must also specify the essence of the self. This not only clarifies the end point of the journey from other to self, but also establishes a set of criteria in order to decide, communally, when the conversion process is complete. Here it is in list form:

Conversion-knowledge has three main tasks:

1. Specify the essence of the self
2. Define the other as deficiency in relation to self
3. Identify techniques for the conversion of other into self

Naturally this is a schematic simplification. Conversion is a difficult and elusive process. It is a reversible process. Reversal can lead not just to the undoing of conversion efforts (a relapse of otherness), but also to new forms of difference, which in Christian thought are often classified as heresies.

In order to overcome these difficulties, conversion-knowledge becomes resilient. It develops its own countermeasures. The one I focus on in this dissertation is the invocation of history. Resilient conversion-knowledge presupposes change, inherent to

the possibility of progress from other into self, and regress of the self into the other.

Resilient conversion invokes history because, as a learned discipline, history claims to produce a special kind of objective and empirically sourced knowledge that is focused upon the study of change. History is especially bound to the requirement that knowledge corresponds to documentary evidence rather than what is politically expedient. And in the service of resilient conversion, history can make powerful claims on what the other was and what the other needs to become. It can marshal examples of other others who successfully became selves and flourished. It can marshal examples of selves who relapsed and suffered perdition as a result. These are examples of how resilient conversion makes use of historical knowledge. It defines and aligns the direction of change with the needs of conversion and the distinction between good and bad outcomes.

Of all these, in this dissertation, I focus on but one type of resilient conversion-knowledge which appropriates history in its bid to transform the other. This is a history of the other which argues that they used to be like the self. It is a historical narrative that doubles as a trope—the trope of regress *in medias res*.

Regress *in medias res* goes like this: the other, as he is given to us, is actually a snapshot of a historical process. Rather than reifying the other, casting him off as being limited to what he appears to be on first impression, he must be seen instead as the outcome of a dynamic regression from the original self. Regress *in medias res* means that

the other is only temporarily other: that he began as the self and will return to being the self thanks to resilient conversion.

Now, resilient conversion takes otherness, which was previously seen as lack, and turns it into deviance, defined by perversion. Some offshoot of the original self was broken, twisted, and stolen away from its original wholeness. This abuse gave rise to the otherness which the converter now beholds and must undo. Resilient conversion uses historical knowledge in order to prove that the other was, a long time ago, identical to the self. Resilient conversion uses history in order to identify the sources and moments when perversion was introduced to these offshoots of self. Resilient conversion-knowledge uses history in order to prove that otherness is false and temporary. Selfhood, instead, is true and eternal. Here it is again in summary form:

Regress in medias res is a narrative trope in historical studies. It is used by resilient conversion-knowledge in order to:

1. Prove that otherness is the result of a dynamic process rather than a static identity.
2. Prove that the process of otherness is one of corruption and perversion from the original self.
3. Prove that the other used to be part of the self before becoming corrupt.
4. Prove that the other will return to the eternal self, as is its destiny.

With this circle completed, the self is supposed to rule in harmony. There will be no miscommunication, no deviation, no rancor between human beings. There will only be peace, love, and mutual understanding. Once the process of conversion is completed, the world is supposed to become good again, forever more.

This dissertation combines tools from the philosophy of history and from intellectual history in order to study the dynamics of regress in medias res. It is separated into three parts.

Part One (Chapters One through Six) is the philosophical part of the dissertation. My objective in Part One is to rehearse the developments of the theory of language from Aristotle through Wittgenstein and Derrida, but in a disarming way that relies on thought experiments rather than the dry explanation you are about to read here:

The Aristotelian theory of language set forth that all words are properly suited to their referents. They are the exactly right words to describe the things to which they refer. Ferdinand de Saussure's classic intervention was that the relationship between signifier [word] and signified [referent] was arbitrary rather than essential. This arbitrariness helped to explain why words could sound similar in different languages but mean different things. Their formal similarities were undone by the fact that they functioned differently. Saussure's paradigm, however, went too far in the direction of defining language as an arbitrary bond between signifier and signified, reinforced by repetition, social consensus, and the wider vocabulary of the entire language (by which

one word, in meaning something, excludes other words from having that same meaning).

Now, language cannot be so arbitrary that the signs change willy-nilly. If language is to be useful, it must be repeatable in shared contexts. The ordinary language philosophers used the works of JL Austin and Ludwig Wittgenstein to specify the repeatable contexts and rules by which language could be employed in order to do things in the world—communicate, share information, collaborate on a complex task, play a game, and so on. The ordinary language philosophers make it possible to reconcile the Saussurean paradigm with the Aristotelian paradigm. There is a sense in which words do have a right fit, that certain occasions really do call for a *juste mot*. If signs are arbitrary, then how can anyone speak of things like eloquence, excellent phrasing, a well crafted and recited poem? Ordinary language philosophy lets us recover the good uses of language which moved Aristotle to construct his investigation of all kinds of goodness. But at the same time, Ordinary language philosophy also lets us accept that words can appear to have arbitrary relationships with the things (and actions) they signify, when the analyst ignores the specific contexts in which words are used. This is how Wittgenstein constructed his language games around seemingly arbitrary words, like "slab" in the construction-workers' game, and "this" as a purely pluripotent signifier which is only meaningful in specific communicative contexts.

Still, Saussure's arbitrary paradigm survived this attack. Other philosophers like Jacques Derrida, drawing somewhat from Saussure and somewhat from Sigmund Freud, focused on characterizing language from those points where language becomes dysfunctional (à la Freud, who famously characterized normal psychology by studying abnormal psychology). Rather than characterizing miscommunication, untranslatability, and misunderstanding as regrettable aberrations of normally smooth language-games, these poststructuralist philosophers sought to analyze language on the basis of its failures. Language breaks down all the time, in serious moments and in everyday occurrences. These breakdowns disclose—following Freudian psychoanalysis—much more than the speaker really intended to share. For example, the Freudian Slip has entered our popular lexicon: an innocent gaffe turns out to be an actual expression of the speaker's unconscious desires. The only accident is that the speaker's superego would have normally covered up this naked expression of desire. In this view, language is quite bad and limited, but it is sadly all we have to work with in order to live. We must resign ourselves to language and hope for some kind of future reconciliation with its badness. In this view, language has a weak relationship with both reality and social communication. If language is necessary to human communication, it is still inadequate to the task of mediating between social symbols and objective reality.

Between the Aristotelians, the poststructuralists, and the ordinary language philosophers, I use Part One in order to chart an ambivalent course through historical

names of Truth, which I also refer to as universals. My goal in this prolegomenon to the real work is to show how a learned discipline like history can be appropriated by resilient conversion because of the instabilities inherent to language. Moreover, a seemingly objective discipline like history will always be vulnerable to the unseemly ambitions of its practitioners and patrons—like the Id breaking free from the Superego. In total, Part I surveys the instabilities of language and psychology that create persistent instabilities within the outwardly stable learned discipline of history.

Parts II (chapters 7 and 8) and III (chapters 9 and 10) use intellectual history. Part II comes from my research into the historiographies of early modern Spain, in which educated clergy, friars, conquistadors, and courtiers interpreted the history of the New World Indians for European audiences. They took their universals so far that some believed the Indians were descended from the Jews. Others believed that the apostles of Jesus must have preached in America hundreds of years before the Spaniards arrived, wandering across the whole world. Part II in particular focuses on how the Spaniards and also the Indians they colonized and converted came to universalize the Christian Gospel in ways that allowed for persistent contentiousness over power and influence in the early modern Spanish Imperium.

Nowadays, these ideas seem laughable. How could the Spaniards have made such naïve mistakes about history? But then in Part III, I will show that historians today continue to stumble into similar pitfalls as the Spaniards of old. I will analyze academic

controversies over how Cold War-era historians have written about the encounters between the Spaniards and the Indians during the Conquest. And I will show how Cold War American historians and archaeologists projected their society's values into the prehistoric, precolonial past in places where the Spaniards once ruled.

By the end of this thesis, I hope you will understand the bond between the Spaniards who believed in early Christianity among the Indians 'before Spanish hegemony,' and post-modern Americans who believe in early capitalism among Arab and Chinese merchants before European hegemony. They are connected by the bond which merges conversion with knowledge, where the study of a historical people merges with the spiritual transformation of that same people. For the Spaniards, that meant the Indians must accept the Christ as the universal Savior of humankind. For the Americans, that meant the peoples of the Third World must accept the conjoined, universal stages of economic development and political liberalization. By the time you have read the Conclusion, I hope you will understand that Christian history is a kind of gospel—an evangelical wisdom—as much as it is a dramatic storytelling art and an empirical social science.

The means by which I achieve these goals come from various forms of argumentation and storytelling. At various points, I employ autobiography, science fiction, thought experiments, historical analyses, aphorisms, and anecdotes to illustrate my points. My tone ranges from informal to scholarly based on how I think I can make

the strongest impression on you. Although I will have some things to say about how postmodernism has reshaped academic knowledge in our times, I make no claims that I am working outside of our episteme either. My polyvocality itself is an application of pastiche—the one which Fredric Jameson counterposed to satire in the postmodernism book.

History offers special approaches to the study of universals, because it is a discipline focused on the permanence of change. Since change is the only historical constant, it makes sense to contemplate names that are supposedly universal without buying into their universality. History affords us distance from our universals in order to see them clearly.

Chapter Two, *Historiography*, discusses the epistemological identity crisis which has shaped history as professional discipline in the past century. In remaking history as a research profession for bureaucrats rather than a prestige activity for gentlemen-scholars, historians recast themselves as social scientists who conducted research in archives, after their cognates in the physical sciences who came to see themselves as researchers whose principal scientific activity took place in laboratories. But a growing chorus of historians looked back to its philological and humanistic roots, who found political opportunities throughout the Cold War to take aim at scientific prestige and to advance a vision of history as a craft based on storytelling and identity-making. In this chapter, I survey the range of discussion on the art/science debate before intervening

with my own interpretation: that Western history is rooted in a set of core Christian values which encompass the sublime and the cathartic aspects of beautiful, dramatic storytelling, as well as the rigorous, empirical, and demystified aspects of empirical scholarship.

Chapter Three, *Watee*, mixes autobiography, speculative fiction, and philosophy. It establishes that no language is nearer to reality than any other language. This contributes to the overall argument because it deflates the presumption that universals are better names for reality than everyday languages.

Chapter Four, *Change*, uses philosophy to analyze the epistemological first premises of history and anthropology. It develops a contrast between history and anthropology to establish how change works as an anti-universal. It contributes to the overall argument by showing how historical analysis establishes distance from universals in such a way that we can see their limitations.

Chapter Five, *Memoirs*, uses literary criticism with a dash of psychoanalysis to analyze autobiographies written by major professional historians. This chapter offers an alternative to thinking about universals. Rather than treating them as objects, I think we should see them as outcomes of situational processes. It is humbler to think in terms of universalizations rather than universals.

Universalization reveals how ideas are bound to situations—specific in place and time—especially when scholars use ideas in order to make purportedly universal claims

about reality. By close reading a selection of historians' memoirs, I show how universals are not given to us. We train and discipline our minds into becoming capable of universalizations at strategic moments. Universals are not born but made.

Chapter Six, *Universalizations*, draws from ordinary language philosophy and the philosophy of orientation to explore how universalizations function. One function is hermeneutic: universalizations help academicians establish interpretative patterns in the historical record and transfer those patterns to various contexts. A second function is pedagogical: universalizations accelerate the indoctrination of new students into the professional historian's characteristic modes of thinking and expression. A third and final function is political: universalizations legitimate agendas for schools of thought and programs of social development and transformation.

That concludes Part One, the prolegomenon of this work. Part One takes us from the names of universals to the processes of universalization.

Part Two of the work analyzes how universalization works in the historical record. It presents the results of my historical research into the historiographical discourses of imperial Spain and, to a much lesser extent, Portugal. It then connects those results to my analysis of Cold War-era historiographical discourse. In the Spanish Conquest, the empirical study of the New World was married to the evangelism and conquest of the New World. In the Cold War, the empiricism of studying political economy became married to the evangelism of global economic development.

Chapter Seven, *Before Spanish Hegemony*, studies the early modern Spaniards' historical and empirical arguments that the Indians were fallen Christians or lost Jews. It surveys the various positions Spaniards took in relation to this controversy, and how those positions were connected to their different stakes in the conquest of the Americas. It uses historical analysis to prove that all universals are also 'situationals.'

This chapter concludes with a discussion of how the Indians themselves took up Christian practices and ideas in the form of the cult of the God Hunabku and the appropriation of the sacraments for unauthorized ministering among the people. These practices may have contested the Spaniards' monopoly of the Church, but they also validated the universality of the Gospel. Rather than reading them in terms of histories (and ministries) of the weak, in contrast to the histories (and ministries) of the strong, I see them instead as practices that help to shape the universality of contested concepts. All contestants make use of their own tactics of universalization in ways that resist and deflate social scientific binaries like "weak/strong," "below/above," "hegemonic/subaltern" because they presuppose that extant power relations are temporary. The writers of the Chilam Balam of Chumayel for example expected that someday the Spaniards would give up the New World and leave. They wrote accordingly to foretell that day of triumph. They drew comfort from linking the decline of the oppressive Itzá empire to premonitions of the decline of the Spanish empire. This was not about becoming "free" from empire the liberal sense, but about restoring the

hegemony of their own Mayan priesthood. Their invention of the Christianized Mayan One True God, Hunabku, disclosed an expectation that they would return to power without claiming to bring about the end of empire once and for all.

Chapter Eight, *Refutatio I*, engages with postmodern historians and archaeologists who debated the merits and demerits of early modern Spanish historiography. These debates underwent a *renaissance* on the occasion of the Quincentennial celebration of Columbus's arrival in the New World—1992 AD. Academicians took this occasion to stage fierce debates over the legacy of Columbus in world history—whether he is a hero or a villain for our times. Related to those polemics was a deeper critique of the historical validity of the knowledge produced by the Spaniards in the New World. In this chapter, I refute the premises of those debates by arguing that the distance between postmodern historiography and early modern historiography is not as great as it would seem. Inspired by Kathleen Davis's work in *Sovereignty and Periodization*, I argue that creating this distance is itself a legitimization strategy that historians still use in order to whitewash their enmeshment in social, political, and economic agendas.<sup>1</sup>

These studies of the historiography of the New World constitute Part II of the work. Together, they show how the early modern Spaniards' historiographical debates

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<sup>1</sup> Kathleen Davis, *Periodization and Sovereignty: How Ideas of Feudalism and Secularization Govern the Politics of Time* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008).

over the original Christianity of the Indians casts a shadow over our postmodern historiographical controversies on what the American Indians were like prior to the Spanish Invasion.

Part III takes the analysis to Cold War postmodernity, to the era of 'Third World' decolonizations—enmeshed in the expansion of a permanent and global American military footprint, and the simultaneous growth of multinational capitalism. Here, historiography and evangelism again combined in a mutually reinforcing project to know and remake the world in the Western image. American historians and archaeologists believed that their disciplines could reveal directions and practices to regenerate "true" African societies after the foreign corruptions of the European empires. Characteristically, these discourses projected American liberal-democratic and capitalistic values into the ancient African past.

Chapter Nine, *Before American Hegemony*, shows how social scientists' ideas about historical peoples legitimized developmentalist agendas. These agendas were rooted in Cold War situational priorities in which the United States of America positioned itself to inherit the former European global empires. In this context, historiographical debates on the origins of capitalism and democracy assumed urgent political auras. They implicitly legitimated African and Asian orientations within the First World international order, by claiming that democracy and capitalism were continuous with true African and Asian histories, before they were subject to the corrupt and foreign rule of the European

hegemony. This chapter shows how post-modern historiographers relied on universalizations in order to orient history in their image.

Chapter Ten, *Refutatio II*, invites the opposing perspective that there is really nothing comparable between the early modern Spanish historians and the postmodern American historians. This perspective has it that the former were bad historians, implicated in a project of colonization and exploitation in the New World. But the latter were good historians, enlisting themselves in the fight against international Communism.

I refute this perspective by showing how the ideological warfare waged by Cold War historians contributed to the situational goals of the national security establishment, using West Africa as a case study.

West Africa is a carefully chosen example, because my avatar of this very process coined the term "symbolic reservoirs" to legitimate civil society democracy in Africa. This same concept travelled to the Caribbean where it has played a new role in the postmodernization of Caribbean archaeology, as I have covered in the earlier chapters.

In the Conclusion, I reflect upon how Western historiography has long combined the twin projects of knowing the other and converting the other. I muse on how many of the debates over whether the West can really ever know 'the Rest' stall because discussants take for granted the idea that knowledge in itself has always been a norm in historical research. Following Hayden White, I will suggest that this idea of history as a

science—about knowing the world in it in itself and on its own terms—is of relatively recent vintage, and underestimates the many ways that historians throughout the ages have put our discipline to use.<sup>2</sup> I will recapitulate the themes of this dissertation, starting with the idea—inspired by Talal Asad's critique of secularism—that Western science has always transacted with the sacred knowledge of God's plan.<sup>3</sup>

For methods, I used Foucauldian discourse analysis to write the empirical chapters of this work. Its virtues are that it is attentive to the ways that knowledge is connected to power relations—constellations of coercion and identity formation. Knowledge is never merely denotative of reality; it also constitutes the realities that it purports to describe. Those realities then orient us towards certain paradigms of action.

For example, Foucault argued that madness was not something that psychiatrists 'discovered', but rather an effect of a particular mode of structuring the world around social norms and social deviations.<sup>4</sup> By constructing madness as a special type of human being, they thereby needed to be cordoned off from "normal", mentally healthy individuals. The discourse produced the disease and its opposite. It produced institutions to separate the two. And with the institutions—the mental asylums and

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<sup>2</sup> Hayden White, "The Burden of History," in *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1985), 27-50. I am grateful to Anna Krylova for teaching this text in her seminar on Historiography and Theory.

<sup>3</sup> Talal Asad, *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003).

<sup>4</sup> Michel Foucault, *Madness and Civilization: A History of Insanity in the Age of Reason*, transl. Richard Howard (New York: Vintage Books, 1965).

sanatoriums—knowledge about the differences between the sane and the insane became self-reinforcing.<sup>5</sup>

Foucault is often seen as a postmodern thinker because of his "hermeneutics of suspicion," to use Ricoeur's felicitous phrase.<sup>6</sup> This suspicion distrusts depths and lauds surfaces. It seeks to excavate and bring to light—like an archaeologist at her dig site—structures and artifacts of thought that have been buried and hidden out of sight, but still exert a power over the living beings of the surface. Foucault wants to break this power, but for me, I am more interested in using Foucauldian methods to reveal the deep half of the dialectic of universalization. I don't want you to become suspicious by

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<sup>5</sup> Foucault also argued that sexuality was not something that physicians 'discovered' but was implicated in a shift in power relations whereby medical and state officials aimed at the rationalization and control of human identities. So it was that the disciplined knowledge of sexuality shifted from an *ars erotica* of techniques aimed at maximizing pleasure, to a *scientia sexualis* of typologies aimed at dividing and subdividing human types by different actualizations of their purportedly universal sexual drives.

But see Robert Beachy, who argued that this discourse was co-constructed by gay activists who sought rights and recognition from the Weimar-era Prussian state. For Beachy, it was not imposed from the top-down by elites and professionals, but instead met halfway thanks to activists' own efforts to constitute a politically effective interest group. Margot Canaday adapted this paradigm to study United States government history. Canaday found that military enlistees deployed tactics of legibility and legitimization to make claims on the burgeoning welfare-warfare state based on their sexual identities. Together, both Beachy and Canaday recuperated agency from Foucault's paradigm. Robert Beachy, "The German Invention of Homosexuality", *The Journal of Modern History* 82:4, 801-838. Margot Canaday, *The Straight State: Sexuality and Citizenship in Twentieth-Century America* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009). I am grateful to Anna Krylova and Dirk Bönker for these references.

<sup>6</sup> Ricoeur calls Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud the masters of the "school of suspicion." This legacy shaped Foucault's early ideas, especially on the concept of the episteme. Paul Ricoeur, *Freud and Philosophy*, transl. D. Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970), 32. For the episteme as a deep system of thought, see for example Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, transl. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon Books, 1972).

the end of this dissertation. Instead, I want you to see the depth for what it is, as something we all have to live with. It is no different from the Christian dialectic between the shallowness of the flesh and the profundity of the soul. The soul is eternal. The flesh wastes away. But both coexist—and sometimes clash—and that is the thrill and the sorrow of being alive, the dialectic of mortality.

Foucault's method anthropomorphizes discourse at the expense of depersonalizing historical people. I have tried to correct Foucault's anti-humanist tendencies by reimagining discourse as a collective attempt at getting a grip on a situation. Rather than being something that controls and pre-constitutes human subjectivities in Foucault's hermeneutics of suspicion, discourse is something prehensile that human beings use in order to coordinate efforts to master their circumstances.<sup>7</sup>

My agential recuperation of discourse comes from Werner Stegmaier's philosophy of orientation.<sup>8</sup> I use Stegmaier's framework to build a conception of knowledge that is essentially situational and contextual. His ideas have enabled me to

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<sup>7</sup> The gist of it is that the suspicious hermeneutician aims at wresting secret truths from a world of diabolical first impressions. The suspicious hermeneutician is a Cartesian sort, who uses doubt as a sounding line in search of reality beneath the shallows, for he is greatly afraid of running aground the ark of knowledge. René Descartes, *Discourse on Method; and, Meditations on First Philosophy*, 3rd edition, transl. Donald A. Cress (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1993). For more on the hermeneutics of suspicion, see Eve Sedgwick, "Paranoid Reading and Reparative Reading; or, You're So Paranoid, You Probably Think this Introduction is About You," in *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003). I am grateful to James Chappel for introducing me to the idea of a hermeneutics of suspicion in his seminar on historical methods.

<sup>8</sup> Werner Stegmaier, *What is Orientation? A Philosophical Investigation* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019).

see the invocation of universality as a tactic for legitimizing circumstantial means and ends.

Thus, from Stegmaier, I construct the other pole of the dialectic of universalization. This pole is shallow because it responds to the immediacy—the flesh—of our political and economic interests. Like the flesh, these things are easily lost to later generations because they decay. Many intellectual historians have made their careers solely on reconstructing the exigent circumstances which surround purportedly eternal ideas. But as I said above, this is only the other half of the dialectic of universalization. It is the fragile flesh which supplements the indestructible soul.

Central to this work is discerning where our universal ideas of history come from and why we believe in them.

## **2. Historiography**

Much of this dissertation will make sense only after I have contextualized the discipline of history. The history of professional history is itself implicated in the story I am telling, about how universals came to appear so powerful in our times.

### **2.1 *The Art vs. Science Debate***

If history were an art, then it would be a kind of storytelling and mythmaking. Its power would depend on artifice and drama, the power to work upon the emotions. Like a play, or a novel, history as art would have us forget the artifice and embrace its profound insights into the human condition.

But if an art, then what could history tell us about the past as it essentially happened? If it were artifice, then would it not be illusory—putty to be molded by the artist at will? What good could come of these profound insights if they could not be rigorously replicated, if they were muddied by the mystique of artistic genius and creative inspiration?

Four generations ago, universities reorganized around the ideal of scientific research, and all the disciplines followed suit. Ambitious scholars embarked on the project to make history into a science. They instituted instruction and training based on the mastery of theoretical principles, and those principles would then be applied to a specific site for rigorous data collection. They ran journals, organized seminars, and standardized professional accountability. Meanwhile, the chemists claimed their

laboratories. The anthropologists claimed their field sites. The sociologists claimed their census surveys. In this scramble for scientific turf, the historians claimed their archives.<sup>1</sup>

These new historians yearned for scientific methods because they yearned for objectivity. It was not merely that art was given more to beauty than to truth. The vitriol of Europe's public spheres seemed to corrode the foundations of society.<sup>2</sup> Soaring rhetoric snared hotheads while measured moderation fell upon deaf ears. Something needed to be done to impose order upon chaos, to raise the standards of publishable knowledge, to protect susceptible minds from foul books.

So it was that the Restoration—an era of political centralization and the expansion of state-mandated censorship—broke the Enlightenment fever and stabilized the mood that scientized history.

The era said: one should have a license to wield the weapon of history. The gentleman-scholar, with his dueling, excellence, private wealth, and inborn privileges,

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<sup>1</sup> Kasper Risbjerg Eskildsen, "Leopold Ranke's Archival Turn: Location and Evidence in Modern Historiography," *Modern Intellectual History* 5:3 (2008), 425-453. I am grateful to the author for meeting with me online to discuss his work during the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>2</sup> Habermas championed these public spheres as the key to rationality in politics and the source of humanism's heyday. But Paul Hazard captures the intensity of the anxiety of those days, the fear that public discourse would lead to anarchy if left to its own devices. Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, transl. Thomas Bürger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1992). Paul Hazard, *The Crisis of the European Mind: 1680-1715*, transl. J. Lewis May (New York, NY: The New York Review of Books, 2013 [1935]).

was on the way out. The bureaucratic schoolmaster — pacified, salaried, and standardized, was on the way in.<sup>3</sup>

The scientific mode of history satisfied this early generation of professionals, but later ones distilled their disappointments and frustration into a heady elixir. Anti-science critics flourished in the wake of the Second World War. Activists and intellectuals reeled from the brutality of total war, the annihilation of cities in the name of striking at enemy vital centers, the specter of mutually assured destruction in the postwar nuclear arms race, the environmental degradation at the hands of industrial manufacturing and chemical byproducts.<sup>4</sup> They balked at the hypocrisy of scientific

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<sup>3</sup> John Higham explains how the professionalization of historical research changed the social composition of its practitioners from aristocrats to bureaucrats in *History: Professional Scholarship in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989).

<sup>4</sup> Although the Kennedy administration's Single Integrated Operational Plan (SIOP) was classified at the time, civilians well understood that urban centers and military infrastructure were both potential targets for nuclear missile attack. The SIOP-62 Briefing between President Kennedy and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff implemented a clear military protocol for the delivery of atomic weapons to their targets: "A fundamental characteristic of the current SIOP is that it provides for attack of an Optimum-Mix Target System. This follows the conclusions and the Presidential relative to Study No. 2009 that an optimum-mix of both military and urban-industrial targets must be successfully attacked in order for the US ultimately to prevail [over the Sino-Soviet Bloc]." Gen. Lyman L. Lemnitzer, "SIOP-62 Briefing," reprinted in *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, eds. Jussi M. Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 296.

Still, it is important to note that the Americans spread out their nuclear intercontinental ballistic missile siloes throughout the rural Midwest region, in part as a countermeasure to concentrating too many military assets in urban centers. For a scholarly treatment of the Cold War Midwest, see Gretchen Heefner, *The Missile Next Door: The Minuteman in the American Heartland* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2012). I am grateful to Dirk Bönker for this reference. This phenomenon intersects with my personal history. I grew up in Omaha, Nebraska,

racism— which seemed to coat the rape and exploitation of colonized peoples with a limpid sheen.<sup>5</sup>

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not far from Eppley Air Force Base and the Strategic Air Command. I have fond memories of visiting the SAC Museum with my family during summer vacation.

The strategic significance that I lived in a likely target area for nuclear ICBM attack was lost on me. However, tornado preparedness was a fixture of my childhood. It shares a surprisingly intertwined history with atomic explosion preparedness. Our annual tornado drills were akin to "Duck and Cover" exercises to survive nuclear attack.

The meteorologist Dr. Tetsuya Theodore Fujita achieved many lasting insights into tornado structure by making inferences through close observations of damage patterns. But before he became a meteorologist, he developed this technique by studying the blast patterns of the atomic weapons dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki to make inferences about the structure of the explosion itself. On this topic, see *Mr. Tornado*, directed by Michael Rossi, WGBH (2021), accessed online at [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/mr-tornado/#film\\_description](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/films/mr-tornado/#film_description).

Rachel Carson's exposé of dichlorodiphenyltrichloroethane (DDT) in *Silent Spring* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 2002 [1962]) is the classic starting point for the anti-industrial vein within the environmentalist movement. Although she used empirical techniques to make her arguments, environmental activists in this era tended to conflate their specific hostility towards industrialization with a general hostility towards science. Her generation also saw controversy over the health dangers of Agent Orange—the US military's defoliant of choice for waging war against the North Vietnam People's Army; and Chlorofluorocarbons—a widely used refrigerant in commercial and industrial applications. Mario Molina and F.S. Rowland published their famous paper linking CFCs to Ozone Layer depletion in 1974: "Stratospheric sink for chlorofluoromethanes: chloring atom-catalysed destruction of ozone" *Nature* 249:810-812 (June 1974).

Prior to this era, American environmentalists were not explicitly critical of industrialization. They sought to cordon off protected natural spaces so that human beings would always have a link to their virile, primordial heritage. The perceived danger was not so much environmental degradation as the fear that citizens would become feeble and "overcivilized" due to industrialization absent these natural exposures. For more on this topic, see Alexandra Minna Stern, *Eugenic Nation: Faults and Frontiers of Better Breeding in Modern America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005). I am grateful to David Igler and Dirk Bönker for teaching this text in seminar and tutorial, respectively.

<sup>5</sup> Critiques of scientific racism came out of schisms within implicated disciplines, such as evolutionary biology and cultural anthropology. They also came out of attempts at

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interdisciplinary synthesis, such as the controversial UNESCO Statement on Race, first published in 1950. They also, naturally, came out of antiracist and anticolonial political movements combined with a Western impulse to reject Nazi and Imperial Japanese theses on racial hierarchies.

Perhaps the most notorious and far-reaching scientific scandal of the Cold War involved the "Tuskegee Study of Untreated Syphilis in the Negro Male," in which black American men were injected with syphilis virus without being informed, then studied to see how the disease progressed without treatment. This leak prompted attempts to standardize and reform scientific ethics. Jean Heller broke the story writing for the Associated Press in "Syphilis Victims in U.S. Study Went Untreated for 40 Years," *The New York Times* (26 July 1972), accessed online courtesy of ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times.

Other scandals included CIA-backed psychiatric experiments on brainwashing and psychological torture at McGill University, which were exposed during the 1975 Church Committee hearings by the United States Congress. On this topic, see Alfred McCoy, *A Question of Torture: CIA Interrogation, from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Metropolitan/Owl Books/Henry Holt and Co., 2006). The complete publications from the Church Committee studies are available online at <https://onlinebooks.library.upenn.edu/webbin/book/lookupname?key=United%20States%2E%20Congress%2E%20Senate%2E%20Select%20Committee%20to%20Study%20Governmental%20Operations%20with%20Respect%20to%20Intelligence%20Activities> courtesy of The Online Books Page, University of Pennsylvania. Book 1, for example, includes a discussion of the MK ULTRA program, in which researchers exposed unwitting victims to psychedelic drugs and spied on them. *Foreign and Military Intelligence, Book 1: Final Report of the Select Committee to Study Governmental Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities United States Senate, Together with Additional, Supplemental, and Separate Views* (Washington DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1976), 389-392.

It is not hard to imagine why popular and radical voices came to associate science with anti-democratic oppression and anti-human corruption in this era. In *The Human Condition* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2018 [1958]), Hannah Arendt warned that scientific knowledge was inherently corrosive to democratic politics because it surpassed human comprehension but was still capable of silencing political dissent on the very basis of that ignorance. Who can talk back to a scientist-activist if they are ignorant of the specialized knowledge behind the policy under debate? For a more recent discussion of similar themes, see James C. Scott, *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Condition Have Failed* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999). In that book, Scott discusses how people manage to survive nevertheless when they become the experimental subjects of centralized, scientific schemes to improve human life. The historian Daniel Immerwahr has disputed some of Scott's proposed solutions by demonstrating how local, grassroots development schemes in the late-20th

The activist-intellectuals sought revenge upon the bureaucrats and declared war upon all kinds of state power. The bureaucrats had stripped them of their academic titles, banished them to exile, and doomed their comrades to grisly deaths in the gas chambers—all in the name of peace. It is no wonder that this era gave us the Frankfurt School and the Foucauldians, the Randians and the Arendtians. In the corners of the left and corners of the right, the same cry rang out. *The enemy is the state!*

So, the academicians mastered new names of reality, universals like totalitarianism and authoritarianism, fascism and statism, discourse and power-knowledge, militarism and militarization. Science lost its hold on objectivity while lived experience gained ground. The latter was the eternal spring of human diversity, the glory of our living birthright. The former was the poison of conformity, the black bile of the Leviathan.

Everything the scientization of history was supposed to achieve was now up for grabs. A vigorous cadre of activist-intellectuals—inspired by the leadership of one

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Century also led to disastrous outcomes. *Thinking Small: The United States and the Lure of Community Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2015).

I am grateful to Robert Mitchell for teaching *The Human Condition* in his seminar on Hannah Arendt. I am grateful to Heidi Tinsman and Anna Krylova for teaching *Seeing Like a State* in their seminars on "History and Theory" and "Historiography and Theory," respectively. I am grateful to James Chappel for teaching *Thinking Small* in our seminar on "Research Methods" and to Daniel Immerwahr for discussing his book in person as a guest speaker.

Michel Foucault, among others—rejected objectivity altogether as a Trojan Horse.<sup>6</sup> No longer was it a progressive tool to lift up the whole of society. No longer did it obliterate mosquitoes and hunger and raise the standards of human dignity. Now it was a technique for the strong to oppress the weak. It was a tool of colonial administration—a handmaiden of empire—imposed upon the exploited natives.<sup>7</sup> For such cadres, knowledge needed to be liberated from science. It had to be read 'against the grain' of colonial records, rescued from bourgeois ideology, located in the integrity of individual experience. Art revived its mystical powers, and Jeremiads bloomed. History became a weapon in the struggle between classes, a narrative to bind tribes together. There was no such thing as a 'past which essentially happened.' For some, consensus itself had to go.<sup>8</sup>

Art over science! Tradition over objectivity! Non-alignment over alignment! In this jittery atmosphere, few stories touched upon so many raw themes as Alex Haley's

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<sup>6</sup> For a representative statement on the role of the activist-intellectual, see Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze, "Intellectuals and Power," interview transcribed in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, ed. Donald F. Bouchard, transl. Donald F. Bouchard and Sherry Simon (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1977).

<sup>7</sup> The Subaltern Studies group under the leadership of Ranajit Guha epitomized this position, although they traced their intellectual lineage back to Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci more so than to Foucault. See for example, Ranajit Guha, "The Prose of Counter-Insurgency," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, eds. Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1988). I am grateful to Laurent Dubois for teaching this text in his seminar on "What is the Archive?"

<sup>8</sup> Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, transl. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

*Roots*, the bestselling book of this era.<sup>9</sup> Haley described his project as "faction" (fact + fiction)—a narrative based upon his family's oral storytelling traditions, abetted by historical research. For him, the family stories provided "at best a skeleton" which he then fleshed out with his own research.<sup>10</sup> Some of it was archival, some of it anthropological, some of it linguistic, and some of it genealogical. True to his journalistic foundations, Haley followed the story wherever it took him, all the way to remote villages in The Gambia. Although he collaborated with a few academicians along the way, Haley kept his distance from them by and large. The fact of his never going to college made him shy away from professional Afro-American and African historians.<sup>11</sup>

The controversies surrounding *Roots* aroused fierce factions who fought over the integrity and meaning of history. Haley's defenders lauded *Root's* emotional drama and uncompromising condemnation of American slavery. Oral history may not stand up to empirical scrutiny, but its champions claimed it as a specifically African cultural knowledge with its own unassailable integrity.<sup>12</sup> Its detractors lamented Haley's

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<sup>9</sup> Alex Haley, *Roots* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Company Incorporated, 1976).

<sup>10</sup> "Alex Haley admits no history is completely accurate," uploaded to YouTube by VideoCollectibles and accessed online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ7-z9\\_JutQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wZ7-z9_JutQ). Clip from an interview with reporter Marcus Jones on behalf of WGBH Boston, aired on 25 February 1991 and accessed online at [http://bostonlocaltv.org/catalog/V\\_QMCSAZ67C0VLVL4](http://bostonlocaltv.org/catalog/V_QMCSAZ67C0VLVL4) courtesy of Boston TV News Digital Library.

<sup>11</sup> Matthew F. Delmont, *Making Roots: A Nation Captivated* (Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2016).

<sup>12</sup> Academicians continue to associate oral history with specifically African epistemologies—such as Luise White, *The Comforts of Home: Prostitution in Colonial Nairobi* (Chicago: The University of

looseness with historical fact, "faction" seemed to them a smokescreen to mix truths and fabrications indiscriminately. Knowledge without empirical standards was not knowledge at all—just a trick for hucksters and demagogues. For this faction, *Roots* evoked the specter of commercialism gone awry, entertainment masquerading as serious history.

*Roots* articulated a diasporic tie, it cast a line across the Atlantic and helped to forge an imagined community linking black Americans to 'Mother Africa.' It rose on the swells of racial pride, in the achievements of African liberation from the European empires, in the rebirth of a galaxy of free black nations. History was the handmaiden of these visions of black futurity—the pre-colonial past seemed to provide the answers to the post-European future.<sup>13</sup> In clothing and in songs, in hairstyles and in cuisine, in

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Chicago Press, 1990) and Donald Wright, *The World and a Very Small Place in Africa* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 1997). Thanks to Laura Mitchell for her seminars on these texts in "Research Methods in History."

<sup>13</sup> See e.g., Cheikh Anta Diop, the Senegalese academician and champion of the thesis on a unified black African civilization—a heritage by and for Africans, a north star to guide the post-imperial future. One of his major works was *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa: The Domains of Patriarchy and of Matriarchy in Classical Antiquity* (London: Karnak House, 1989). African History shaded into African Future in those days—a postliberation legacy that continues to strike a nerve with 21st-century mass audiences.

The 2019 Hollywood film *Black Panther* profited from this historical futurism with its setting: the fictional kingdom of Wakanda, untouched by colonization, an imago of authentic Africa. I will note here the interesting connection that Wakanda shares its name with the Omaha Indian sacred energy of Creation—Wa'konda. *Black Panther*, directed by Ryan Coogler (Burbank, CA: Buena Vista Home Entertainment), DVD, 2018. I am grateful to Wujun Ke for watching and discussing this film with me during its theatrical run.

linguistic revitalization and archaeological dig sites, the yearning for black cultural authenticity embraced and transcended *Roots*. Americans mobilized history in the search for a pure African identity, untainted by slavery and foreign domination.<sup>14</sup>

So, history was drawn into the politics of imagination—into dreams of a global reconstruction rising from the ashes of empires.<sup>15</sup> Along what lines should newly independent nations guide their paths? History became the oracle of orientation, the solution and the problem. For if history was a science, was it in danger of recolonizing

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For more on the power and sacredness of Wa'konda for the Omaha people, see Robin Ridington and Dennis Hastings (In'aska), *Blessing for a Long Time: The Sacred Pole of the Omaha Tribe* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1997).

<sup>14</sup> Haley himself referred to the peoples of The Gambia as purely black in the sense of both skin color and African blood. By contrast, he understood himself as an admixture of European and African stocks. He even went so far as to visit Ireland to trace the white aspects of his paternal lineage. "Alex Haley speaking at UCLA 11/14/1968," uploaded to YouTube by UCLACommsStudies, accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qP4Jy0tiloU>.

<sup>15</sup> For more on the emancipatory politics of dreaming, see Robin D.G. Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Black Radical Imagination* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 2002). Thanks to Adriane Lentz-Smith for teaching these ideas in her seminar on "Urban North America."

Dreams hold a special place throughout the Holy Bible as a source of visions and portents—an opportunity for human beings to catch coded hints of the Divine Plan. Joseph is one of the most famous seers and interpreters of dreams. His story is told in the Book of Genesis. Sigmund Freud grasped these connections when he developed the psychoanalytic methods of dream interpretation for therapeutic use. *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 3rd edition, transl. A. A. Brill (London, Allen & Unwin: The Macmillan Company, 1923).

At around the same time as Freud, the Surrealist movement articulated related ideas about the political potential (and limits) of dreaming. I'm grateful to Blake Beaver for lending me his copy of André Breton, *Manifestoes of Surrealism*, transl. Richard Seaver and Helen R. Lane (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1969).

the newly independent nations? If history was an art, could it really establish any foundations for the decolonized future?

Some academicians envisioned opportunity in history's identity crisis. They doubled down on capturing history for art. Hayden White appropriated the techniques of literary criticism.<sup>16</sup> He discerned genres, styles, and narrative archetypes at work inspiring the first generation of social-scientific historians.

Other historians doubled down on history's scientific foundations. They fought to rescue objectivity from empire and decolonize the sciences. For Fernand Braudel, the dream was to unify the social sciences in the study of long-term human civilizations.<sup>17</sup> His study of the *longue durée* was designed to suss out the fundamental aspects of specific life patterns—a set of deep values and habits accumulating across the centuries. For Immanuel Wallerstein, who cut his academic teeth studying the dynamics of economic underdevelopment in Africa, objectivity could be rehabilitated to dispel the

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<sup>16</sup> Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973). I am grateful to Anna Krylova for teaching Hayden White's ideas in her seminar on "Historiography and Theory."

<sup>17</sup> Fernand Braudel, "History and the Social Sciences: The *Longue Durée*," transl. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Review (Fernand Braudel Center)* 32:2 Commemorating the Longue Durée (2009), 171-203. Thanks to Anna Krylova for teaching Braudel in her seminar on "Historiography and Theory."

ideologies of Western Triumph.<sup>18</sup> Social scientific history was the solution, not the problem, for putting the world back together.

Other academicians sought to heal the art-science breach. The philosopher Paul Ricoeur argued that both were more similar to one another than meets the eye.<sup>19</sup> Art, along Aristotelian lines, follows a set of dramatic rules and conventions—it is methodologically rigorous in its own way. Science depends on narrative in order to parse out its findings in human time—it is aesthetic in its own way. So it is that history is both art and science together: narrative and empirical, it can decode the laws of human existence and give us insight into dramatic situations without contradiction.

Still others attacked the very premise that art and science were stable categories in their own right. For John Lukacs, postmodern art and postclassical physics had converged upon the primacy of individual perspective.<sup>20</sup> Knowledge changed based on

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<sup>18</sup> Immanuel Wallerstein, *The Modern World-System*, 4 vols (Berkeley and Oakland, CA: University of California Press, 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Time and Narrative*, 3 vols, transl. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984-1985). Thanks to Prasenjit Duara for this reference.

<sup>20</sup> John Lukacs, *Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (New York: Harper and Row, 1968). Thanks to Devin Creed for this reference.

Lukacs had his finger on the pulse on the Cold War—he had a successful career as a diplomatic historian, and enjoyed a long correspondence with George F. Kennan, US Ambassador to the Soviet Union and member of "The Wise Men" group within the US Establishment. Their letters are collected in *Through the History of the Cold War: The Correspondence of George F. Kennan and John Lukacs*, ed. John Lukacs (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010).

the situation of the observer. For historians, this would mean that the framing of facts was just as important as the facts themselves.

More importantly, for Lukacs, this meant that the hierarchy between art/science and history had become inverted. Historians no longer needed to look to art or science for their disciplinary identity. Instead, artists and scientists will need to think historically, in order to understand the changing ways human beings have framed artistic and scientific truths in the recorded past. Once upon a time, theology was the queen of the disciplines, and art and science bowed down to her. Now, it was history's turn to reign.

My dissertation—the dissertation you are reading now—draws from all of these influences. It defines history as the study of change, the analysis of how human beings have shifted their orientations and perspectives on the world down the generations. It transcends art and science because it studies all kinds of change using all kinds of knowledge. For me, history is a perspective on reality, not a method of research. For me, if history is to have some kind of organizing metaphor beyond art and science, then it would be as a kind of gospel.

The Christian Gospel is itself a weave of many genres. It is a testimony to the deeds of the God of Abraham. It is a pillar for the community of faith. It is a history of a people, beginning with Adam, the first man. It is an introduction to the faith for new believers. It is a bulwark for the faith against new challengers. It is a source of revealed

wisdom about the nature of the One True God. It is the last will and testament of Moses—the greatest Prophet—and Jesus Christ—the Son of Man. It is the key to humanity's survival under His watchful gaze.

The One True God is both deliverer and destroyer. The Book of Genesis recorded the deeds of this delivering and destroying God. He created the World by parting the sky from the sea. He destroyed the world in a universal flood. Yet He spared the good man Noah and his family. Noah convinced God to permit a twinkle of upright life to survive this apocalypse. Generations later, God prepared to annihilate two large cities for their sins: Sodom and Gomorrah. Still, He spared the good man Lot—nephew to Abraham—and his family.<sup>21</sup>

How should a human be good in the eyes of the Lord God? How can a human learn to be good as Noah was good, as Lot? The Book of Leviticus codified the rules and practices by which all the descendants of Israel could practice moral uprightness, even if they could not themselves hear the Word of the Lord God directly like the prophets. Thus, by being pleasing to their Lord God, they could spare themselves the calamities of war, plague, and famine. They could ensure that their number would grow as numerous as the stars.

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<sup>21</sup> Abraham pleaded with God to spare the people of Sodom and Gomorrah: "Will you sweep away the righteous with the wicked?" Genesis 18:23 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/genesis/18/> courtesy of Biblica.

For example, here is the prohibition against eating blood within the meat, which God told to Moses:

And wherever you live, you must not eat the blood of any bird or animal.

If anyone eats blood, that person must be cut off from his people.<sup>22</sup>

The obligation and its punishment are clearly stated. In the case of the blood in the meat, there is no possibility for restitution. As for the obligations of the priests to the Temple of God, the consequences were immediate and direct from God Himself. For instance, the priest Aaron's sons Nadab and Abihu made the mistake of burning incense in an "unauthorized fire before the LORD, contrary to his command."<sup>23</sup> Immediately, the Lord consumed them in flames. In observing the rules of when to offer fire to the Lord, the obligations and the punishments are clear and unambiguous.

And yet, though these codes linked health and wealth, bountiful harvests and regular rains to the moral conduct of the Chosen People, this was not and could never be

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<sup>22</sup> Leviticus 7:26-27 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/leviticus/7/> courtesy of Biblica.

<sup>23</sup> Leviticus 10:1 NIV, *ibid.*

a mere *quid pro quo* with the Lord. Sickness still happened; famine still came. Death still fell upon good men and the wicked still flourished. How could a just God let these things happen? The Book of Job thematized this controversy and taught its audience about the nature of the Lord God. Job was a perfect man, the image of righteousness. He led a beautiful life, pious and sumptuous. He gave freely to the poor and had plenty for himself and his children.

But God smote Job anyway, to test his faith and see that it was not merely *quid pro quo*.<sup>24</sup> God sent a whirlwind and killed Job's beloved children, marauders stole his cattle, he succumbed to boils and rotting flesh. Life itself became an unceasing torment.

Job's companions came to give him succor, but they only provoked his rage. For they erred in arguing that Job must have sinned if he had brought upon his head such calamities, and that if he would repent, he could save himself. But Job denied their accusations and instead reckoned that God, master of all things, could simply give and take as He pleased. Job said:

"...But how can a mortal be righteous before God?"

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<sup>24</sup> This was done to respond to Satan's challenge: that men only worship God because He blesses them. "Then the LORD said to Satan, 'Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.'" Job 2:3 NIV, accessed online courtesy of Biblica at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/job/2/>. Satan replies that God has not gone far enough—he expects that Job will curse God when his health is taken from him.

Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand.

His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?

He moves mountains without their knowing it and overturns them in his anger.

He shakes the earth from its place and makes its pillars tremble.

He speaks to the sun and it does not shine; he seals off the light of the stars.

He alone stretches out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea.

He is the Maker of the Bear and Orion, the Pleiades and the constellations of the south.

He performs wonders that cannot be fathomed, miracles that cannot be counted.

When he passes me, I cannot see him; when he goes by, I cannot perceive him.

If he snatches away, who can stop him? Who can say to him, 'what are you doing?'"<sup>25</sup>

The debate between Job and his companions reached a stalemate. His companions insisted that God punished the wicked, and that therefore only the wicked

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<sup>25</sup> Job 9:2-12 NIV, accessed online courtesy of Biblica at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/job/9/>.

received punishment. They chastised Job for believing that he did right in the eyes of the Lord, since God had plainly poured terrible wrath upon him. But then God Himself descended, to rescue Job and to conclude the discussion. The Lord validated Job's perspective, that there is no man who can lay claim on God:

"Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up [God's] dominion over the earth?

"Can you raise your voice to the clouds and cover yourself with a flood of water?

"Do you send the lightning bolts on their way? Do they report to you, 'Here we are'?"

Finally, God rebukes Job's companions:

I am angry with you [Eliphaz the Temanite] and your two friends, because you have not spoken of me what is right, as my servant Job has.<sup>26</sup>

How is one to live with a God who is good, but whose ultimate designs are inscrutable to mortal beings? Reading Leviticus, one may hope for clear answers, a set of rules that if followed, will unfailingly lead to favor with the Maker. Reading Job, one may despair that there are no clear answers, that God may reward but also punish,

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<sup>26</sup> Job 42:7 NIV, accessed online courtesy of Biblica at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/job/42/>.

cherish but also discipline, by His will alone. So, how should a good man live, if he is caught between Leviticus and Job?

Enter history—as the record of the relationship between the Hebrews and their God. This history is a transmitted and interpreted collection of experiences that span generations. Thus, history has the power both to remind people of God's power, and to reveal the unfolding of the Divine Plan after the fact of its happening. In the Book of Exodus, God did not deliver the Jews from slavery until He hardened Pharaoh's heart and smote Egypt with His wonders. He did so to make a name for Himself, to be remembered through the ages as the One True God and the God of Israel, who remembered His covenant with their forefathers and delivered the Hebrews from slavery. Time and again in the historical books of the Canon, the prophets chastise the Jews for forgetting how God brought them out of Egypt, beginning with Moses when he led them across the desert on the way to the Promised Land.

The common people of the Hebrews did not know what the Divine Plan had in store for them. They grew restless and worshipped idols they could see and touch. They grew nostalgic for the fleshpots of Egypt. Even this first generation of Jews out of Egypt, who had firsthand experience of God's wonders, needed reminders in order not to forget. History blended with futurity: it was a reminder that the Divine Will would bring them to the Promised Land, because it was a reminder that a Divine Will existed and had acted on their behalf to rescue them from Egypt. History meant that God had a

reason for doing all things, including punishing the good and rewarding the wicked, like when He allowed Egypt to enslave Israel. The prophet Habakkuk expressed this sentiment in the midst of famine and desolation in Israel:

Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls,

yet I will rejoice in the LORD, I will be joyful in God my Savior.<sup>27</sup>

God's reason is beyond human understanding—many prophets cowered from His call.<sup>28</sup> Only history reveals the workings of God's plan and testifies to its fulfillment in the human past. Only history gives humanity a chance of grasping threads of His plan, insofar as it is given to us to understand it.

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<sup>27</sup> Habakkuk 3:17-18 NIV, accessed online courtesy of Biblica at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/habakkuk/3/>.

<sup>28</sup> Moses: "O Lord, I have never been eloquent, neither in the past nor since you have spoken to your servant. I am slow of speech and tongue." Exodus 4:10 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/exodus/4/>.

"But Jonah was greatly displeased and became angry" for being called by the Lord to preach, Jonah 4:1 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/jonah/4/>.

The Lord God to Ezekiel: " And you, son of man, do not be afraid of them [the Israelites] or their words. Do not be afraid, though briars and thorns are all around you and you live among scorpions. Do not be afraid of what they say or terrified by them, though they are a rebellious house." Ezekiel 2:6 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/ezekiel/2/>.

## **2.2 History as a Revelation of the Divine Plan**

One of the last great historians before the scientization of the discipline was Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet. Bossuet was a favorite in the Court of Louis XIV, a successful theologian and ardent defender of Catholicism from Protestantism. He was a sort of French nationalist, in the sense that he believed that God had selected the French nation to become His Chosen People, to carry out His will on Earth. This created controversies with the Pope, and Bossuet was involved in attempts to smooth over relations between Versailles and the Vatican.

Louis XIV entrusted Bossuet with educating his heir to the throne, Louis Le Grand. Bossuet dutifully obliged even if he felt the job to be beneath his considerable talents. This was in part because Bossuet could still use his tutelary role to influence French society. In that humanist climate, publishers circulated instructional manuals written explicitly for princelings to broader audiences. Thus, the publisher and the author could turn a profit, and society could benefit from the most prestigious information of the day.

So it was that Bossuet intended his *Discourse on Universal History* to benefit both Louis Le Grand specifically and France generally. In this treatise Bossuet articulated his ideas about Christian statecraft. He warned the prince that God was the most powerful Being of all, the source of any king's right to rule, and the One with the power to take

away that right if He so pleased. It was imperative that the King ruled according to Biblical precepts so as to protect the health and wealth of his realm from God's wrath.

True to his genre of universal history, Bossuet collected the touchstones of the Biblical chronicles. True to his task of instructing the prince, he then distilled those events into rules for good Christian governance. Thus, he used history in the Levitical sense to teach his readers how to choose life and to avoid death. He counseled them to avoid sexual promiscuity, to abstain from war and conquest. He did so to chastise Louis XIV for his scandals and policies, and also to develop a program for reform after the royal succession.<sup>29</sup>

Yet Bossuet also humbled his readers. He reminded the Prince that God's Plan was known only to Himself, and that it was beyond man's capabilities to know this Plan. No matter how cut and dry the codes of life might be, God might always nullify them for His own, ultimately benevolent purposes. Thus, Bossuet used history in the Jobian sense to teach his readers not to become arrogant due to mere historical wisdom. History is not the same as God's Plan—only a shadow of it.

In the Third Part of the Discourse on Universal History, Bossuet brings both the Levitical and the Jobian senses to bear on the history of empires. This part represented a culmination of the work, because it touched on the matters of most direct bearing on the

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<sup>29</sup> Orest Ranum, "Editor's Introduction," in Jacques-Bénigne Bossuet, *Discourse on Universal History*, transl. Elborg Forster (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1976).

Prince. Was there something to be learned from studying the rise and fall of the great empires of the past, or was it merely a testimony to how God could raise men to great heights and then topple them according to His plan? The answer is yes and no:

For the God who causes the universe to be linked together and who, though all-powerful in himself, willed, for the sake of order, that the parts of the great whole be dependent on one another—the same God also willed that the course of human affairs should have its own continuity and its own proportions. By this I mean to say that men and nations have had qualities proportioned to the heights they were destined to reach and that, with the exception of certain great reversals by which God wished to demonstrate the power of his hand, no change has occurred without causes originating in the preceding centuries.<sup>30</sup>

Bossuet consoles his readers: although God is capable of doing all things, He has also created a world based on order. "...no change has occurred without causes originating in the preceding centuries." There is hope that the student of history may find those causes and connect them to their effects, to learn from these connections in past empires so as to optimize his own realm's power.

You must now...accustom your mind to connecting effects with their most remote causes. In this manner you will

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<sup>30</sup> Bossuet, *Discourse*, 303-4.

learn what is so necessary for you to know, namely, that by looking at unrelated occurrences we might think that fortune alone decides the rise and fall of empires, but that in reality, taking everything into consideration, the situation is rather akin to gambling, where the most skillful player wins in the long run.<sup>31</sup>

What does it mean to win? To grow in strength, to tap into the power of God's will and ride this current to the greatest extent possible.

And indeed, in that cruel game where nations vie for domination and power, it is those who have had the most far-reaching plans, have been the most diligent, have persevered the longest in great efforts and, finally, have known best how to press on or to restrain themselves according to the situation who have, in the end, gained the upper hand and have been able to use fortune itself for their ends.<sup>32</sup>

The Prince must study history so that he can understand the signs and indications of God's Plan in action. He is like a sailor feeling the winds and ocean currents to adjust his tack. Though he cannot presume to control the weather, he can at least make the best possible path and avoid disaster within what is handed to him. Or, in Bossuet's gambling analogy, the player cannot will certain cards into his hand, but he

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 304.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 305.

can make the most of the hand he is dealt and turn seeming chance into success against his competitors.

At the conclusion to his history of empires, Bossuet again reminds the Prince to be humble before the Lord God. Though we can learn from history, we will never be able to fully pierce the veil of uncertainty and seeming chance, even if we know that there is a plan behind it all:

Thus God reigns over every nation. Let us no longer speak of coincidence or fortune; or let us use these words only to cover our ignorance. What is coincidence to our uncertain foresight is concerted design to a higher foresight, that is, to the eternal foresight which encompasses all causes and all effects in a single plan. Thus all things concur to the same end; and it is only because we fail to understand the whole design that we see coincidence or strangeness in particular events.<sup>33</sup>

All human beings are fallible, even the heads of nations. So it is that even the actions of kings have unexpected consequences: some beneficial, others deleterious. History and faith can help us find our way, but in the end, only God is the true master of all circumstances. His plan is comprehensible to Him alone.

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<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 374.

They [all rulers] achieve either more or less than they plan, and their intentions have always led to unforeseen consequences. They neither control the configuration of circumstances that was bequeathed to them by past centuries, nor can they foresee the course of the future, much less control that course. All this is in the hands of him who can name what is and what is yet to be, who presides over all the ages, and who knows in advance what will come to pass.<sup>34</sup>

Bossuet did not speak of any tension between the Levitical style of history and the Jobian style of history. They were part of the one Biblical Canon, different ways of learning about the One True God and recognizing the pitfalls of idolatry and base pleasures. God created an orderly world, which the Hebrew priests decoded in the Book of Leviticus. Yet He was also capable of reversing those laws in order to show His power—as they recorded in the Book of Job. But by the time Leopold von Ranke—honored by his students as the father of scientific history—acquired a name for himself, the Levitical and Jobian styles of history began to seem like a contradiction which needed to be overcome.

By Ranke's time, history came to be understood by new universals.<sup>35</sup> It could either be scientific or artistic. In the scientific style, the emphasis shifted to decoding the

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 375.

<sup>35</sup> Ranke was born some three generations after Bossuet died, reckoning that the average generation is 33 years long.

laws of reality. In the artistic style, the emphasis shifted to the craft of writing, in order to represent the beauty of that same reality in monograph form. Yet Ranke still perceived the need for their unity, a need for historians who were capable of mastering both the artistic and the scientific modes of history.

The historian's task...is at the same time literary and scholarly; history is at once art and science. It has to fulfill all the demands of criticism and scholarship to the same degree as a philological work; but at the same time it is supposed to give the same pleasure to the educated mind as the most perfect literary creation. One might feel inclined to assume that beauty of form is only achieved at the expense of truth. If this was the case, the idea of combining science with art would have to be abandoned and shown to be false. But I am convinced of the contrary, and think that interest in form may even stimulate the passion for research. For on what else could the presentation of material be based than on vivid knowledge? But that can only be acquired by careful and exhaustive research. A free and great form can only result from what has completely been grasped by the mind.<sup>36</sup>

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The sociologist Randal Collins estimates that the average generation is equivalent to 33-35 years. *The Sociology of Philosophies: A Global Theory of Intellectual Change* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998).

<sup>36</sup> Leopold von Ranke, *Sämtliche Werke*, 3rd ed., vol. 12, 5f. Quoted in Rudolf Vierhaus, "Historiography between Science and Art," in *Leopold von Ranke and the Shaping of the Historical Discipline*, eds. Georg G. Iggers and James M. Powell (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1990).

Richard Evans has written about how the German word *Wissenschaft* is semantically more inclusive than the English word science. One can properly speak of *Wissenschaft* in any

In this passage, Ranke avows that the empirical mastery of history leads to mastery of the presentation of historical research. Knowledge leads to form—science leads to art. This passion for form then "stimulate[s] the passion for research." Art leads back to science. For Ranke, the relationship is like a braid in which history-as-art and history-as-science mutually reinforce one another.

In spite of these new names, the old universals persisted. The scientific laws were powerful because they could optimize life through the pursuit of exact understanding of the past. The artistic craft was powerful because it was connected to the tensioning and catharsis of readers' emotions. The laws of truth implied prohibitions against breaking

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disciplined pursuit of knowledge, including in the arts, so the art/science distinction may not have been quite as strong for Ranke and his colleagues.

However, it is worth noting that Ranke himself opined about this distinction, took it seriously as a problem for historians to overcome. Indeed, in the original German text, Ranke used the words *Kunst* and *Wissenschaft*. English translators have rendered these words as art and science, respectively.

For his English-language perspective on *Wissenschaft*, see Richard J. Evans, *In Defense of History* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1999). I am grateful to Dirk Bönker for this reference. However, compare this to the source I cited above, as well as Ranke's *Kunst* versus *Wissenschaft* distinction elsewhere in his collected works.

For example, Ranke made a similar point in the introduction to a lecture sometime in 1831 or 1832 (the precise date is unclear): "Als Wissenschaft ist sie [Historie] der Philosophie, als Kunst der Poesie verwandt. Der Unterschied ist, daß sich Philosophie und Poesie ursprünglich im idealen Element bewegen, während die Historie auf ein reales angewiesen ist... Sie verbindet sie beide in einem dritten nur ihr eigentümlichen Element." Leopold von Ranke, "Vorlesungseinleitungen," *Aus Werk un Nachlaß*, ed. Walther Peter Fuchs and Theodor Schieder, vol. 4 (Munich: Oldenbourg, 1975), 72. Quoted in Vierhaus, "Between Science and Art," 195 note 1.

them, which would otherwise cause needless strife and preventable wars. The power of catharsis implied an encounter with the sublime, an experience of a divinely attuned transcendence. The scientific mode of history meant getting it exactly right, understanding each epoch of history on terms proper to itself. The artistic mode of history meant using "beauty" to "stimulate the passion for research." The culmination of this art-science synthesis was to grasp the sacred order of creation, the Divine Plan itself. In other words, history as the fusion of art and science is, like the Holy Bible, knowledge of the One True God.

Historical scholarship and portrayal is an office that only permits comparison to that of the priestly, as worldly as the objects with which they now busy themselves may be. Because, after all, the present current looks to control the past and construes it within its meaning. The historian is there in order to understand and teach understanding of each epoch in and of itself. He must only keep in sight with all impartiality the subject itself and nothing further. Above all hovers the divine order [*göttliche Ordnung*] of things, **which though not exactly to proven, is after all to be sensed.** In this divine order, which is identical with the succession of the times, the prominent individuals have their place: so the historian must conceive of them. The historical technique, which only seeks the real and the true, treads thereby in the immediate vicinity of the highest questions of the human race.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Emphasis mine. Leopold von Ranke, "An Otto von Ranke: Berlin, den 25, Mai 1873," in Idem. *Das Briefwerk*, ed. Walther Peter Fuchs (Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe Verlag, 1949), 518-19. I am grateful to Charlotte Schwarz for translating this text into English for me. It is a letter Leopold

Even though Ranke embraced both the emerging scientific and artistic frameworks for the discipline of professional history, the Gospel was never far from his mind. History enabled researchers to "not exactly" prove the Divine Order, but to transcend proof itself in their ability to intuit the pattern of that Order.

Even now, long after Ranke's death, historians draw upon the Gospel's legacy. Some take the Levitical path. They seek out the laws of history so as to optimize life. They warn of impending doom if the laws are ignored. For them, humanity's fate lies in the balance of its deeds, so we must act before Judgment Day befalls us. Still others take a Jobian perspective: creation is beyond human understanding. They counsel that we

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von Ranke wrote to his son, Otto. The original German passage as reprinted in *Das Briefwerk* is as follows:

"Die historische Wissenschaft und Darstellung ist ein Amt, das sich nur mit dem priesterlichen vergleichen läßt, so weltlich auch die Gegenstände sein mögen, mit denen sie sich eben beschäftigt. Denn die laufende Strömung sucht doch die Vergangenheit zu beherrschen und legt sie eben nur in ihrem Sinne aus. Der Historiker ist dazu da, den Sinn jeder Epoche an und für sich selbst zu verstehen und verstehen zu lehren. Er muß nur eben den Gegenstand selbst und nichts weiter mit aller Unparteilichkeit im Auge haben. Über allem schwebt die göttliche Ordnung der Dinge, welche zwar nicht geradezu nachzuweisen, aber doch zu ahnen ist. In dieser göttliche Ordnung, welche identisch ist mit der Aufeinanderfolge der Zeiten, haben die bedeutenden Individuen ihre Stelle: so muß sie der Historiker auffassen. Die historische Methode, die nur das Echte und Wahre sucht, tritt dadurch in unmittelbaren Bezug zu den höchsten Fragen des menschlichen Geschlechtes."

must humble ourselves rather than presuming to know the future.<sup>38</sup> For them, Creation is more resilient than we can ever imagine. And when we touch this Creation—in its essence—we encounter the sublime.

There are many historians who wield history as a gospel unawares. There are a few who know what they are doing. I cannot do justice to the entire field of history as it is currently practiced, so let me have one speak for those who know. As of this writing, Thavolia Glymph is President-elect of the American Historical Association. She named her first major monograph on American slavery using the words of the Lord.<sup>39</sup> Her book

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<sup>38</sup> Readers wishing to learn more about this should consult my essay on "Ethical Archetypes in Environmental Histories," *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* 36 (2020), available online at <http://rhizomes.net/issue36/ali/index.html>.

There, I used jargon like "positive metaphysics" and "negative metaphysics" to describe the moral techniques environmental historians use in order to move their readers. Here, I believe that those are better explained with the Jobian frame (roughly positive) and the Levitical frame (roughly negative). These are not exact congruences, but it is a decent simplification.

<sup>39</sup> It strikes me that another source of inspiration may have been from the story of Joseph, recounted in the Book of Genesis. Joseph started out in Egypt as a slave in Potiphar's house. However, the the mistress of the house abused and cast him into jail, when she successfully framed him for attempted rape.

The body of scholarship on the weaponization of rape and the accusation of rape to maintain white supremacy in the United States is too vast for me to cite appropriately here. By and large, the major point of debate within this literature concerns the place of black agency. Cultural touchstones like Harper Lee's *To Kill a Mockingbird* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2001 [1960]) present black archetypes as fundamentally sexless and innocent, but also helpless when dealing with social and legal institutions complicit in sustaining white supremacy.

Yet black historians and pornographers have accentuated the ways in which sexuality can upend and complicate the very black-white bifurcation so essential to white supremacy's mythic social order. For these cultural touchstones, like in the erotic film *Mandingo*, black power is to be found in the irresistibility and erotic power of blackness. This discourse reframes White supremacist anxieties about rape into a paradoxical admission of erotic dependency.

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One reading of *Mandingo* along these lines would have it that a mistress who falsely accuses her slaves of rapist intent is disavowing her unconscious, real desires for interracial intercourse. It also sets up an erotic triangle in which she implicitly admits that the white husband to whom she is supposed to be faithful, is actually too impotent to meet her irrepressible erotic needs. Antiracial violence then becomes a way for masters and mistresses to disavow these sexual passions—but only until the next time their repressed libido bubbles forth. Dariack Scott wrote the classic articulation of this viewpoint in *Extravagant Abjection: Blackness, Power, and Sexuality in the African American Literary Imagination* (New York: New York University Press, 2010). I am grateful to Peter Sigal for teaching this text in his seminar on Race and Pornography in Modern Sexuality. *Mandingo*, dir. Richard Fleischer (San Diego, CA: Legend Films), 2008, DVD. For commentary on the chimera of fear and desire manifest in black-white interracial pornography, this is a good starting point to a now voluminous literature: Linda Williams, "Skin flicks on the racial border: pornography, exploitation, and interracial lust," in *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004).

See also the early Eldridge Cleaver: "The [white] Omnipotent Administrator conceded to the Supermasculine [black] Menial all of the attributes of masculinity associated with the Body [so that the Administrator could monopolize the attributes of the Brain]: strength, brute power, muscle, even the beauty of the brute body. Except one. There was this single attribute of masculinity which he was unwilling to relinquish, even though this particular attribute is the essence and seat of masculinity: sex. The penis. The black man's penis was the monkey wrench in the white man's perfect machine. The penis, virility, is of the Body. It is not of the Brain...

[...]

"You can't really dissociate the penis from the Body! Not even the Brain, the Omnipotent Administrator, can do that! *But you can seize the Body in a rage, in violent and hateful frustration at this one great flaw in a perfect plan, this monkey wrench in a perfect machine, string the Body from the nearest tree and pluck its strange fruit...*" Emphasis by the author. Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Incorporated, 1968), 164-5.

One problem is that this interpretation undermines the distinction between consent and violation. Liberal activists have responded by championing the concept of "affirmative consent," an unambiguous avowal of sexual willingness where verbal "yes" and only "yes" is our best hope of a clear standard.

The most fraught perspectives come from black activists who have decided to take control of antiracial stereotypes by purposely mastering and embodying them. According to Adam Curtis, this is the strategy Tupac Amaru Shakur took when developing his "Thug Life" rapper persona. *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, directed by Adam Curtis (British Broadcasting Corporation), <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p093wp6h/cant-get-you-out-of-my-head>.

The theory of purposefully embodying stereotypes in order to overcome them can be found in academic touchstones like Judith Butler, "Gender is Burning: Questions of Appropriation and Subversion" in *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (Abingdon,

is titled *Out of the House of Bondage*. In the page following her Dedication, Glymph quotes the relevant verse from Exodus 20:2 King James Version: "I am the LORD thy God, which have brought thee out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of bondage."<sup>40</sup> She is one of those historians who, like Bossuet and Ranke long ago, also knows.

## **2.2 An Epistemology of the Gospel**

Ask a historian to disclose their epistemological foundations, and they will fall back on empiricism. History disciplines itself through empirical methods: you cannot argue what cannot be proven in the record. Every claim about the past requires some

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Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge 2011) and Ariane Cruz, *The Color of Kink: Black Women, BDSM, and Pornography* (New York: New York University Press, 2016). Both of these authors emphasize the kinds of empowerment and agency that come from appropriating and purposely deploying stereotypes as an act of agential reclamation of otherwise demeaning images. Thanks to Jennifer Wild and Peter Sigal for teaching these references in their seminars, respectively.

On stereotypes, Adam Curtis took a more postmodern view. For him, Tupac eventually lost control over the image he was appropriating and became controlled by the very discourse he was trying to change.

Black feminists have generated their own critiques, seeing the embodiment of such stereotypes as examples of false consciousness and racial self-hatred—precisely the opposite of agential self-assertion. Two of the most famous articulations of these perspectives are bell hooks, "Is Paris Burning?" in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (New York: Routledge, 2015 [1992]); and Patricia Hill Collins, "Mammies, Matriarchs, and Other Controlling Images," in *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000 [1990]).

For the purpose of foreshadowing, I will note here that Afeni Shakur named her son after Tupac Amaru II, leader of a major rebellion and Inka revival movement against Spanish rule in Peru, 1780-1783.

<sup>40</sup> Quoted in Thavolia Glymph, *Out of the House of Bondage: The Transformation of the Plantation Household* (Cambridge, UK; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Thanks to Jehangir Malegam for his comments on an earlier version of this footnote.

form of evidence about that past—a combination of documents, artifacts, testimonies, and even autobiographical recollections. What I am calling empiricism is a burden of proof and interpretation. The historian must appeal to sense and intuition. She must show things, and properly explain them.

Ranke is often credited with instilling empiricism in history in order to make it a scientific discipline, but this is a mistake. Ranke drew from generations of scholars—philologists, philosophers, and historians—who pursued Truth in the terms of the Christian tradition.<sup>41</sup> The foundations of scientific history and its empiricism are to be found in the Gospel.

The Book of Acts recounts the growth and persecution of the early Christians. The Apostles, a generation of men who knew and walked with Jesus personally, led this movement and guided it as it grew. This early movement established its legitimacy throughout the Roman Empire by working signs and wonders. According to their New Testament, the Lord God empowered them to give these signs because they believed in Christ as the son and incarnation of God Himself

But there was doubt and skepticism everywhere. According to the New Testament, the Jews in King Herod's provinces, even during the time Jesus of Nazareth

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<sup>41</sup> Anthony Grafton meticulously traced Ranke's intellectual debts down multiple generations, from his teachers at the University of Göttingen down through the medieval philologists who disputed the veracity of sundry manuscripts in the name of Christian truth, in *The Footnote: A Curious History* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

walked among men, were divided on the meaning of this person. Some thought him a demon, because he was able to exorcise demons out of possessed people. The Jerusalemite "teachers of the law" accused Jesus of being "possessed by Beelzebul! By the prince of demons he is driving out demons."<sup>42</sup> Others thought him a mortal man of God—a prophet and even a competitor to John the Baptist. Still others, like the Pharisees, likened him to a cheat and a sorcerer who was dangerous to political stability in the realm. These Pharisees tried their best to arrest Jesus through entrapment. They posed as his students and asked him loaded questions, hoping to catch him contradicting Mosaic law.

The purpose of the signs and wonders, then, was to overcome the doubts of the stiff-necked Jews. He walked on water and multiplied food. He turned water into wine and healed the sick. He restored Lazarus to life, and gave sight to the blind:

As he went along, he saw a man blind from birth.

His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

"Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the works of God might be displayed in him."<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Mark 3:22 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/mark/3/> courtesy of Biblica. Thanks to Jehangir Malegam for catching this missing footnote.

<sup>43</sup> John 9:1-3 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/john/9/> courtesy of Biblica.

Then Jesus cured the man's flesh, by giving him sight. And in this proof, he worked to cure his followers. For they were afflicted by the blindness of the spirit, and their cure was this sign of God's power, that they might be faithful to Him.

At last, Jesus offered up His own body as proof when He brought Himself back to life after dying on the cross. The Apostle Thomas refused to believe this miracle unless he examined the wounds on Christ's body from the torture.

The greatest tell of all was the laceration in Jesus' side. For this wound was itself the result of a search for proof. A centurion wanted to check and make sure that Christ was dead upon the cross before removing His body, so he pierced Christ's side with his spear. Now, to soothe doubting Thomas, after coming back from the dead, Christ bade him dip his hand in the same wound. Said Thomas:

"Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were and put my hand into his side, I will not believe."<sup>44</sup>

Jesus replied:

"Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> John 20:25 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/john/20/>.

Thomas complied, and he believed. Jesus concluded with a lesson for them all:

"Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."<sup>46</sup>

Proof emerges in sight, and touch, and sound. It is displayed in miracles and wonders in the physical realm, which appeal to the base senses. Yet these appeals are limited and are not always enough to make doubters into believers. So, Jesus chastised a crowd after He impressed them with His infinite division of the bread:

"Very truly I tell you, you are looking for me, not because you saw the signs I performed but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you..."<sup>47</sup>

In this Biblical epistemology, the spiritual complements and transcends the physical. Christ is the food that does not perish. His wisdom is eternal nourishment—it

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<sup>45</sup> John 20:27 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/john/20/>.

<sup>46</sup> John 20:29 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/john/20/>.

<sup>47</sup> John 6:26-7 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/john/6/>.

transcends corruptible, physical matter. Thus, artful debate and the dispensation of wisdom in the spiritual realm are also important forms of proof. No one could understand how such unschooled men—Jesus of Nazareth and his Apostles—could possess such insight when they preached among the people and debated with the Pharisees. Speaking for themselves, the Apostles credited the Holy Spirit for entering into them and moving them to say what needed to be said. Even their unschooled wisdom was a sign.

And still, the Apostles found it hard to believe when they walked with Christ. Only in memory, after He left the mortal world to rejoin God in Heaven, did the Truth become clear. Only then, did the Apostles believe. This is because the life, death, and resurrection of Christ established the fulfillment of the old prophecies, to correctly foretell the future. So, for the men most intimate with Jesus Christ, the study and interpretation of prophetic fulfillment supplied the final, and most crucial proof of His Divinity. Then, at last, they were able to believe, and perform wonders of their own as they spread the Good Word across the world.

It may seem, in this light, that actually empirical proof is inferior to believe. It would seem that empirical proof is somehow deficient or flawed and that it should not be seen as a precondition for belief as Doubting Thomas did. But I find the Scriptures ambivalent on this matter. The lesson I have taken away is that the point is not that empiricism is inferior to believing without seeing, but that it is a reflection on the

fallibility of man. Even faith the size of a mustard grain can move mountains—humanity is feeble. Even the apostles started out as men of little faith: Paul, their tireless leader, started out as a Pharisee and persecutor of the Christians. Empiricism is *both necessary and inadequate* to the task of making men believe because humankind inherited Adam and Eve's disobedience. We are human: we cannot do what we are told for our own good, on the basis of faith alone. We must be shown things and disciplined to that end. Empirical proof is both necessary and inadequate because it gets us to the threshold of true belief, when proof no longer becomes necessary to faith.<sup>48</sup>

Some sixty generations have passed since Christ broke bread among humankind. But the New Testament has distilled his life into a strong wine, to last through the ages. To listen to the New Testament is like tapping the keg. To hear it explained in sermons is to take it in dilution. Behind this wine lie the traces of the grapes, even the vineyard where they were harvested. We taste the astringency of the persecutions, the pungency of difficult parables, the sweetness of the Apostles' final triumph. We savor the vintage of Roman Judaea. It sustains our historical bond to those who strove against the current of their times, long before we were but a clot inside mother's womb. This wine, this blood of Christ, is a trace of His living memory.

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<sup>48</sup> I am grateful to Jehangir Malegam for raising this objection about the subordination of proof to faith during our dissertation defense.

Modern history is like this wine. It lets us commune with our ancestors by activating the traces behind every document. It is the hand behind a pen stroke. It is the mind behind a verse. It is the breath behind a speech and the flesh behind a photograph. But it is more than just these physical testimonies. It is the fulfillment of a prediction, the interpretation of old events. It connects what is happening now with what has been foretold before our births. It reminds us of the promises and dreams of our ancestors, the achievements that they want us to strive towards in the fullness of time.

Beyond art and science, modern history is a testimony, and testament, and a prophecy. As a testimony, it returns us to the traces of past lives. As a testament, it obligates us to execute the wills of our ancestors. As prophecy, it equates our present with their future, and our past with their present, and shows us how all these times are intertwined.

### 3. Watee

Once upon a time, you were a baby. When I was a baby, my parents thought nothing of raising me in a bilingual household. They spoke to me in English, and between themselves they spoke in Urdu. Naturally, I picked up the sounds of Urdu, its cadence. What I collected in my ears like rain pans trickled down into my throat, and there English and Urdu flowed together. I was the first of my family to be born with it dripping down my hollows, starting with the Central Valley drawl of the nurses and the obstetrician.<sup>1</sup> Now, without thinking, without translating, I secrete English passively from the grottoes beneath my tongue.

Urdu was mother's milk to me. Something my mother, who cared for and relished her duties to cultural stewardship, took pride in. As with the cuisine of her homeland, this Urdu mother's milk was her way of nourishing me. As that milk trickled through me and mingled with my English saliva, I came to babble in my own motley way. The Urdu *pani* and the English *water* became, in my mouth, *watee*. Allegedly this *watee* was my second word, after *joos* (juice). If I was indeed such a thirsty babe, I must have taken weaning with some difficulty. This withholding of the breast with my

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<sup>1</sup> I was born in Hayward, CA, part of the Central Valley region. It is famous for its 'Valley Girl' dialect, thanks in part to Hollywood. Obviously, I have no memories of my first moments, but I know based on documentation and my mother's stories that I was born in a hospital.

advancing age, this growing up and accepting the mass production dairy of farming conglomerates, this modernization, was inseparable from my weaning from Urdu.

My father was bent on rapid assimilation. He feared that my home brew would ferment and make me funky. He feared that this funkiness would retard my advancement through grade school. He feared that it would close doors to me in chasing a career. He feared that I would grow up to be a poor man, like he was in Pakistan. Modernization: I would have to be standardized, Anglicized, lactified, to rise to the cream of the American hierarchy in school and in work.<sup>2</sup> I would have to be like Grade A dairy by the gallon at *Super Saver*.

So, they withheld Urdu from me. Perhaps my mother, going against her own wishes, took it as a concession. After all, she insisted on picking my name over and against my father's opposition. He wanted assimilation. He wanted me to be Danyal, who could just as easily go by Daniel, or Danny. He wanted a reflection of his own choices. At home he was Murtaza. At work, Ali or Sid—his Anglicization of Syed. My name, Mohammed (he who is worthy of praise), fit into my mother's faith and her pride in herself for having her first son on her first try. Mohammed did not necessarily upend my father's paradigm, but it was a name synonymous with Islam in the world, like the

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<sup>2</sup> Frantz Fanon wrote the definitive study of lactification in *Black Skin, White Masks*, transl. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008).

name Israel to the Jews. I would not go by “Mo” until my mid-20s, and after that I returned to Mohammed.

My mother, having first chosen to bring me to term against his wishes, then insisted on choosing my name. She feared my father's wrath so much that she sheltered with her sister in California, where I was born. When my lungs took air for the first time in Alameda County, my father was in Nebraska, getting ready for his morning commute. She returned to him in Lincoln, where I grew up among White, Anglo-Saxon Protestants at school and Pakistani Sunnis at home. In so many mouths, my name ran the gamut from *Mammad* to *Mahomet*. Perhaps it was by swinging between these extremes that Urdu haunted me long after *watee* had slipped beneath my memories.

I remember when that trouble returned to me in first grade. In Mrs. Machuga's class one day, I found myself paralyzed by vocabulary. How could *pani* and *water* refer to the same thing? Which word was more correct? What criteria, how could I go and find out, whether *pani* or *water* was truer to that ubiquitous substance? *Water* opens the mouth with “WA” and then folds the tongue around “TER.” *Pani* opens the mouth with “PA” and then tightens the throat around “NI.” Did one flow more than the other? Was *pani* the babbling of a brook and *water* the plunk of a dripping faucet? Which one made more sense to me? Which one did I like better?

I intuitively understood that there was no higher authority to which I could appeal. My schoolteachers knew nothing of Urdu. My imams, although bilingual, cared

nothing for such riddles. I was thwarted, and could not be consoled, and kept this frustration to myself. Now, I write for that frustrated first-grader who, as a toddler, asked for “watee” if he could not have “joos.” In these pages, I argue once and for all that water is inferior to pani.

Just kidding.

In the years hence, I have grown out of questions like “which language is truest to reality?” These questions are philosophically untenable. Who dares to have the standing to even decide on such a question without favoritism or bias? The fact that human beings exist who use water to achieve communicative ends, and that other human beings use *pani*, and still others use words of their own, is enough to validate the many ways to speak of this thing, that flows and when clean and sipped cures thirst and safeguards life itself, but when dirty and forceful can mean grueling death.

Even *watee* has some integrity of its own. It was part of a nascent hybrid of English and Urdu. My father had the power to delegitimize *watee* because he was my father. He was acting as many parents do: not as “dad” in the personal sense, but as a representative of a quasi-objective human community. He stood in for the collective rather than as an individual to impart the cultures in which we lived onto his son. In spite of all that, I can still make sense of *watee* for my benefit, and I can still explain it to you. No matter how hard he might have tried, my father knew what I meant when I asked for *watee*. I know this because he brought me water anyways.

But *watee* did slip beyond my memory for a time, and water did come to take its place. I do not, even now, use *watee* at home. And now, having completed my general education, I am aware of still another name for this thing that flows, H<sub>2</sub>O, which designates this substance in its essential makeup. Two parts hydrogen to sixteen parts

oxygen make up this purified substance. Without the elements of hydrogen and oxygen, in this proportion, a substance can flow but not be water. It can be clear but not be water. H<sub>2</sub>O is a universal concept: it is meant to invoke the exact same meaning regardless of time and space and language. In space and language: H<sub>2</sub>O to a Pakistani chemistry student denotes a purified substance with two parts hydrogen to sixteen parts oxygen by gravimetric weight. H<sub>2</sub>O to an American chemistry student denotes a purified substance with two parts hydrogen to sixteen parts oxygen by gravimetric weight. In time: 65 million years ago, triceratops surely sipped on solutions of H<sub>2</sub>O, even if there were no chemists walking the earth to verify this deduction.

What interests me about these three terms is how they differentiate in time. The story of *watee* discloses its boundedness in time. It is a word linked to my memories of childhood. The story of its displacement, by water, is one of growing up and becoming a responsible, reasoning being in the United States. It is also one of assimilation into a land that was foreign to my parents, a secular conversion that inducted me into cultural communities of English speakers and English-language literature. Thanks to the rise of water, *watee* was demoted as a vestige of childhood, limited to that particular time in my life cycle. Water even now reigns as the present champion.

And what of H<sub>2</sub>O? This is the result of yet another conversion, my processing in the state's compulsory educational system. It is a higher language, a technical language aimed at maximizing precision in communication. H<sub>2</sub>O allows high school chemistry

students to write up chemical reactions, to predict the outcomes of laboratory experiments according to the rules of the conservation of mass and energy—part of what chemists call stoichiometry.

Water cannot support those same stoichiometric equations in a chemically meaningful way.  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is elegant and practical for the way it interlocks with other chemical formulas. Every H atom on the left side of the reaction must correspond with an H atom on the right side of the reaction. Every O atom on the left side of the reaction must also correspond with every O atom on the right side. The H's and O's might switch to produce different compounds, as in the reaction of photosynthesis. Light stimulates the conversion of carbon dioxide and water to sugar and oxygen. In doing so, the hydrogen, oxygen, and carbon of water and carbon dioxide shuffle around to become glucose and oxygen.  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  serves the double-entry bookkeeping method of high school chemical stoichiometry.

Water does not possess these capabilities. As a word, water is a phonetic transcription. There is no "W" atom that must be debited and credited between two sides of the reaction formula. These features mean that  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  and water work best in different contexts. Water is sufficient and efficient for communicating with English speakers.  $\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is overly precise and even chemically misleading for everyday conversations, since actually-existing water is often in solutions with various minerals and actively transitioning between chemical phases—remember the condensation cycle of grade

school climate studies, when sea water evaporates and becomes clouds, which then concentrate and shed rain across the countryside, collecting in streams and rivers that empty out into the sea? Still, H<sub>2</sub>O is exactly right among scientists when tallying reaction formulas.

As a matter of temporality, though, H<sub>2</sub>O tends to erase the conditions of its history, while water tends to disclose that same history. Water's time is that of a linguistic community: it hearkens back to those misty days when the Anglo-Saxons poured into lowland Britain in the wake of the Roman Empire. Water and *watee* are both bounded in time, but on two different scales—water expresses the temporality of a whole language, of migratory patterns, of the amalgamation of German and Dutch dialects over a period of generations, even the withdrawal of the Roman Empire from Britain to the Mediterranean Sea. It works to police in-group and out-group boundaries, as when politicians try to eliminate linguistic diversity in the name of national unity.<sup>3</sup>

H<sub>2</sub>O, on the other hand, as a technical word, erases that same temporality. H<sub>2</sub>O undoubtedly has a history—Lavoisier determined an approximate proportion of hydrogen to oxygen by weight in water and published these results in 1789. But as a technical term, meant to be universally valid in space and time and language, H<sub>2</sub>O

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<sup>3</sup> For more on the development of the English language, see Míša Hejná and George Walkden, *A History of English* (Berlin: Language Science Press, 2022), available online at <https://langsci-press.org/catalog/book/346>.

denies that it has any such history. It is the same for chemistry students in London, and chemistry students in Karachi. Furthermore, H<sub>2</sub>O is a definition based on substance rather than phase. If I asked you for *watee* and you gave me ice instead, I would be cross with you. I can't drink ice, and maybe it's too cold and hurts my teeth. Water and watee refer to the liquid form in everyday matters. However, with H<sub>2</sub>O, it can refer to Antarctic ice, frozen millions of years ago, and the liquid dispensed from my Town of Chapel Hill municipal tap, and the cumulus clouds grazing across the Carolina sky on a hot day. H<sub>2</sub>O supersedes the temporalities of watee and water. It erases the conditions of its own making in a bid to rise above the sediments of time.<sup>4</sup>

The drama of H<sub>2</sub>O's alienation of time can be seen in the works of Paul Needham at the turn of the twenty-first century. Taken together, his papers "What is Water?" and "The Discovery that Water is H<sub>2</sub>O" create a clear picture of how H<sub>2</sub>O has itself led philosophers (and perhaps also neophyte chemistry students like my young self) into speculations about this substance "not motivated by the scientific facts."<sup>5</sup> In those two essays, Needham argues that H<sub>2</sub>O was identified in a precise context aimed at specifying the macrostructural properties of water—that is, the aggregate characteristics of large

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<sup>4</sup> This phrase belongs to Reinhart Koselleck, who used it to describe the overlapping coexistence of multiple temporalities in history in *Sediments of Time: On Possible Histories*, transl. Sean Franzel and Stefan Ludwig-Hoffmann (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2018). I am grateful to Prasenjit Duara for this reference.

<sup>5</sup> Paul Needham, "The discovery that water is H<sub>2</sub>O," *International Studies in the Philosophy of Science* 16:3 (2002), 205.

quantities of water molecules. Not only is the "microstructure" of the H<sub>2</sub>O molecule poorly understood, but also the relationships between H<sub>2</sub>O molecules in large quantities. Needham does this by leveraging a variety of chemical insights into water: for instance, on the microstructural level water molecules are constantly trading ions with one another, oscillating between H<sub>3</sub>O<sup>+</sup> and OH<sup>-</sup>, variant "with the prevailing macroscopic conditions" in such a way that defeats the conventional simplification that 'water is H<sub>2</sub>O.'<sup>6</sup> In short, Needham shows how microstructural knowledge about water is actually fuzzier than macrostructural knowledge about water, in order to prove that philosophers are wrong to assume a positive correlation between breaking down water into its molecular units and greater precision in characterizing what water is. It is the *macrostructure* which stabilizes meaning for the *microstructure*, and not the other way around as in the reigning orthodox view.

But what is most important for our discussion is how Needham invokes history in order to undo the kind of oblivion wrought by H<sub>2</sub>O. Needham himself takes especial aim at the "reductionist assumptions" and "philosophical orthodoxy" that true water is denoted by H<sub>2</sub>O, which itself denotes chemical microstructure on the scale of individual molecules.<sup>7</sup> By reconstructing the "conceptual history of the notion of chemical

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Needham, "What is Water?" *Analysis* 60:1 (January 2000), 19-20; and in greater detail, *Idem.*, "Discovery," 221.

<sup>7</sup> Needham, "Discovery," 208; *Idem.*, "What is Water?" 13.

substance,"<sup>8</sup> Needham shows how H<sub>2</sub>O was originally only meant to denote an aggregate, macrostructural property of water compounds. Needham traces the historical development of this idea from Lavoisier on through the establishment of consensus, at the 1861 Karlsruhe conference, on Cannizzaro's method of writing chemical formulae based on the proportions of the elements found in compounds.<sup>9</sup>

"The significance of the definite article eventually found expression in the law of constant proportions and Cannizzaro's method of assigning compositional formulas to compounds. Accordingly, the expression "H<sub>2</sub>O" simply describes water's composition and not any of its microstructural features. By the law of constant proportions, composition is in general a necessary feature of single substances called compounds, and happens to be sufficient for the special case of being water, which lacks isomers."<sup>10</sup>

To finish the argument, Needham demonstrates using current chemical knowledge the ambiguities, dynamism, and great deal of variability in the microstructural characteristics of water according to various conditions. It is not necessary for me to go into these details—suffice it to say that it is Needham's skill, time,

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<sup>8</sup> Idem., "Discovery," 206.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 211.

<sup>10</sup> Needham, "Discovery," 223.

and energy, honed by his disciplinary training in the history and philosophy of science, that makes it possible to undo the oblivion of H<sub>2</sub>O.

This alienation, to me, is paradoxical. Thanks to his disciplinary training, the historian of science is easily capable of historicizing H<sub>2</sub>O. With some expense of effort, time, and capital, he can reveal the conditions and logic and politics of its invention, its transmission through time. He can unmask H<sub>2</sub>O as a snapshot of a historical process: the making of modern chemical discourse, for instance. But H<sub>2</sub>O gets us into these problems in the first place because it hides its own historicity.

How can a historical concept claim to be ahistorical at the same time? What kind of alienation is this, that a technical term like H<sub>2</sub>O can be so much younger than water—yet so much more oblivious to its history? How can H<sub>2</sub>O be both specific to the Lavoisier laboratory and come to mean water in its purest essence—water, as it essentially happens?

I will not answer these questions. Instead, I pose them in order to thematize something I will be tracking throughout this dissertation—how something new can also be the fulfillment of a truth about all of history. I have used the story of *pani*, water, *watee* and H<sub>2</sub>O to thematize in material form the insights I would like to repeat to the discipline of history. "[T]he first steps in the development of modern chemistry can be illustrated by the discovery that water is H<sub>2</sub>O. In that sense, the advent of H<sub>2</sub>O in our chemical understanding of water meant that something new was also something old: a

fulfilment and clarification of all the past names that water has had in human history: *pani, wasser, water, wæter, voda*, and my *watee*. H<sub>2</sub>O has a history, and it does not have a history.

By this thought exercise, I want to anticipate the major themes in the rest of the work, about the role of Christianity in Western historiography. For it is also the case that the advent of Jesus Christ—to His apostles—brought something new to something old. His advent clarified all the prophecies of the Hebrew Bible, now rechristened as the Old Testament in relation to the New. For the Christian followers, His Gospel was both new wine for new bottles, and also the man foretold some eight centuries ago:

"But he was pierced for our transgressions,  
he was crushed for our iniquities;  
the punishment that brought us peace was on him,  
and by his wounds we are healed."<sup>11</sup>

So, Christ was both old and new, both unprecedented and long foretold, both Man and God, Son and Father. In this Christian horizon, all temporalities converge—something like what H<sub>2</sub>O did to all the old names of water. But this is not just knowledge of reality in and of itself. This is conversion-knowledge, *resilient* conversion-

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<sup>11</sup> Isaiah 53:5 NIV, courtesy of Biblica.

knowledge which says that what is new has always been before. It is resilient conversion-knowledge that claims to reunite the other in the self, in the name of Truth.

I encountered H<sub>2</sub>O in my long secular conversion, in my acceptance of certain canons of the discipline of chemistry during my compulsory high school days. It brought me closer to the community of practicing chemists and laid the foundations for further study should I have elected that major in college. Naturally, this education was connected to the labor market, to graduating cadre after cadre, sufficiently useful and marketable when hiring out their labor to industrial firms.

Of course, the analogy between Christ and H<sub>2</sub>O becomes strained at this point, because of our modern secular-spiritual divide. Chemistry *can* behave evangelistically, such as in the corporate recruitment of qualified young scientists. Industry-funded career guidance films testify to this phenomenon.<sup>12</sup> And sociologists like Max Weber have taught us how Western professional culture developed the logic of the calling: where a dispassionate professionalism could also move the very heart and soul of the practitioner in ways that drew their spirit from absolute devotion to Christ and the injunction to do good work in the world. In that remote way, H<sub>2</sub>O baptized me into chemistry for a short while.

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<sup>12</sup> One such example is a 1964 career guidance film produced by the American Institute of Chemical Engineers. "The Chemical Engineer," directed by Justin Herman, available online on YouTube courtesy of PeriscopeFilm, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWMZeBVeeFw>.

The water of the baptism cleanses and sanctifies the person, cleansing both the flesh and the spirit before she joins the Christian fellowship. In a related way, H<sub>2</sub>O cleansed and clarified my mind for chemical discipline, like so many other of my school subjects. Christ meant both Truth and salvation, of being worthy before God. Time and again, the apostles enjoined their fellows to work hard, and to do good works. "As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead."<sup>13</sup> All our Western disciplines rely upon these spurs to the spirit—history and the social sciences included.<sup>14</sup> H<sub>2</sub>O thematizes my conversion to the discipline of chemistry, and we will encounter the theme of conversion time and again in this dissertation. As a matter of conversion, H<sub>2</sub>O is a name of Truth—like Jesus Christ. As a name of Truth, it is both historical and ahistorical, time-bound and timeless, new and old.

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<sup>13</sup> James 2:26 NIV, courtesy of Biblica.

<sup>14</sup> Between the initial and final submission of this dissertation, this chapter and the introduction went through substantial revisions. I'd like to thank Prasenjit Duara, Malachi Hacohen, and Aalyia Sadruddin for their helpful comments.

#### **4. Change**

Since history only rests on the study of change, historians are not required to use any names of Truth for their analyses. Historians can even study time itself—whether the Big Historical sense of the creation of time after the Big Bang, or the humanistic sense of socially constructed time in response to political, economic, and religious transformations. Any names of Truth that historians might employ in their scholarship are fundamentally tentative, even if the authors themselves do not believe this. Change is the anti-Truth that holds history together, because it reminds us that all names are temporary in the grand scheme of things.

In fancier words, everything that we can say about the past is itself historically conditioned. We know this because we can safely assume that after we die, there will be human beings on the Earth still going about their business. Some of those human beings will have known us personally. Eventually, they too will die, and the rest of humanity will continue to go about its business. Eventually, there will no longer be any living people on Earth who has firsthand knowledge of who we were. We will exist in the documents and detritus we leave behind, the records stored in government and corporate archives, the letters and tchotchkes kept as family heirlooms. Among the human beings long past our time will be historians, and those historians will be able to use the things we left behind to attempt reconstructions of our ways of life.

Naturally they will get some things right and some things wrong. What is

undoubtedly true is that we will someday pass into historical memory as a result of our mortality. The only people in the world who could know anything about us would have to do so secondhand, using those documents and tchotchkes.

The same is true for the ways we think and talk about the past. Our ways of seeing history pass into the documentary record. Future historians, who will have no choice but to learn about us secondhand, will develop their own ways of seeing us historically. Our habits of historical thinking will become examples of how people used to think about things back in the day. We will be praised for our foresight. We will be chastised for our shortsightedness. We will be Cicero—and Mark Antony. We will be heroes—and villains.

Empathy allows us to imaginatively adopt different perspectives on the world and about ourselves. It allows us to see ourselves from the perspective of the past, and to imagine ourselves from the perspectives of possible futures. We can imagine ourselves as taking part in someone else's past. We can imagine ourselves as taking part in someone else's future.

Empathy allows historians to imagine how our own most cherished ideas were unknown among our ancestors. Empathy allows historians to imagine how our own most cherished ideas will become obsolete from the perspective of our descendants. Empathy also reminds us that human beings will exist after we die—and that this chain

of being means that someone will be there to remember us and to try to reconnect with us as part of their heritage.

The historian Arash Khazeni wrote a book called *Sky Blue Stone*<sup>15</sup>. It was the result of his study of how past peoples living in medieval Iran valued and traded turquoise, and also a line of connection with his heritage. In the book, Khazeni argued that turquoise used to be traded as an emblem of sovereign power. It was one of the most highly valued objects facilitating networks of gifting, displays of grandeur, and alliance-making among a people before the capitalist mode of exchange for cash value took Europe and then the world by storm.<sup>16</sup> Once that happened, the old meanings of turquoise became obsolete.

Khazeni devotes his book to recovering such forgotten modes of material culture following the globalization of capitalism, which include appreciating old etymologies and delegitimized forms of knowledge about turquoise. Islamic scholars and geologists

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<sup>15</sup> Arash Khazeni, *Sky Blue Stone: The Turquoise Trade in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).

<sup>16</sup> The idea that capitalism began in Europe is subject to controversy. Among academic writers, its most famous recent proponent is Immanuel Wallerstein, while its most famous recent detractor is Janet Abu-Lughod. In *Before European Hegemony*, Abu-Lughod argues that Arab and Chinese merchants interacting in the Indian Ocean and Silk Road trade routes created the world's first systems of credit lending, insurance, and paper money, which thereby qualifies them as the heralds of modern capitalism. *Before European Hegemony: The World-System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

For Wallerstein's classic work see *The Modern World-System* (Vols. I-IV) [Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011]. A more accessible corridor into Wallerstein's thought can be found in his *World-Systems Analysis: An Introduction* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

posited that “the rays of the sun and stars and the heat from celestial bodies combined with the coldness of earth to form stones.”<sup>17</sup> The purportedly celestial origin of these stones helps us to reconstruct their symbolic associations with power and divinity. Khazeni explains that etymologically, “the Persian word for turquoise, *firuzi*, shares a root with the word for the word for victory (*piruzi*).”<sup>18</sup>

His book goes beyond Islamic material culture. It is also a history about the place of turquoise in the world as told from what the center of turquoise mining was once, cutting, refinement, and distribution—Nishapur, Iran. With the reactivation of turquoise mines in America came the end of the Iranian-Turkish control over the world's turquoise trade, and an irreversible decline in trade value with the increase in known global supply. In order to tell that part of the story, Khazeni decides to lean on the name of Truth—the H<sub>2</sub>O—of turquoise.

A hydrous phosphate of copper and aluminum, it is born in igneous rocks, as magma, fiery liquid deep within the earth, surges toward the surface, pools, and solidifies. In a geological process that lasts thousands of years, nature weathers, buries, and erodes these rocks, bringing their copper, aluminum, phosphorus, oxygen, hydrogen, and

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<sup>17</sup> Arash Khazeni, *Sky Blue Stone: The Turquoise Trade in World History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 45. Thanks to Laura Mitchell and James Chappel for this reference. Thanks as well to Arash Khazeni, with whom I brought up some of these ideas when he was a guest of our colloquia series at Duke History in Spring 2019.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

water together to create the chemistry of turquoise,  
 $\text{CuAl}_6(\text{PO}_4)_4(\text{OH})_8 \bullet 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$ .<sup>19</sup>

In this passage, Khazeni is not telling this account of turquoise as if it were unique to the European tradition of Positivistic theories of matter or rooted in the emergence of early modern scientific culture. Instead, Khazeni is telling what he takes to be a True account of how turquoise is objectively formed and what elements it is objectively made of. It is True because it is supposed to be valid wherever turquoise exists, for all times and all places, even if the people involved did not believe turquoise had anything to do with fiery liquid deep within the earth, or any relation whatsoever to copper, water, and aluminum. Yet what is disturbing to me about Khazeni's account is that he is interested in telling the story of how turquoise came to lose its mythical and symbolic power. This modern geological knowledge is part of the same historical shifts that knocked the sky-blue stone from the heavens and brought it down to earth.<sup>20</sup> The

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<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>20</sup> Academicians like to describe this overall process as the European Enlightenment's disenchantment of reality. Since then, new generations of scholars have tried to re-enchant it. The conflict between enchantment and disenchantment has long cut across class lines and is older than the Enlightenment. The Torah attests to struggles within ancient Israel between the king and the people's superstitions and polytheistic temptations and the elite priests and men-of-God. These elites sought to keep the people together and obedient to God's Covenant lest they incur His Wrath, often at great risk to their safety. For the elites, the God of Jacob was the only real God, and that idol worship, superstition, and other gods were fake. Many of these stories are chronicled in the Book of Kings.

Today the conflict has reappeared in the form of secularized, scientific medicine. Modern psychiatrists classify "magical thinking" and strange beliefs about reality as part of a cluster of

name  $\text{CuAl}_6(\text{PO}_4)_4(\text{OH})_8 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$  is the result of that process—it is hardly a neutral participant in the ways humanity has thought about the stone.

Another way to think about this is through a thought experiment. Suppose you've had a chance to take a ride on Mr. H.G. Wells' time machine. You find him in the desert, pretty far from the Las Vegas Strip, you've signed the waiver, you know exactly what the risks are, and you've seen the demonstration. You're convinced that this is not some gaudy rip-off. So, Mr. Wells takes you to medieval Nishapur and you have found yourself gob smacked by the Persians' reverence for turquoise when it can be so cheaply obtained in our own times.

You decide to dazzle them with our modern geological understanding of turquoise, to further along the progress of scientific knowledge a few hundred years ahead of schedule. Surely, you muse, the world would benefit from more science, much earlier in human history. Imagine how advanced your own time would become once

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schizophrenic-type symptoms. Still, it is worth noting that psychiatric designations are relative to community norms. For nuanced doctors, the problem with magical thinking is not that it is magical per se, but that it is so far outside the norms of the majority discourse that it makes human-human relationships difficult to maintain. Yet some influential activists have argued that it is psychiatry, and not the patient, who is the source of the problem because norms are instruments of oppression. Andrew Solomon offers a comprehensive discussion of psychiatry and the anti-psychiatry movement in his chapter on schizophrenia in *Far from the Tree: Parents, Children, and the Search for Identity* (New York: Scribner, 2012). I am grateful to Charlotte Schwarz for this reference. Incidentally, she is a psychiatrist.

you hop back into the Machine! You rub your palms together and wonder, how to go about stating your case to the Persians?

Assuming you can converse in medieval Farsi, you tell them that you have come from the future with true knowledge about the great sky-blue stone. It is a phosphate of copper and aluminum. It is formed when thousands of years ago, magma boiled up from the center of the earth and cooled near the surface.

The Iranians listen politely, but they make no effort to hide that they are astounded. They pity your foolishness and assume that you must be some mountain-dwelling heathen from the east. But you are just as much an object of curiosity to them, so they bring you to a scholar so that you can have a debate about the true nature of the sky-blue stone. They summon a local learned man named Irfan and bring you both some *ab* and sit around in a circle to observe you two debating one another.

You sit down cross-legged on a blanket near where you landed, seated across from Irfan. You repeat what you told the crowd and gesture to your Time Machine. Irfan looks at the machine and acknowledges that it is an impressive machine. He thanks Allah with a brief prayer and then humbly extends his hospitality to you as an honored guest. Then he tells you that you are surely mistaken about the nature of the sky blue stone, because while you have stated that it comes from the depths of the earth, he knows that it is comes from the heavens: the rays of the sun and the stars mix with the

coldness of the earth to make it, and this is why although it comes from underground caves and mines, it bears the color of the heavens.

How can you disprove what Irfan is saying? You stammer a bit and explain that magma comes from the Earth's core. It is superheated rock and metal that turns liquid, just like how mountain snow melts when exposed to warm air. Irfan scoffs and remarks that the deeper one goes into the Earth the colder the temperature becomes. Heat originates from the sun and the stars, not from the bowels of the world! How can you prove that it is in fact the opposite? How can all the best scholars in the world be wrong?

Now you start to lose your temper. Your throat swells and you clench your jaw. Irfan has a point. You are a stranger in this land. You are the only one who took the Time Machine to medieval Nishapur. These men have the backing of scholarly consensus. Your modern geology has not been invented yet. Even if you could bring a scholar from medieval Europe, he would likely take the Persians' side over your own. You don't even have equipment by which you could offer them an examination or chemical analysis of turquoise. Even if you could, you would have to reconstruct a large chunk of modern knowledge for it to begin to make sense: the periodic table of the elements, the law of the proportionality of molecular composition. The nomenclature and ideas behind  $\text{CuAl}_6(\text{PO}_4)_4(\text{OH})_8 \cdot 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$  would make little sense within the paradigm of the heavenly stone.

Worse still, it turns out that they aren't totally wrong from a modern Deep History perspective. Even within modern astronomy our consensus is that the planets were made from condensed space gases left behind from exploded stars. All of the elements—copper, aluminum, phosphate, hydrogen, oxygen included—come from stellar ash compressed by gravitational force. Is that really so different from saying that the stones came from congealed astral rays?

You are so flustered that you cannot reply to Irfan. He graciously gives you time to set your thoughts in order. Finally, you tell him you are grateful for his hospitality, and you must leave back to your own time and your own land. You assure him that the debate is not finished. You promise to return soon with pictures and documents, perhaps even an expert who will help you to explain. Irfan and his compatriots are disappointed in your determination to leave without dining with them or meeting more of the local notables. Who will believe them when they explain that they met a traveler from another era?<sup>21</sup>

You rise from the blanket and repeat your promises. Irfan pleads with you to change your mind and stay, but you are stubborn. He relents and wishes you well on your return trip. The men gather and watch you as you strap back into the Machine, and

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<sup>21</sup> You are fortunate to have escaped with your life. It is now known that the second expedition to Mars (August 1999) vanished because the Martians believed that their human visitors were not really Earthlings, but in fact mentally deranged Martians. The Martians ushered the unwitting crew into an insane asylum and euthanized them. Ray Bradbury, *The Martian Chronicles* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1958).

you wonder what it is that they will see after you flip the lever back to Las Vegas, 2022 AD. As the world darkens and you lurch into the windless tornado, you faintly hear them cry out in unison, *khuda hafiz!*

Back in our own time, we know that the celestial story of the stone is obsolete, even in modern Iran.<sup>22</sup> Yet why should we assume that our current state of knowledge will not become obsolete some day in the future? Why should we treat  $\text{CuAl}_6(\text{PO}_4)_4(\text{OH})_8 \bullet 4\text{H}_2\text{O}$  as something exempt from change?

History makes us witness how past people's most cherished names of Truths become obsolete over time. Thanks to historical empathy, we can imaginatively reverse the roles of past and present. If the past can believe in its own names that have become obsolete in our times, then we can always imagine what it could be like when our own names become obsolete in someone else's time. We can even do as I have just exemplified for you. We can imagine what could happen if past and present confronted one another's names.

The reasons for why our ideas might become obsolete are many. It might be scientific progression, in which new paradigms emerge that do a superior job of explaining repeatable phenomena succinctly when compared to their predecessors. It

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<sup>22</sup> Khazeni indicates as much when he cites a 19th-century Iranian mineralogy textbook. For further information about this topic, see Mohammad Yazdi, "The History of Mineralogy and Gemology in Iran," *Earth Sciences History* 40:2 (2021), 566-580.

might be ideological shifts motivated by political controversies. It might be a global catastrophe that interrupts and buries our current state of knowledge. For medieval *ulama* like my Irfan character, the main factors were the interconnected traumas of the Black Plague and the Timurid Mongol invasions, rather than intellectual debate over competing paradigms. Then it was the economic and political rise of the West, which prompted scientific modernization movements throughout the Islamic world.

The names of Truth used by modern academicians are neither more nor less universal than the names of Truth used by medieval *ulama*. They are all subject to change over time. They are all snapshots of historical processes.

## 5. Memoirs

I think that Arash Khazeni practices historiography the way that most historians are trained to do it. They construct a dialogue between a theoretical armature derived from other people's scholarship, and the clay of their assemblages of archival sources. The armature is made of universals while the clay is made of singularities. A properly executed book is one in which the statue seems to articulate itself like a natural human being—stabilized by its simulated sinews. The universal and the singular become harmoniously intertwined, and as they do so, the academician's names of reality seem to become indistinct from that reality.<sup>23</sup>

However, historians, perhaps more than other academicians, have a set of learned reflexes that can be more or less latent in the way that they think. Every academician experiences a passage from layperson to professional, from using language pragmatically to using language symbolically. After all, a historian is not born, but made. This transition creates a contrast between the layperson's emotional identification with the past and the professional's empirical analysis of the past. The historian's trained reflexes allow for a sensitivity to that change, even a recognition of the incompleteness of that transition. In their memoirs, historians often fixate upon traces where their past

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<sup>23</sup> One of the main academic books that takes up this exact topic—the origins of the realist style in history writing—is Peter Novick, *That Noble Dream*. Another metaphor I thought of for this comes from the culinary world. Water and oil normally repel one another, but it is possible to bring them together into unctuous, tasty harmony with proper technique. Such emulsions can be as deep as a butter chicken curry, or as snappy as a citrusy vinaigrette.

selves appear within their present selves. They make their universals vulnerable by drawing attention to academic training as a process rather than an identity.

In memoir, the historian has an opportunity to reflect upon their emotional identifications and analytical developments. Oftentimes they choose to let those narratives become synergistic rather than antagonistic. In their thousands of grant applications in a full-length career, academic professionals craft personal statements that combine their personal passion for what they study with their analytical professionalism. They present themselves as the perfect unity of heart and brain, and it is only natural that they would bring these professional habits of writing about themselves to their autobiographies.

E.J. Hobsbawm wrote his autobiography, *Interesting Times*, as a companion to his historical work, *Age of Extremes*. Both narratives cover the twentieth century. Thanks to reconstructed diary entries, Hobsbawm discloses that his sense of political purpose drove him into academic history. He accepts academic training in order to become a rigorous Marxist. Here he reflects on his *Bildung* in preparation for the Cambridge Scholarship Exam of Autumn 1934:

As I read my diary of 1934-5, it is perfectly clear that its writer was getting ready to be a historian. What I was trying to do above all else was to elaborate Marxist historical interpretations of my [wide and general] reading. And yet I was doing so in a way I almost certainly

would not have done, had I continued my education on the continent. The 'materialist conception of history' was, of course, central to Marxism. However, Britain in the 1930s was one of the rare countries in which a school of Marxist *historians* developed...<sup>24</sup>

This budding historian-in-training grew seamlessly into his professional role.

Hobsbawm quotes from his diary: "...the historical question I asked myself at the age of seventeen has permanently shaped by work as a historian. I am still trying to 'analyze the (social) influences which determine the form and content of poetry (and more generally of ideas) at different times'."<sup>25</sup> Before even entering college, this young Marxist had already steeped himself in universals in order to develop his worldview. His Leftist *Bildung* was accomplished in tandem with his involvement in political and intellectual community, first in Berlin at the Prince Henry Gymnasium and second at Cambridge University. Universals led him to political consciousness-raising: community with Marxists and estrangement from "the suburban petty-bourgeoisie."<sup>26</sup>

The road to professionalization is not always so smooth. John Hope Franklin was a contemporary of Hobsbawm—an American counterpart in terms of eminence and intellectual dedication. In his autobiography, *Mirror to America*, Franklin emphasized his love for scholarship and his determination to excel, values instilled in him by his

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<sup>24</sup> Eric J. Hobsbawm, *Interesting Times: A Twentieth-Century Life* (London: Allen Lane, 2002), 97.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

parents. Unlike Hobsbawm, Franklin was not initially drawn to historiography for the purpose of social justice. Instead, it was his affection for a charismatic teacher whom he met through coursework at Fisk University.

I did not turn to scholarship in search of tools to confront America's racial injustice. In a way, there was no turn to take. Since following my mother's chalk marks on the blackboard when I was three, I had enjoyed the determined effort to excel at my studies. A part of that pleasure no doubt traced to my parents' injunction to all of their children that, so long as they tried their hardest, no white person was any better than they. But that very injunction underscored the fact that Jim Crow America was set on confronting any black determined to excel. I hardly needed to seek a way to confront American racial injustice. My ambition was sufficient to guarantee that confrontation. My decision to focus that ambition on a career as a scholar, as opposed to a lawyer or some other pursuit, was not a response to the racial injustices that marked my freshman year, but can be directly attributed to a single individual.<sup>27</sup>

Franklin goes on to describe how that man, Professor Theodore S. Currier, spellbound his classroom with dramatic storytelling and intellectual vivacity. The young scholar was hooked. Over time he came to appreciate the value of scholarship to advancing racial justice in the United States and worked tirelessly to “dismantle” the

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<sup>27</sup> John Hope Franklin, *Mirror to America: The Autobiography of John Hope Franklin* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 2005), 44-5.

apparatuses of racial inequality in law and custom. In his own career, he desegregated the Department of History faculties at the historically white Brooklyn College, University of Chicago, and Duke University. Throughout the narrative, he emphasizes his determination to excel, his indefatigable work ethic, and the support of mentors and colleagues throughout his professional life.

For Franklin, academic history offered tools for destroying the purportedly universal concept of “race.” It offered tools to rehabilitate humanity as a new universal to replace race. In his autobiography, he showed no signs of a conflicted attitude towards embracing our common humanity and relishing the cultural specificity and integrity of blackness. Instead, he credits his ecumenical attitude and “determination to pursue my profession wherever it led” in his willingness to desegregate professional associations and university faculties, and to escape from the “straitjacket confinement of pursuing a career exclusively in historically black colleges and universities.”<sup>28</sup> Franklin's single-minded determination to pursue his profession meant that he had no internal conflicts, and no personal compunctions, about accepting the scholarly life.

Other extraordinarily accomplished historians have not been so successful at reconciling their psyches to the burden of universalized thinking. William Cronon bookended his classic work, *Nature's Metropolis*, with autobiographical reflections.

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid., 7-8.

Structurally, he struck a balance between the anti-urban romanticism of a young William Cronon with the Godlike perspective of the professional historian, impersonally surveying the development of Chicago and the midwestern countryside in tandem.

In his Preface to *Nature's Metropolis*, Cronon shares how his "private passion" informs his professional research: "to understand...environmental changes...to the actions of human beings..."<sup>29</sup> He chooses to study Chicago and the Great West because it represents an excellent union between private memories and public discussion: "I choose Chicago [for this book] in part because it loomed large in my own childhood as a dark symbol of They City...But Chicago is also an appropriate focus for a less personal reason—it has been raising similar questions about the city's place in nature for well over a century now."<sup>30</sup> Yet these continuities between the private Cronon and the public Cronon, his personal Chicago and Chicago talking about itself, is belied by important breaks between the child Cronon and the adult Cronon, the layperson and the academician.

Cronon relates these breaks as a matter of increasing skepticism. He sees his childhood self as someone who was naïve to the superficial dichotomies between city and countryside, manmade environment and natural environment. This childhood self

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<sup>29</sup> William Cronon, *Nature's Metropolis: Chicago and the Great West* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1991), xiv.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 8-9.

was unknowingly conditioned by a “venerable tradition” of pastoral Romantic-era literature from the European and American cultural heritages, 19th-century shadows cast upon the peoples of the 20th century.<sup>31</sup>

Yet as this boy became a man and embraced his *métier* as a professional historian-in-training, he came to demystify and abstract himself from those childhood impressions. Over time, Cronon realized that this tradition was “distorting my sense of city and country alike.”<sup>32</sup>

Would these Wisconsin farms be here without the city in which to sell their crops? Could the city survive if those crops failed to appear? The answer to both questions was surely no, but then why did it make sense, in trying to understand rural nature, to draw a boundary between it and the urban world next door? The more I pondered that question, the more I began to doubt the “naturalness” of the wall that seemed to stand so solidly between the country I thought I loved and the city I thought I hated.<sup>33</sup>

Now, as an adult, Cronon sees the perspective of his childhood self in terms of collective failure: “We fail to see that our own flight from ‘the city’ creates ‘the wild’ as its symbolic opposite and pulls that seemingly most natural of places into our own

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 8.

cultural orbit.”<sup>34</sup> The adult has renounced his childhood innocence, and he has done so by arguing that it was really not innocence at all, but a kind of cultural brainwashing that determined in advance his uncritical acceptance of the separation between city and countryside. In submitting himself to academic professionalization, in accepting the methods and tools and skepticism of modern research, he learned to demystify and distance himself from the culture of his upbringing.

Here, historical empathy reveals a double edge. The more Cronon deepens his affiliation with reality in itself, the more he becomes alienated from his own cultural heritage.

Much as I say I love “nature,” that word usually remains an abstraction in my daily life—a non-urban quality of aesthetic or sacred beauty to be looked at and “appreciated,” not the gritty web of material connections that feed, clothe shelter, and cleanse me and my community.<sup>35</sup>

At this climactic moment, Cronon inverts our expectations. It turns out that his academic gaze is *less* abstract than his casual use of the word “nature.” This inversion alienates the public Cronon from the private Cronon, and the environmentalist Cronon from the academic Cronon. He trades in his cultural roots for the study of history.

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 18-19.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 384.

In the epilogue, Cronon admits that he still retains his childhood preferences for the country over the city. He cannot deny the power of his early reminiscences, such as his “evil memory” of a glowing smokestack.<sup>36</sup> He finds himself caught between academician and environmentalist, between the boy who shucked corn on his stoop at Green Lake,<sup>37</sup> and the man who, as a professional, views both farm and factory in a web of mutual dependency. In spite of all his research, he is “still...a captive of the pastoral myth.”<sup>38</sup> No matter what changes professionalization has worked upon his soul, he cannot completely trade his cultural roots in for a purely professional perspective. The result is what he calls “moral schizophrenia,” a conflict between his emotional attachment to the pastoral countryside and his rational understanding that it is a myth that denies the mutual dependencies between city and countryside, humanity and nature.<sup>39</sup>

Cronon meant for these personal journeys to show, at the risk of “self-indulgent” writing,<sup>40</sup> the ways in which he has thought through an ethical way of life that acknowledges the mutual interdependencies of city and country, humanity and nature. His aim is to leave something so that his daughter may inherit a better world. Cronon melts the division between city and countryside in order to emancipate our way of life from the clutches of myth. Yet he does so by creating more schisms, splitting child from

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 385.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 379.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 384.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., xxiii.

adult, layperson from academician, enculturated from enlightened, emotional from rational. So it is that several nineteenth-century shadows take the place of the one from Romantic literary pastoralism. He has sliced off the head of one historical hydra, only to grow four more.

Whereas William Cronon framed his study of capital, commodities, and development in America's Midwest region with this drama between the lay emotions and academic rationality, the English labor historian Carolyn Steedman thematized an entire autobiographical narrative around this problem. Her autobiography is a personal look at two generations of working-class British women's childhoods: the one of her mother and the one of herself. Here the drama between the daughter and the mother, the child and the adult, the lay and the professional takes center stage. The self becomes not a universal whole, as in John Hope Franklin's narrative, but a tinderbox of desire and frustration.

Steedman calls her work a *Landscape* rather than a *History of a Good Woman* for her conviction that she is not telling a historical narrative. The story is not an explanation, an ordering of a chain of situations and processes, but a case study narrative painting the relationships of people among the objects—objects they make, buy, and look at with envy—inclusions, and exclusions that frame their emotional and psychic lives. A *Landscape*—not quite a *Portrait*, either—because it balances foreground with background without giving one over to the other. So, London, the postwar

reconstruction, the beginnings of the consumer boom and the baby boom, all are present in that ensemble which her mother, her father, herself, and her sister inhabit together.

While Steedman uses her book title to implicitly distance her work from historical scholarship, she uses the model of the Freudian psychoanalytic case study to do so explicitly. Whereas the historian would reconstruct a sequence of events from documentary evidence, the psychoanalyst has free reign to combine the empirical and the emotional, to notice how past perpetuates itself in the present, and how present contaminates its memories of the past.

My mother cut herself off from the old working class by the process of migration, by retreat from the North to a southern country with my father, hiding secrets in South London's long streets. But she carried with her her childhood, as I have carried mine along the lines of embourgeoisement and state education. In order to outline these childhoods and the uses we put them to, the structure of psychoanalytic case-study—the narrative form that Freud is described as inventing—is used in this book. The written case-study allows the writer to enter the present into the past, allows the dream, the wish or the fantasy of the past to shape current time, and treats them as evidence in their own right. In this way, the narrative form of case-study shows what went into its writing, shows the bits and pieces from which it is made up, in the way that history refuses to do, and that fiction can't. Case-study presents the ebb and flow of memory, the structure

of dreams, the stories that people tell to explain themselves to others.<sup>41</sup>

In fact, for Steedman, historical narration cannot serve as a vehicle for her story because of the way it effaces the very class conflict at the heart of *Landscape*. The author's own training for academic history *is* her path to embourgeoisement. In like fashion, she singles out historical consciousness as a problem rather than a solution to telling the stories of working-class people. Histories amalgamate the singular stories of many into a universal story, they assemble individual lives into interchangeable evidence of a generic working-class type. Yet to be working class, to be excluded from bourgeois life, also makes working class experiences fundamentally disruptive to historical amalgamation.

What historically conscious readers may do with this book is read it as a Lancashire story, see here evidence of a political culture of 1890-1930 carried from the Northwest, to shape another childhood in another place and time. They will perhaps read it as part of an existing history, seeing here a culture shaped by working women, and their consciousness of themselves as workers. They may see the indefatigable capacity for work that has been described in many other places, the terrifying ability to *get by*, to cope,

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<sup>41</sup> Carolyn Kay Steedman, *Landscape for a Good Woman: A Story of Two Lives* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 20-21.

against all odds. Some historically conscious readers may even find here the irony that this specific social and cultural experience imparted to its women: "No one gives you anything," said my mother, as if reading the part of 'our man' handed to her by the tradition of working-class autobiography. "If you want things, you have to go out and work for them." But out of that tradition I can make the dislocation that the irony actually permits, and say: "If no one will write my story, then I shall have to go out and write it myself."<sup>42</sup>

Steedman anticipates these universal concepts and seeks to stop them in their tracks. "Lancashire story," "evidence of a political culture," "consciousness of themselves as workers," all have to be interrupted in order for her to tell this story that is uniquely and singularly her own, a case study that refuses universalization.

Nonetheless, Steedman uses her historical training in order to help her tell her story. She obtains records of the family finances, computes sums, and compares the beliefs her mother held about the family's impoverishment with data on the standards of living and typical expenses for childrearing at the time. In the light of empirical research, her mother's refrain for how expensive the children (Steedman and her sister) were to raise is revealed as a myth, something that transcends the bare facts and yet leaves an unmistakable impression on Steedman's mental reality even after her academic training.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 23.

We weren't, I now realize by doing the sums, badly off. My father paid the rent, all the bills, gave us our pocket money, and a fixed sum of seven pounds, a week housekeeping money, quite a lot in the late 1950s went on being handed over every Friday until his death, even when estrangement was obvious, and he was living most of the time with somebody else. My mother must have made quite big money in tips, for the records of her savings, no longer a secret, show quite fabulous sums being stored away in the early 1960s. When she died there was over £40,000 in building-society accounts. Poverty hovered as a belief. It existed in stories of the thirties, in a family history. Even now when a bank statement comes in that shows I'm overdrawn or when the gas bill for the central heating seems enormous, my mind turns to quite inappropriate strategies, like boiling down the ends of soap, and lighting fires with candle ends and spills of screwed up newspaper to save buying wood. I think about these things because they were domestic economies that we practised in the 1950s.<sup>43</sup>

Even though she knows the empirical truth, Steedman cannot help but reflexively prepare herself for getting by. Her historical training cannot force her out of these habits of mind passed down through her mother. She concludes:

If we'd lived within my father's earning power, been uncomplicatedly his children, two meals a day round the kitchen table, parents sharing a bed (and the *car*, in all those years my mother was never driven anywhere in the firm's car) then our household would actually have represented, and represented to its children, the unambiguous position of the upper working class. But it was my mother who defined our class position, and the emotional configurations that follow on such an assessment. What is more, until we were in our thirties, my sister and I continued to believe that she bore the major

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 38-9.

burden of supporting us. As children we believed that without her we'd go hungry, and the knowledge of how little we cost came very late indeed.<sup>44</sup>

In all this, Steedman manages to wrestle the conflict between her psyche and her professional outlook into a productive tension, in which the opposition between the two drives her need to tell her own story, in the face of all the working-class histories that came before. Yet unlike a professional historian, Steedman does not let limitations of memory or lack of information keep her from writing out these stories that have become fixed in her identity:

To begin to construct history, the writer has to do two things, make two movements through time. First of all, we need to search backwards from the vantage point of the present in order to appraise things in the past and attribute meaning to them. When events and entities in the past have been given their meaning in this way, then we can trace forward what we have already traced backwards, and make a history. When a history is finally written, events are explained by putting them in causal order and establishing causal connections between them. But what follows in this book does not make a history (even though a great deal of historical material is presented). For a start, I simply do not know enough about many of the incidents described to explain the connections between them. I am unable to perform an act of historical explanation in this way.<sup>45</sup>

Using the model of the case study allows Steedman to explore other kinds of connections that are no less real than the chains of historical causation. These connections have to do with memory and association, belief and feeling, resentment and

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 21.

catharsis. They surface even when Steedman reads in official archives, in her capacity as an academic historian.

I cry now over accounts of childhoods like this, weeping furtively over the reports of nineteenth-century commissions of inquiry into child labour, abandoning myself to the luxuriance of grief in libraries, tears staining the pages where Mayhew's little watercress girl tells her story. The lesson was, of course, that I must never, ever, cry for myself, for I was a lucky little girl; my tears should be for all the strong, brave women who gave me life. This story, which embodied fierce resentment against the unfairness of things, was carried through seventy years and three generations, and all of them, all the good women, dissolved into the figure of my mother, who was, as she told us, *a good mother*.<sup>46</sup>

Here the figure of the good woman, and her cloistered crying, snap Carolyn Steedman back across three generations. In the psychic constellation that makes up this professional historian, who studies and reads in the archives of working-class girls' lives, who has published monographs on this specialization within the normative ambit of the discipline of history, historical consciousness must coexist (if uneasily) with the

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 30, author's emphasis.

tiger's leap.<sup>47</sup> No one can relate to the past without this primitive identification, this psychic bond that runs roughshod over the neatly ordered causal chains that make up the professional historian's bailiwick. There has never been an adult who was not first a child. There has never been a historian who was not first a human being.

A historian is not born but made. Attending to this making shows us how the universals historians use in order to talk about reality are not given to human experience. Instead, any individual's acceptance of universalized thinking is the result of years of training, discipline, and self-denial in order to become an academic professional. Yet as we have seen in these autobiographies, no historian can fully deny or repress their lay consciousness and childhood memories. They can energize the historian, as with John Hope Franklin and E.J. Hobsbawm. They can trouble the historian, as with William Cronon and Carolyn Kay Steedman. Either way, in the professional consciousness of the historian, universals fail to assimilate the psychological artifacts of individuality. Professional historians must learn to live with a consciousness divided between multiple realities: the professional reality inculcated by

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<sup>47</sup> This is Walter Benjamin's famous modality of history in his essay, "On the Concept of History" (also known as the "Theses on the Philosophy of History"). In its original context, the leap describes the revolutionary's rejection of the homogeneous empty time of linear, sequential history. For me, it also describes the interaction between memory and history. We do not replay all of our memories in sequence in order to get to the right one. Instead, we expect that the exact memory we need will flash into focus, triggered by the needs of our present circumstances. Walter Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," transl. Dennis Redmond (2005), accessed online at <https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/benjamin/1940/history.htm>. I am grateful to Laurent Dubois for assigning this to our class on "What is the Archive?" at Duke University.

their training and the psychological reality formed by their life experiences. They must learn to place their universals alongside their psychological singularities, and to navigate the tensions such juxtapositions create.

Can we not then use historical empathy to bring these tensions out in the open, to lighten the burden of universals by contemplating them? Can we reimagine universals not as approaches to reality in and of itself, but as strategies—universalizations—for coordinating our imaginations to solve problems and commune with our ancestors?

I hope someday that academicians will find the strength to imagine our universalizations as the results of processes and conversations rather than as givens and reifications of reality. They will help us search cooperatively for direction rather than serve as expressions of academia's intellectual hegemony. We do not need to burn our universals, as if idols in the temple of God. I only wonder if we could stop worshipping the things of our own making as if they were synonymous with the world.

## 6. Universalizations

Here is a tale of two graduate students. Luther studies slavery. Teresa studies prostitution. He sifts through the old pages of deeds and account books. She pores over old diaries, judicial records, and *belles lettres*. They meet in graduate seminar. They discuss Michel-Rolph Trouillot's *Silencing the Past*, Marisa Fuentes' *Dispossessed Lives*. Does critical fabulation work against the professional historian's commitment to empirical methods? How does one rescue the lives of the oppressed from the records of their oppression? Their professor teaches them methods for reading colonial archives against the grain.

Luther and Teresa do well in class. They have picked up powerful insights into the craft and science of history. Luther returns to his archive with a great mission. Teresa returns to her archive with a great mission. He will recover the lost voices of the enslaved. She will recover the lost voices of disorderly women.

Luther and Teresa are both buoyed by their determination to save, their injunction to remember the lost. The archive itself oppresses the enslaved. The archive itself oppresses the prostitute. They will overturn this oppression and liberate the oppressed, shout their stories from the mountaintops, from the heights of the ivory tower. Henceforth, no one will forget the enslaved. Henceforth, no one will forget the sex worker.

So, they find themselves back in their archives. A sweat—a chill—no, a fever overtakes them. For the stakes of the project seem to loom over them like the End Times. Those who are not written in the book of life shall not be saved. They will be forgotten, left to oblivion, unknown forever among the living. Teresa finds herself dizzy and afraid. Luther is paralyzed into inaction. Whatever source the neglect, whatever human being they do not include—is this not a failure of the worst kind? To consign a historical person to oblivion by not including them, is that not perpetuating the violence of the archive? Is it not becoming complicit with the oppressor?

They have a double duty: one to the profession of history, and one to the people whom they write about. So, Luther and Teresa double down. They forgo sleep, they survive on beef jerky, crackers, and stale coffee. They must try to save as many souls as they can, all of the lives must be remembered. Every source must be consulted. Every lead must be chased.

The Lord God told Ezekiel:

"When I say to the wicked, 'O wicked man, you will surely die,' and you do not speak out to dissuade him from his ways, that wicked man will die for his sin, and I will hold you accountable for his blood.

"But if you do warn the wicked man to turn from his ways and he does not do so, he will die for his sin, but you will have saved yourself."<sup>48</sup>

Is not failing to collect a life in history tantamount to failing to warn wicked men from evil? Is not forgetting a kind of evil, a perpetuation of the silence of the archives? Is it not the historian's duty to call upon us to remember?

This is a version of the parable Jacques Derrida taught us about the archives, the archive fever that afflicts the historian, caught with the injunction to remember.<sup>49</sup> Derrida called it more than a sickness. It was an inflammation, a passion, a productive tension. It drove the analyst to greater and greater feats of mastery. It is a passion that can afflict anyone, any psychoanalyst, any archaeologist, any historian.

Archive fever is a kind of delirium, a haunting. The researcher infers that any potsherd, any document, any lock of hair preserved within an archive is a trace of some real and experienced past, an indicator of a human being on the other end of time. The researcher accumulates traces to enrich their understanding of that past, to come still closer to that other human being. But no trace will ever be enough to really re-live that past, to repeat it. So, the researcher grows frustrated, trapped, impotent, unable to fulfill this pressing desire. Yet the researcher cannot accept this ego-shattering impotence. So,

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<sup>48</sup> Ezekiel New International Version 33:8-9.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, transl. Eric Prenowitz (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998). I am grateful to Laurent Dubois for teaching this challenging text in a seminar on "What is the Archive?" at Duke University.

they divert their energies into more traces, more research, more reading, more archives, greater mastery. The trauma of the loss of the past generates this double-faced attachment to the evidence. One: a yearning for these traces because they are all we have—they allow us to posit a past altogether. Two, a hatred for these traces because they are merely shadows of the past which looms over us. So, it is a haunting: every ghost in the present presupposes a living being in the past. The ghost discloses and seals away the possibility of knowing that living being altogether: it archives and *an*archives a life.

Historians, like archaeologists and psychoanalysts, encounter ghosts all the time. Imagine Jill Lepore gazing into the strands of Noah Webster's hair.<sup>50</sup> This professional historian admitted that she "loved too much", that even as she despised Webster's icky personality and patriarchal bearing, she could not help but develop an emotional bond with him as she pored over his archives and his plucked hairs. The ghostly suggestion of a furrowed brow behind each lock, a hot pulse behind each ink-stained letter, tantalized her, aroused her archive fever, made her "love" in spite of herself. But while Lepore drew lessons for the field of microhistory from her daydreams in the archives, her passion can be found in all specialties.

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<sup>50</sup> Jill Lepore, "Historians Who Love Too Much: Reflections on Microhistory and Biography," *The Journal of American History* 88:1 (June 2001), 129-144.

Julius S. Scott III took eight years to complete his Cold-War-era dissertation on the diffusion of revolutionary politics in the Caribbean islands—and the fretful imperialist attempts to contain such men and movements. And though his "Common Wind" achieved success within its subfield as one of the most respected history dissertations of all time, the author almost failed to publish it.<sup>51</sup> He had in fact received a book contract with Oxford University Press—which he signed—but found himself overwhelmed by his own ambitions.

"Part of the problem was that I was not committed to one place: I wasn't a U.S. historian, or a Jamaican historian. I included all of those places. I studied archives in Jamaica, Cuba, Haiti, England and France. I could read and speak Spanish and French, but I also wanted to learn Dutch and Danish [to study the other islands in the Caribbean], but that would have taken more years to write. I set an agenda for myself that was far too ambitious. Eventually, I put the dissertation aside. I had a job, and I left it at that."<sup>52</sup>

So, this doyen of Caribbean History concluded that his project had gotten out of control. English took him from North Carolina to Jamaica and England. French opened

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<sup>51</sup> Calling it a "failure" may seem harsh, but these are Julius Scott's own words: "About a year ago [2017 or early 2018], I got a call from my former graduate assistant, saying Verso Press was interested in publishing it. I couldn't believe it! Initially, I didn't want to dredge up those failures from over thirty years ago." Eugene Holley Jr., interview with Julius Scott, "Spreading the News of Freedom: PW talks to Julius S. Scott," *Publishers Weekly* (November 21, 2018), accessed online at <https://www.publishersweekly.com/pw/by-topic/authors/interviews/article/78658-spreading-the-news-of-freedom-pw-talks-to-julius-s-scott.html>

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. I am grateful to Ayanna Legros for sharing the legend of "The Common Wind" with me.

doors to him in Haiti and France. Spanish for Cuba. But then he became acutely aware of what he was leaving out rather than what he already had. So, he set his sights on the archives of the Dutch and Danish West Indies—and presumably their metropolises too. Two more languages, several more archives, uncountably more sources loomed before him. Time to back out. He had his job—and Oxford could find someone else to sign for their Caribbean history book list.

The job was a lectureship at Duke, followed by another at the University of Michigan. What else would he do as a professor but impart his meticulous craftsman's approach to his students?

"His commitment to careful and archivally rooted thought elicited a striving for care in his students that at times felt daunting...Discussions with Scott could unfold over hours and frequently left one with a renewed clarity concerning all the homework still to be done."<sup>53</sup>

Thus, archive fever spreads. Teachers give it to students, and students give it to their students. Colleagues take note. Like the Common Wind that bore the "Common Wind"—word of mouth, symposia, colloquia, and classes—the aerosolized droplets of contagion travel with it. What Scott's obituarists described as "that sense of never having

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<sup>53</sup> Vincent Brown, Laurent Dubois, and Jennifer Morgan, "In Memoriam: Julius S. Scott, 1955-2021", *Perspectives on History* (February 28, 2022), accessed online at [https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/march-2022/julius-s-scott-\(1955%E2%80%932021\)](https://www.historians.org/research-and-publications/perspectives-on-history/march-2022/julius-s-scott-(1955%E2%80%932021))

done quite enough research" is one of the classic manifestations of this illness.<sup>54</sup> They imply that this sense is a common experience that bedevils the historian.<sup>55</sup>

But to call it "perfectionism" only gets at a comorbid condition.<sup>56</sup> Perfectionism does not account for the entirety of archive fever. This fever is the injunction to remember, the duty of the historian to wrest his subjects from the oblivion of apathy and forgetting, to carry forward the voices and strivings of past humans into the present—but to do so only with scraps and hints, led along by the ghosts of history. And so, I understand Julius Scott as a man who sought too much, who was so determined not to leave any masterless man behind, who so wished to enter all of these souls into his book

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid.

<sup>55</sup> Indeed, it is common and longstanding. The first great historian of the Indies—and the Spanish 'New World'—was afflicted with archive fever too. Daymond Turner argues using educated guesses and archival research that Oviedo failed to publish the promised Part Two of his *Natural and General History of the Indies* due to a combination of archive fever, lack of funds, and finally, his own mortality. The two issues were combined because as the manuscript grew, so did the costs of printing it! Here is Turner: "As early as 1540 the chronicler Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés was preparing a complete edition of the fifty books of his vast *Natural and General History of the Indies*, to include a greatly enlarged version of the nineteen books of part one and an augmented final book which would become Book 50 (or Book 12 of his third part.) By 1 March 1542 these preparations were well advanced. However, in his zeal to record every accessible fact about Spain's overseas empire he continued to revise and add to each of the three parts of his *General History* until, on the eve of his last return to Hispaniola in January or early February 1549, he deposited the entire manuscript in an unspecified Spanish monastery for safekeeping." Daymond Turner, "The Aborted First Printing of the Second Part of Oviedo's 'General and Natural History of the Indies'." *Huntington Library Quarterly* 46:2 (Spring 1983), 119.

<sup>56</sup> In an interview with Tom Bartlett of *The Chronicle of Higher Education* to promote the book release of *The Common Wind*, Scott admitted to being "guilty" of perfectionism. Tom Bartlett, interview with Julius Scott, "An Underground Sensation Arrives: The three-decade publication saga of a revered manuscript," *The Chronicle of Higher Education* (November 02, 2018), accessed online at <https://www.chronicle.com/article/an-underground-sensation-arrives/>

of life, that he could not face consigning them to oblivion. So, English led to French and Spanish, and then further on to Dutch and Danish. Stymied by his passion, what else could he do but seek mastery of those necessary but insufficient traces? So, Scott domesticated his archive fever into such a modest desire: to become nothing less than the "Braudel of the Caribbean."<sup>57</sup>

Is it possible for historians to break the fever? Yes of course! Books get published. Classes get taught. There is a whole world to live, a reality principle that restrains the perpetual conflict between the libido and the death drive. So, historians take a magic pill, an intellectual Tylenol if you will.

This drug, this acetaminophen of the archives, is the universal. Universals are, in the argot of the philosophy of orientation, like signs. They direct the attention of the researcher to likely interpretative frameworks and sources. They attune researchers to models of published research that they too can follow as a guide. In the philosophy of orientation, universals are powerful because they are efficient. They allow historians to quickly identify patterns and communicate those patterns with their colleagues. They allow historians to quickly make sense of massive amounts of data, and deliver those results to publishers, funding committees, and students.

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

For example, an economic historian could equip herself with universals like— labor, capital, superstructure, base, dialectics, consciousness, and political economy. These would then allow her to identify sources and make sense of them, depending on her framework and personal disposition. For example, E.J. Hobsbawm drew from the arts and literature to characterize the consciousness of the new bourgeoisie in his *Age of Revolution*. But a different economic historian might focus on consciousness within labor on the road to proletarianization—let's say, E.P. Thompson and his reading of English ditties. Someone else, a sociologist for instance, might instead speak of cultural capital, fusing existing universals to charter research agendas based on the study of discernment and consumer preferences—like Pierre Bourdieu. Universals allow for leeway—wobble room—in setting creative intellectual paradigms, while ensuring that the results are intelligible to fellow scholars.

Werner Stegmaier uses a different set of metaphors than passion to describe the process of getting a grip on a situation.<sup>58</sup> He is not explicitly talking about historians, but of all kinds of people doing all kinds of things, ranging from the everyday shopper at the mall to the pure mathematician in office hours. His organizing metaphors relate to navigation: rock climbing and sailing. Both of these metaphors are apt: they both have to do with finding one's way. They involve a combination of planning in advance and

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<sup>58</sup> Werner Stegmaier, *What is Orientation? A Philosophical Investigation* (De Gruyter: 2019).

making course corrections on the fly once the plan has been set into action. On cliffsides and on the waves, one has got to "get a grip" on the action—just as one gets a grip on the situation "at hand" or "grasps" an important idea.

Let us consider that the historian confronting the mass of archives around the world, the millions of linear square feet of boxes, the uncountable reams of paper that have been preserved or stored or thrown away and then recovered for all kinds of reasons. This confrontation is a situation. The historian must get a grip, find footholds that lead to familiar byways, leave crumbs behind for other historians to follow in the same path, draw up maps to amplify patterns and to train other scholars on them. Historians need universals in order to find their way and to direct the ways of their junior colleagues. Just like road signs, universals abbreviate, find shortcuts, flag hazards, and identify points of interest for the academician.

Moreover, universals release us from the burden of memory. By drawing our attention to certain features of the situation, they allow us to unburden our attention from other ones. Universals give historians permission to forget. They put an end to that overwhelming feeling of being assaulted by all kinds of stimuli and potentially useful information. So, Luther can use the universal "race" to ignore the dimensions of slavery as a conflict over different interpretations of the Old Testament. So, Teresa can use the universal "gender" to ignore how brothel owners invoked Biblical stories to fight for their places in the Southern tourism industry. Like all signs, universals are artificial

too—hence like the pharmacological pills we take for relief from sickness, they intervene and correct pathological states of mind. As Stegmaier put it, to remember everything indiscriminately is a kind of disease. In that sense, universals are cures.

But as I wrote about in the Introduction to this dissertation, universals are dangerous because they are so effective. We forget that they are made by human hands. We are seduced by their efficiency, by the communities of interpretation that make them self-reinforcing. They begin as effective tools for directing attention, for abbreviating more complex constellations of signs into simpler arrangements, for teaching new generations of historians. But over time these names seem to own a power that is not properly theirs.

Their origins are forgotten, they exert a totemic power—the power of collective effervescence—over their interpretive communities. Their leeway grows larger over time. Slow by slow, meanings shift as these signs are put to work in an expanding range of circumstances. Where once, names seemed to make order out of chaos, now entropy takes its toll. It becomes harder to separate signal from noise—has this universal become an "empty signifier" that stands for both everything and nothing?

Some academicians will take this as a call to go back to the original text or an original framework. Thus, we are instructed to go "back to Marx" and not be led astray by the bourgeois humanism and psychology of his culturally-inclined devotees. Or we are told it is time to "bring the state back in" and rejuvenate a universal that has been

forgotten. We are called upon to narrow our interpretive leeway—to turn from superstructure back to base! —or to trade in our shabby universals ("capital") for something sharp and well-defined ("the state").

But entropy spares no one. These refurbished universals will eventually suffer the same fate. Their meanings will shift over time, they will become baggy and formless, totemic and corrupt. And academicians will call upon new or forgotten universals to take their place. As the sociologist of sociology Andrew Abbott put it, this is a process of perpetual intellectual "rediscovery."<sup>59</sup> New universals emerge but are eventually tasked with explaining features that they leave out, until they come to mean too many possible things. Then the wheel of renewal turns once more.

Abbott uses "language" as such an example. "Language" cannot achieve perpetual hegemony as a stable universal because in doing so, it loses its ability to direct lines of inquiry:

...a truly universal predicate is inherently uninteresting, even meaningless. If 'everything is discourse, because everything is mediated through language,' then language is neither interesting nor consequential. It cannot explain the differences that interest us in social life, for it does not explain where differences originate, but only the means by which preexisting differences cause later ones.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Andrew Abbott, *Chaos of Disciplines* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 15.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 19.

Let us return then to archive fever. Instead of waiting and hoping and clamoring for universals, turning again and again the wheel of rediscovery, what we need is inoculation against future illnesses. We need this because it is unrealistic to hope that someday we will be free from illness altogether, as if archive fever could be eradicated with just the right universals.<sup>61</sup>

And so, I propose "universalizations", to attend to the processes of finding an orientation within the archives. Whereas a universal is a simple noun, universalization is a nominalized verb, a freeze-frame that captures the sense of an unfolding activity. Whereas "universal" obscures the process behind the object, "universalization" places the process front and center. "Universalization" conveys the maxim that "things are snapshots of processes."<sup>62</sup>

Hoping for universals means seeking out some new and refurbished sign, but that strategy can only temporarily restrict our interpretive leeway's and ability to filter out relevant data from noise in any given situation. By contrast, universalizations

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<sup>61</sup> Robyn Wiegman makes a similar argument about "intersectionality" and the cruel optimism behind hoping for a truly final, all-encompassing conception of human identity. Her work has helped me to think through these issues in the context of the social sciences. *Object Lessons* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012).

<sup>62</sup> Richard Levins, "Strategies of Abstraction," *Biology & Philosophy* 21 (2006), 742. The full axiom is as follows: "Things are snapshots of processes. They remain the way they are long enough to be recognized and named because of opposing processes that perturb and restore them." Ibid. Levins' overall project is to advance dialectical philosophy within the field of biology. He legitimizes his project in part by citing Hegel and Marx.

distance ourselves from universals, reminding us that there is a dynamic process at play in the getting—and losing—grips on changing circumstances.

This distance, this staying in limbo, is something like getting a vaccine. The vaccine is deliberate introduction to protein components or weakened versions of the target virus—and this exposure may generate an immune response—a slight fever, aches, and chills. Like real vaccines, there are no guarantees. Scientists identify the most likely strains of viral mutations—say, within the class of influenza viruses—and develop countermeasures to those specific strains. Some will fall through the gaps, hopefully less harmful than the priority strains. Even with inoculation we can still get the flu.

However, flu after vaccination will almost certainly be less severe, almost certainly easier to make a full recovery. Thinking about universalizations may be disorienting, but so much less so than foregoing this prophylactic altogether.

## 7. Before Spanish Hegemony

When the Spanish Leviathan arose, it forced men to cast down their private arms and take up their disputes in court.<sup>1</sup> Where once their daggers splashed humors upon the earth, now their quills splashed hot ink upon the scroll. The lance racked up, the shield stowed away, now the nib sharpened, and the inkhorn filled—honor, fortune, life itself remained at stake even in the time of the Iberian Pax Hispanica. Only the means of contest had changed—to persuade the King to unleash the full might of his Leviathan down upon one's own enemies. So, debate, and litigation, and polemics flourished among these men, scarcely removed from the crush of medieval feuding.

If these men wished to make a living out of combat, they could join the new Infantria in sworn fealty to the Crown, or they could keep their private arms and become soldiers of fortune in the New World. Some departed as clergy to save Indian souls—depending upon the Conquistadors for the peace of arms. Others sought honor

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<sup>1</sup> The Spanish Leviathan refers to the Crown, flush with power after its triumph over the rebellious Comuneros. For more on the consolidation of power in the Spanish Crown—and its integration into the Hapsburg kingdoms—see Jan Glete, *War and the state in early modern Europe: Spain, the Dutch Republic and Sweden as fiscal-military states, 1500-1660* (London; New York: Routledge, 2002).

For the political concept of the Leviathan, see Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2012). I am grateful to Adam Mestyan for teaching this book in his seminar on Sovereignties in Global History.

For context on the Comunero rebellion with primary source documentation, see "Demands of the Comuneros (1520)," in *Early Modern Spain: A Documentary History*, ed. Jon Cowans (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003). In some respects, this rebellion spawned from dissatisfaction among the nobility, because the Crown had revoked many of their old privileges on its path to administrative, political, and military centralization.

and fortune in the royal service, as governors and administrators in the King's realm beyond the sea. Waves of men in galley ships advanced behind the tip of the Conquistador's lance, clutching rosaries and books and swords and food and quarrels, endless quarrels.

As these bearded, demanding men flung themselves ashore across the world, there glimmered within their minds the rays of déjà vu. Feebly, like the gray dawn peeling back hot summer nights, the first generation of conquerors groped towards universals for framing the New World's peoples.

It began with The Admiral. Christopher Columbus framed the Taíno using the Book of Genesis. To him, they were naked and innocent.

"The people of this island, and of all the others I have found and been to or heard of, all go naked, men and women alike, just like the day they were born..."<sup>2</sup>

"They know neither religion nor idolatry, except that they believe that all force and all good things come from the heavens."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Christopher Columbus, "7. Christopher Columbus, Letter on the New World," in *Early Modern Spain*, 30.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

In other words, they did not worship—they had no discipline of the faith, no sacred texts. They accepted the Ave Maria readily—giving no indication of a competing and jealous religion. There were none of the disputations with the pagans, nothing like early Christianity surviving persecution among the Jews and the pagan Romans.

Because I saw it for myself and I know—says the Admiral—these people have no religion at all, nor are they idolaters; rather they are very gentle...and ingenuous, and they know there is a God in heaven, and they are convinced that we have come from heaven, and they are very quick with any prayer we teach them to say, and they make the sign of the cross.<sup>4</sup>

Like Adam and Eve before the Fall of Man, they had not partaken of the tree of knowledge. They had neither shame nor penance. They trusted in the goodwill of strangers so much that corrupt Spaniards tricked them with 'gifts' of broken glass.

Finally, the Indians lived in a garden of unimaginable plants, lush with natural wonders.

This island [which I have named La Española], like all the others, is very fertile, and this one extremely so...so many large and good rivers that it is a marvel to behold.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Christopher Columbus, "Appendix A, Diary of the First Voyage," in Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: Chronicles of the New World Encounter*, ed. José Juan Arrom, transl. Susan C. Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 42.

<sup>5</sup> Columbus, "Letter on the New World," in *Early Modern Spain*, 29.

The Admiral did not beat around the bush: he had discovered a kind of Paradise. At this stage in the conquest, it seemed that the Taíno were eager to learn and accept the Catholic Gospel. Columbus dispatched his brother to govern the territory of Hispaniola in the name of the King. He also dispatched the friar Ramón Pané to study the ancient beliefs of the Taíno. Evangelization, ethnography, exploitation, and invasion worked hand-in-hand.

Pané enriched the Columbian paradigm. The Taíno were still not idolaters because their leaders—the *caciques*—seemed aware that their zemi figurines and masks were but objects made by human hands. They did not worship because they knew that they were swindling the credulous beneath their ranks. Religion was nowhere to be found—only trickery and child's play. In short, these were a people innocent of the Fall of Man and were ready to accept the Good Word.

Within this paradigm Pané universalized the Christian framework of the Ages of the World when he studied the Taíno creation myths. He noted dutifully the origins of the earth and the sea, the names and foibles of their gods. The Taíno, too, allegedly experienced a great flood—here, evidence that the flood of the Old Testament was in fact a universal cataclysm. He also found that his native informants prophesized the coming of the Spaniards, and that this was the making of the final epoch of the world. Catholic Spaniards widely believed in the imminence of the apocalypse—after retiring

from a life at sea, even Christopher Columbus wrote a popular treatise revealing the latest signs of the End Times. The Spanish monarchy had been chosen by God to spread Catholicism across the world, and with this evangelization completed, Jesus Christ would return to rule Jerusalem. So it was that Pané universalized the Last Era—finding that the Taíno tradition matched the Christian truth.

As new waves of conquerors penetrated Tierra Firma—the mainland of the Americas—they encountered more peoples, more armed, and more organized than the Taíno of the Antilles. As war broke out time and again, the conquerors shifted their universal frameworks in order to justify harsh and uncompromising tactics. Now the Indians appeared as idolaters and cannibals, who sacrificed their own children in heinous worship. These peoples of Yucatan were true idolaters—their leaders had none of the cynical self-awareness of the Taíno *caciques*. This was much worse than mere trickery—it was corrupted religion, replete with discipline, reverence, and worship for the devil. Just as Ba'al was the work of the one and only Satan, so this Viracocha and that Quetzalcoatl were deceptions by the Lord of Hell. Just as God instructed the Jews—once the chosen race—to annihilate their idolatrous Levantine foes, so now the chosen Spaniards had divine right to destroy and enslave the Indians. Whosoever the Lord God detests, a good Christian must also detest.

The conquistador Bernal Díaz leaned as much on his experience as he did upon the Holy Bible to tell of his expedition to conquer Tenochtitlan under the command of

Hernán Cortés. Frustrated with misattributions and stolen credit for services to the Crown which he saw cropping up in other publications, Bernal Díaz decided to set the record straight at the end of his frustrated and impoverished life—of course, he stood to gain in reputation having been on the wrong end of many such schemes among the Spaniards.

Throughout the narrative, he was careful to tell of the violence and idolatry the Spaniards witnessed in joining with reader's expectations. For example, here he describes negotiations with one of Montezuma's tributary polities. The Spaniards have severed their ties to the Mexican Empire and unburdened them from that vassalage. Now controlling them by way of 'protection' against Mexican reprisals, Cortés immediately imposes the terms of their partnership.

Cortés received them [the caciques] with a cheerful countenance, and thanked the caciques for the gifts, but he said that before we could accept them and become brothers, they must get rid of those idols which they believed in and worshipped, and which kept them in the darkness, and must no longer offer sacrifices to them, and that when he could see those cursed things thrown to the ground and an end put to sacrifices that then our bonds of brotherhood would be most firmly tied. He added that these damsels must become Christians before we could receive them, and the people must free themselves from sodomy, for there were boys dressed like women who went about for gain by that cursed practice, and every day we saw sacrificed before us three, four, or five Indians whose hearts were offered to the idols and their blood

plastered on the walls, and the feet, arms, and legs of the victims were cut off and eaten, just as in our country we eat beef brought from the butchers.<sup>6</sup>

The Bible offered frameworks ready to hand. The Spaniards stopped drawing so much from Genesis and turned now to Exodus, Judges, Kings, and Isaiah to find parallels between the idolatries of the Baal-worshippers and the complex ritual worship of the Mexicans and the Inkans. In the Old Testament, the human sacrifices practiced by the Levantine Ba'al worshippers offered frameworks ready-to-hand that could explain all kinds of ritual violence.

"These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land of the LORD, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess—as long as you live in the land. Destroy completely all the places on the high mountains and on the hills and under every spreading tree where the nations you are dispossessing worship their gods. Break down their altars, smash their sacred stones and burn their Asherah poles in the fire; cut down the idols of their gods and wipe out their names from those places. You must not worship the LORD your God in their way."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo, "9. Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The Conquest of Mexico* (1550s)," transl. Alfred Percival Maudslay, reprinted in *Early Modern Spain*, 38.

<sup>7</sup> Deuteronomy 12:1-4 NIV. Ibid. LV: "haec sunt praecepta atque iudicia quae facere debetis in terra quam Dominus Deus patrum tuorum daturus est tibi ut possideas eam cunctis diebus quibus super humum gradieris subvertite omnia loca in quibus coluerunt gentes quas possessuri estis deos suos super montes excelsos et colles et subter omne lignum frondosum dissipate aras earum et confringite statuas lucos igne conburite et idola comminuite disperdite nomina eorum de locis illis non facietis ita Domino Deo vestro".

"The LORD your God will cut off before you the nations you are about to invade and dispossess. But when you have driven them out and settled in their land, and after they have been destroyed before you, be careful not to be ensnared by inquiring about their gods, saying, "How do these nations serve their gods? We will do the same." You must not worship the LORD your God in their way, because in worshiping their gods, they do all kinds of detestable things the LORD hates. They even burn their sons and daughters in the fire as sacrifices to their gods."<sup>8</sup>

In the Book of Deuteronomy, the laws are all laid out. The Jews are about to cross into the Promised Land, after having been brought out of bondage in Egypt and wandering in the desert. But they have certain responsibilities to their God in return for this grace. They must worship Him and Him alone, and not be seduced by the ways of the people already living in the Promised Land. In spite of repeated warnings, still, the

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I obtained citations of the New International Version (NIV) Holy Bible online courtesy of Biblica. I obtained citations of the Latin Vulgate (LV) Holy Bible online courtesy of the Perseus Digital Library of Tufts University. St. Jerome composed the LV Bible in the fourth century AD. It was adopted as the de facto standard edition of the Bible throughout the Roman Catholic Church up to the time of the Spanish conquest of the New World.

Throughout this book I will use the NIV for accessibility while providing the LV in the endnotes for historical authenticity (the first edition of the NIV was released in 1973 AD).

<sup>8</sup> Deuteronomy 12:29-31 NIV. Ibid. LV: "quando disperderit Dominus Deus tuus ante faciem tuam gentes ad quas ingredieris possidendas et possederis eas atque habitaveris in terra earum cave ne imiteris eas postquam te fuerint introeunte subversae et requiras caerimonias earum dicens sicut coluerunt gentes istae deos suos ita et ego colam non facies similiter Domino Deo tuo omnes enim abominationes quas aversatur Dominus fecerunt diis suis offerentes filios et filias et conburentes igne".

stiff-necked people did not obey their God. Time and time again they failed to uphold the Covenant with God. Here, for example, King Jehoahaz of Israel turns to the path of perdition.

"Ahaz was twenty years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem sixteen years. Unlike David his father, he did not do what was right in the eyes of the LORD. He walked in the ways of the kings of Israel and also made cast idols for worshiping the Baals. He burned sacrifices in the Valley of Ben Hinnom and sacrificed his sons in the fire, following the detestable ways of the nations the LORD had driven out before the Israelites. He offered sacrifices and burned incense at the high places, on the hilltops and under every spreading tree. Therefore the LORD his God handed him over to the king of Aram. The Arameans defeated him and took many of his people as prisoners..."<sup>9</sup>

Here, now, the Indians were like the enemies of God. They did not worship the same Baal of the Old Testament, but their idols were analogous to the former. Whether Christian or not, they had been corrupted by the one Satan and the temptations of sin.

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<sup>9</sup> 2 Chronicles 28:1-5 NIV. Ibid. LV: "viginti annorum erat Achaz cum regnare coepisset et sedecim annis regnavit in Hierusalem non fecit rectum in conspectu Domini sicut David pater eius sed ambulavit in viis regum Israhel insuper et statuas fudit Baalim ipse est qui adolevit incensum in valle Benennon et lustravit filios suos in igne iuxta ritum gentium quas interfecit Dominus in adventu filiorum Israhel sacrificabat quoque et thymiama succendebat in excelsis et in collibus et sub omni ligno frondoso tradiditque eum Dominus Deus eius in manu regis Syriae qui percussit eum magnamque praedam de eius cepit imperio et adduxit in Damascum manibus quoque regis Israhel traditus est et percussus plaga grandi".

Aram (Arameans) are the Hebrew designations for Syria (Syrians).

As to the Pre-Spanish thesis, Bernal Díaz described what he saw, but let his readers reach their own conclusions:

They [the Indians] led us to some large houses very well built of masonry, which were the Temples of their Idols, and on the walls were figured the bodies of many great serpents and snakes and other pictures of evil-looking Idols. These walls surrounded a sort of Altar covered with clotted blood. On the other side of the Idols were symbols like crosses, and all were coloured. At all this we stood wondering, as they were things never seen or heard of before.<sup>10</sup>

The phrase "like crosses" leaves enough room for ambiguity, that readers were free to use this as evidence, or dismiss it, on the question of the pre-Spanish thesis.

Royal governor, encomendero, and eventually, royal historian, Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo y Valdés drew on similar themes as Bernal Díaz to justify the enslavement of the Indians to the Spaniards. He inaugurated a new mode of writing

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<sup>10</sup> Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *The True History of the Conquest of New Spain*, vol. 1, transl. Alfred Percival Maudslay (London: The Hakluyt Society, 1908), 19.

The original text reads: "Y lleváronnos a unas casas muy grandes, que eran adoratorios de sus ídolos y bien labradas de cal y canto, y tenían figurado en unas paredes muchos bultos de serpientes y culebras grandes, y otras pinturas de ídolos de malas figuras, y alrededor de uno como altar, lleno de gotas de sangre. En otra parte de los ídolos tenían unos como a manera de señales de cruces, y todo pintado, de lo cual nos admiramos como cosa nunca vista ni oída." Bernal Díaz del Castillo, *Historia Verdadera de la Conquista de La Nueva España*, vol. 1, ed. Joaquin Ramirez Cabañas (Distrito Federal [Ciudad de México], México: Pedro Robredo, 1939), 58; accessed online at <https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/historia-verdadera-de-la-conquista-de-la-nueva-espana-tomo-i--0/html/481f665e-69c1-4064-9d6a-6333c5711ecc.htm> courtesy of Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes.

early modern Spanish historiography in his voluminous and self-aware *New History*. Ambitious and clever, resilient and redoubtable, he succeeded in mounting a long campaign to become Royal Chronicler of the Indies once that position became vacant upon the death of its former officeholder, the Renaissance humanist Peter Martyr d'Anghierra.

Oviedo's pivot to empiricism leveraged his extensive career in the Indies in such a way as to differentiate himself and to supersede his predecessor, who had no such direct experience. It enabled Oviedo to overcome his self-conscious reticence about possessing no formal education, and combined a variety of ancient and contemporary genres, ranging from history to legal testimonies. The aegis of objectivity was, above all, perfect for settling scores with his rivals, and for influencing royal policy in order to protect his New World assets.<sup>11</sup>

The early Oviedo, the ambitious early-career administrator who drew Las Casas' ire, was an encomendero and a governor by the time he was writing the first part of the General and Natural History of the New World. His personal stake in the perpetuation of Indian slavery and the policy of allotment led him to characterize the Indians as brutish and cunning adversaries who needed enslavement and harsh measures in order to be made good again.

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<sup>11</sup> Kathleen Ann Myers, *Fernández de Oviedo's Chronicle of America: A New History for a New World*, with translations by Nina M. Scott (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2007).

These ideas worked to legitimate cruel treatment and brutal work, and worked to deflect the monks' accusations that the encomenderos were driven by greed, to the neglect of their obligations to protect and Christianize their captives. Oviedo accepted the idea that the Indians were originally Christians, who heard the Apostles when they sailed around the world but fell so sharply due to their inferior nature and the powers of universal Satan, that they could not easily be redeemed.

In accordance to what is said by the psalmist David, Saint Gregory says about chapter sixteen of Job these words: the Holy Church has already preached in all parts of the world the mystery of our redemption. Therefore, these Indians already had news of the evangelical truth and could not pretend to be ignorant in this case...<sup>12</sup>

So, Oviedo uses the wisdom of the early Church—Saint Gregory was one of the most prolific of the Latin Fathers—to lend authority to his universalization of

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<sup>12</sup> Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *General and Natural History of the Indies*, Vol. 1, Bk. 2, Ch. 7, transl. Emilie Rose Parker (The Oviedo Project at Vassar), accessed online at <https://oviedoproject.vassarspaces.net/home/book-ii-chapter-7?path=book-ii>.

The original text, written in Asturian, reads as follows: "Conforme á lo que es dicho del psalmista David, diçe Sanct Gregorio sobre el capítulo diez y seis de Job estas palabras: la Sancta Iglesia há ya predicado en todas las partes del mundo el misterio de nuestro Redempcion. Assi que, estos indios ya tuvieron notiçia de la verdad evangélica y no pueden pretender ignorancia en este caso..." Gonzalo Fernández de Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, islas y tierra-firme del mar océano, Primera parte*, ed. José Amador de los Rios (Madrid: Imprenta de la Real Academia de la Historia, 1851), 29. Accessed online at <https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/historia-general-y-natural-de-las-indias-islas-y-tierrafirme-del-mar-oceano-primera-parte--0/html/014747fa-82b2-11df-acc7-002185ce6064.htm> courtesy of Biblioteca Virtual Miguel de Cervantes.

Christianity in the New World. Later he implies that these stiff-necked Indians who forgot the Apostles remain difficult subjects in his own times.

Truthfully, I do not want to blame entirely the officials or ministers in charge of the holy and pious work on evangelizing this generation of Indians for what has gone wrong in this endeavor. I blame the Indians themselves, especially for their weaknesses and bad inclinations, because it is true that among their multitudes those who persevere in the faith are very rare—rather, their faith slips from them like granite from the points of spears.<sup>13</sup>

For Oviedo, a uniquely personal stake in the conquest helps drive him towards the Pre-Spanish thesis. The sharpness of the fall meant that the Indians needed greater discipline to keep to the way of Christ. If the governors of the New World sometimes erred or exceeded the bounds of temperance, this was a lesser evil than letting the Indians enslave themselves to sin a second time.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

The original text reads as follows: "Yo en la verdad la principal causa de lo que en este caso puede haber mal subçedido, ó no tambien efectuándose como fuera raçon, tampoco la quiero dar á los ofiçiales ó ministros de tan sancta é pia obra, como es doctrinar esta generacion de indios; sino á ellos mismos, espeçialmente por su incapaçidad y malas inclinaciones; porque es çierto que son muy raros é aun rarísimos aquellos que en tanta multitud dellos perseveran en la fé: antes desliçan della, como el graniço de las puntas de las lanças." Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, Primera parte*, 30.

<sup>14</sup> John 8:34 NIV: "Jesus replied, 'Very truly I tell you, everyone who sins is a slave to sin.'" Ibid. LV: "respondit eis Iesus amen amen dico vobis quia omnis qui facit peccatum servus est peccati".

Oviedo also argued that the Antilles were part of the legendary islands of the Hesperides, and that these were original possessions of the ancient Visigoth Kings of Spain. Marshalling classical sources and some geographical know-how, Oviedo deploys a three-step argument. Step One: he proves that in ancient times territories and peoples were often named for the sovereigns who ruled them. Step Two: Oviedo contends that the legendary Hesperides must have been named after the ancient king of Spain, King Hespero, because of the identity between their names. From the naming convention established in Step One, this must mean that the Spanish King Hespero must have ruled over the Hesperides if they were named after him.

Now, by the combination of Steps One and Two, Oviedo has established an unbroken chain of ancient right that the current Spanish Crown has the right to rule over these formerly forgotten lands. Finally, Step Three is to prove that the Spanish Indies are indeed identical to the ancient islands of the Hesperides, which Oviedo does through a combination of nautical reasoning and mythological sources about a legendary island known to the Carthaginians.

The end effect of Steps One, Two, and Three is to lead the reader to the conclusion that the Spanish Crown has a right to rule these islands both according to God's providence and according to ancient conventions of sovereign right. The discovery of the Indies is nothing more than the reestablishment of Spanish rule:

"Hence, just as Spain, Italy, and that city in Mauritania were named Hesperidas and Hesperidia after Hesperus, twelfth king of Spain, so too were the Hesperides Islands, which according to Sebosus, Solinus, Pliny, and Isidore should indubitably be held to be these Indies, and to have been under the dominion of Spain since the time of Hesperus, which was, as Berossus writes, 1658 years before the Savior of the world was born. And because 1535 years have elapsed from his glorious Nativity to the present, it follows that it is now 3193 years from the time Spain and its king Hesperus controlled these islands or Hesperides Indies. And so with such very ancient right, and according to what has been told, or what will be said hereafter of the travels of the Admiral Christopher Columbus, God returned this territory to Spain after so many centuries. And it seems that, like something that was once hers, divine justice wants it returned and kept in perpetuity in the fortune of the blessed and Catholic Monarchs, Don Ferdinand and Doña Isabella..."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Oviedo, *General and Natural History*, Vol. 1, Bk. 2, Ch. 3, transl. Charlotte Rhoads (The Oviedo Project at Vassar), accessed online at <https://pages.vassar.edu/oviedo/2020/07/09/charlotte-rhoads-22-book-ii-chapter-iii-to-whether-the-location-of-these-indies-had-already-been-known-by-the-ancients/>.

The original text reads as follows:

"E assi como España é Italia é aquella cibdad, que se dixo en Mauritania, se nombraron Hespéridas y Hespéride de Hespero, rey duodécimo de España, assi las islas que se diçen Hespérides, é que señalan Seboso é Solino, é Plinio é Isidoro segund está dicho, se deben tener indubitadamente por estas Indias, é aver seydo del señorío de España desde el tiempo de Hespero, duodécimo rey della, que fue, segund Beroso escribe, mill é seysçientos é çinquenta é ocho años antes quel Salvador del mundo nasciesse. Y porque al presente corren de su gloriosa Natividad mill é quinientos é treynta é çinco años, siguese que agora tres mill é çiento é noventa é tres años España é su rey Hespero señoreaban estas islas ó Indias Hespérides; é assi con derecho tan antiquíssimo, é por la forma que está dicha ó por la que adelante se dirá en la prosecucion de los viajes del almirante Chripestóbal Colom, volvió Dios este señorío á España á cabo de tantos siglos. E paresçe que, como cosa que fue suya, quiere la divina justiçia que lo haya tornado á ser é lo sea perpétuamente, en ventura de los bienaventurados é Cathólicos Reyes, don Fernando é doña Isabel..." Oviedo, *Historia general y natural de las Indias, Primera parte*, 17-18.

So, the first empiricist historian of the New World, a Renaissance man and Catholic to the core, used history to legitimate the perpetual rule of Spain over the Indies. The thesis of pre-Spanish Christianity among the Indians supported the claim that the most Catholic Kings of Spain had returned, to assert their just and historical rights over these rediscovered territories.

This universalization of Spanish rule, some "1658 years before the Savior of the world was born," also provided cover for a tactical move on behalf of the Catholic Majesties. It used historical analysis to choke off the only source of legitimate objection to the Spanish claims in the New World. Pope Alexander VI had issued the famous bull, *Inter caetera* on May 4, 1493, spelling out extraordinarily favorable terms in granting Spain possession of the Western hemisphere. There was only one loophole: it could not be used to abrogate the New World claims of any Christian kingdoms that existed prior to December 25, 1492.

As Pope Alexander VI decreed, Spain had been granted and assigned all the territory discovered and to be discovered, West of the line of demarcation from North to South Pole...

"With this proviso however that none of the islands and mainlands, found and to be found, discovered and to be discovered, beyond that said line towards the west and south, be in the actual possession of any Christian king or prince up to the birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ just past

from which the present year one thousand four hundred and ninety-three begins...no right acquired by any Christian prince, who may be in actual possession of said islands and mainlands prior to the said birthday of our Lord Jesus Christ, is hereby to be understood to be withdrawn or taken away."<sup>16</sup>

Given these political circumstances, Oviedo's lengthy three-step proof of the universality of Spanish right to rule in the Indies serves the Crown nicely. It denies that any other Christian king at any other time in history can assert any competing right to rule in the New World. Those are the only rights that Pope Alexander VI would recognize, that would poke holes in the burgeoning Spanish imperium.

As the conquistadors gained the upper hand against their Mexican enemies and cemented alliances with their Tlaxcalan friends, the clergy and the friars sallied forth in their wake. Though not entirely protected among their armed compatriots, these evangelists were moved by faith and fear of God to bring the Good Word to the Indians and to check the sins of the Spaniards.<sup>17</sup> Their universal concepts justified their efforts at

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<sup>16</sup> "7. The Bull *Inter Caetera* (Alexander VI.). May 7, 1493." in *European Treaties Bearing on the History of the United States and its Dependencies*, eds. Frances Gardiner Davenport and Charles Oscar Paullin (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1917-1937), 77. This source includes the original Latin text, reprinted from the original manuscript of the Bull.

<sup>17</sup> Sometimes these aims came into conflict. This created a rift between the Jesuit Padre Nóbrega and the Bishop Pedro Fernandes in Bahia, Brazil. The Jesuit wanted to Christianize the Indians. The Bishop thought the Indians were not capable of improvement and preferred to focus their efforts on reigning in the conquistadors. The Jesuit encouraged hybridization between Mayan traditions and Christian traditions. The Bishop thought this mixture was abhorrent and needed to be stopped as soon as possible. For the letters documenting this dispute, see the reprints in

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*Colonial Latin America: A Documentary History*, eds. Kenneth Mills, William B. Taylor, and Sandra Lauderdale Graham (Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources, 2002), 93.

Scriptural support for Padre Nóbrega can be found in The Book of Acts, when the Apostles debate whether or not they should allow gentiles to join the Christian faith without having to follow the Mosaic laws.

Peter argued that it would be hypocritical for the Jewish converts to hold the Gentiles to a standard which the Jews have never been able to uphold on their own. "Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear?" Acts NIV 15:10, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/acts/15/>. Ibid. LV: "nunc ergo quid temptatis Deum inponere iugum super cervicem discipulorum quod neque patres nostri neque nos portare potuimus," accessed online courtesy of Perseus Digital Library at

<http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060%3Abook%3DActs%3Achapter%3D15%3Averse%3D10>.

James declared: "it is my judgment, therefore, that we should not make it difficult for the Gentiles who are turning to God." Acts NIV 15:19, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/acts/15/>. Ibid. LV: "propter quod ego iudico non inquietari eos qui ex gentibus convertuntur ad Deum," accessed online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060%3Abook%3DActs%3Achapter%3D15%3Averse%3D19>.

The Apostles concluded that Mosaic law was no longer necessary for the salvation of souls, reflecting a major theme throughout the New Testament, about the importance of love and belief in order to be good, rather than by simply following rituals. This theme is occasionally expressed as the difference between the circumcision of the flesh, and the circumcision of the heart.

Scriptural support for Bishop Fernandes can be found in Galatians. In this epistle, Paul the Apostle warns against false evangelizers. In context, these evangelizers are attempting to indoctrinate Mosaic Law into the fledgling Christian communities.

Wrote Paul: "I am astonished that you are so quickly deserting the one who called you to live in the grace of Christ and are turning to a different gospel—which is really no gospel at all. Evidently some people are throwing you into confusion and are trying to pervert the gospel of Christ. But even if we or an angel from heaven should preach a gospel other than the one we preached to you, let them be under God's curse! As we have already said, so now I say again: If anybody is preaching to you a gospel other than what you accepted, let them be under God's curse!

"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God? Or am I trying to please people? If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."

Galatians 1:6-10 NIV, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/galatians/1/>. Ibid. LV: "miror quod sic tam cito transferimini ab eo qui vos vocavit in gratiam Christi in aliud

conversion among the heathens. In their hands, the Indians appeared as fallen Jews or Christians!

For the famed defender of the Indians, Las Casas, there was no question that the Indians were themselves Christians once upon a time. In his discerning eyes this was evidence of natural law at work, that all human beings possessed a certain set of norms handed down by the Lord God. All people who worshipped had heard God's word—thus all the religions of the world were evidence that God had reached them, because all people yearn by nature towards their creator. But the intercession of the devil, that universal foe, led people down the paths of idolatry and cannibalism, human sacrifice and sibling incest, all things detestable to the Lord.

Other evangelists reached their own conclusions. The Friar Diego de Landa wrote his *Relacion de las Cosas de Yucatan* in part to defend his controversial mass burning of Mayan books of sacred and occult knowledge. Indians and Spaniards alike accused him of cruelty, zealotry, and insubordination (the mere friar did not think to ask for

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evangelium quod non est aliud nisi sunt aliqui qui vos conturbant et volunt convertere evangelium Christi sed licet nos aut angelus de caelo evangelizet vobis praeterquam quod evangelizavimus vobis anathema sit sicut praediximus et nunc iterum dico si quis vobis evangelizaverit praeter id quod accepistis anathema sit modo enim hominibus suadeo aut Deo aut quaero hominibus placere si adhuc hominibus placerem Christi servus non essem", accessed online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060%3Abook%3DGalatians%3Achapter%3D1%3Averse%3D6>.

permission from the Bishop Toral). Called to the royal court to answer for himself, Fray Landa defended himself by explaining to Spanish readers the truth about the life, customs, and environs of the Maya in Yucatan.

At the moment of the infamous book burning (and punishment of recalcitrants)—the *auto de fé*—Landa minimizes his personal responsibility and maximizes the idolatry of the Indians to imply that the means to compel them to Christianity were not only justified but would have to be uncompromising.

This people, after having been instructed in religion, and the young boys having advanced in their studies as we have said, were perverted by the priests whom they had at the time of their idolatry and by their chiefs. And they returned to the worship of their idols and to offer them sacrifices not only of incense but also of human blood. The friars made an Inquisition about this and asked the aid of the *alcalde mayor*, and they arrested a great number and put them on trial, after which an *auto* was celebrated.<sup>18</sup>

He emphasizes procedures followed, authorities contacted, a proper respect for the chain of command—first an Inquisition, then coordination with the town mayor. Meanwhile, the Indian students had already accepted the Word of Christ and could be lawfully coerced into keeping it. The priests of their parents' generation continued to

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<sup>18</sup> Diego de Landa, *Landa's Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan, a translation*, ed. and transl. Alfred Tozzer (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Institute of American Archaeology and Ethnology, Harvard University, 1941), 75-6.

steer them back towards the old ways—and so the priests had to be stopped and their books had to be burned.

Much later in the *Relación*, Landa addresses the burning of the books—although this happened at the time of the trial. First, he condemns the knowledge contained within the books:

Whoever put in order this computation of katuns, if it was the devil, he did it, as he usually does, ordaining it for his own glory, or, if it was a man, he must have been a good idolater, for with these katuns of theirs, he increased all the principal trickeries, divinations and delusions with which these people, besides their miseries, were entirely deluded, and thus this was the science to which they gave the most credit, and that which they valued most and not all the priests knew how to describe it.<sup>19</sup>

This passage refers to the Mayan calendar system, with which priests divined future events and characterized the coming months. It coordinated plantings, social ceremonies, and expectations of happiness and despair depending on which Lord—the "Katun"—demanded worship in a given month.

These people also made use of certain characters or letters, with which they wrote in their books their ancient matters and their sciences, and by these and by drawings and by

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<sup>19</sup> Landa, *Relación*, ed. and transl. Tozzer, 168.

certain signs in these drawings, they understood their affairs and made others understand them and taught them. We found a large number of books in these characters and, as they contained nothing in which there were not to be seen superstition and lies of the devil, we burned them all, which they regretted to an amazing degree, and which caused them much affliction.<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the Old Testament, the God of Abraham prohibits the Jews from seeking omens and divinations. These practices amounted to superstition and sorcery—deviations from faith in the providence of the One True God. Trickery in the form of divination caused the faithful to forget their all-powerful God, and to fail to observe His Commandments in order to enjoy a blessed life. Those Jews who sought omens and contravened God's Laws met terrible fates—foremost among them was Judas Iscariot himself. After betraying Jesus Christ to the Pharisees, "Judas bought a field; there he fell headlong, his body burst open and all his intestines spilled out."<sup>21</sup> So Friar Landa saw himself as saving their souls—no matter their afflictions over losing their sacred books, nothing could compare to the afflictions of Hell.

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>21</sup> Acts NIV 1:18, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/acts/1/>. Ibid. LV: "et hic quidem possedit agrum de mercede iniquitatis et suspensus crepuit medius et diffusa sunt omnia viscera eius", accessed online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060%3Abook%3DActs%3Achapter%3D1%3Averse%3D18>.

But if they were so susceptible to idolatry and unfaithfulness, why go through the trouble of converting them all? Was it not better to follow the Conquistadors' ways and kill those who could not be pacified?

In part to protect the Indians, Landa builds his case that the Maya were originally peoples of the Book—one of the fabled lost tribes of Israel. His supporting evidence comes in part from his interpretation of the Mayan correlates to the Holy Sacraments—baptism and confession.

Baptism is not found in any part of the Indies except in Yucatan, where it even exists under a name which means, “to be born anew or again”; which is the same as *renascor* in the Latin language, for in the language of Yucatan *sihil* means “to be born anew or again,” and it is only used in compound words, and so *caput sihil* means “to be born anew.”

... and they had such great faith in it [baptism] that they never repeated it in any way. That which they thought they received by it was a preliminary disposition towards being good in their way of living and not to be injured in their temporal affairs by the evil spirits, and by this means and by a well ordered life to attain glory, which they hoped for, as which, as in that of Mahomet, they were to enjoy eating and drinking.<sup>22</sup>

Landa here emphasizes that the Mayans had a word in their language that was identical to the Latin word for baptism, implying that they had the same functions. This

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<sup>22</sup> Landa, *Relación*, ed. and transl. Tozzer, 102.

word was for the true and correct baptism because of its exact congruence with its Latin counterpart. Then he goes on to explain the features of Mayan baptism to show that they bear the traces of the true practice as handed down in the Catholic Biblical tradition— one baptism, characterized by "great faith", and a vision of the afterlife comparable to that other people of the book, the Muslims—the paradigmatic Other of the Spanish Self in those days.

The Yucatecans naturally knew the wrongs which they did, and since they believed that deaths, sickness and affliction came to them for their wrong-doing and their sin, they had a custom of confessing themselves, when they were already suffering from them. This was the way that they did it. When, on account of a sickness or something else, they were in danger of dying, they they confessed their sin(s); and if they were neglectful, their nearest relations or their friends reminded them of it. And thus they publicly confessed their sins to the priest, if he were present, or otherwise to their fathers and mothers; wives to their husbands, and husbands to their wives. The sins of which they most commonly accused themselves were theft, homicide, the weaknesses of the flesh and false witness. And (after confessing) they thought themselves safe.<sup>23</sup>

How easily should these people accept the true Holy Sacraments! They were already practicing them in their own ways, partially enthralled by the devil and partially

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 106-7.

blessed with the truth. Although they had been swindled into worshipping the katuns, they still clung to vestiges of the sacraments. So, they carved and revered their idols, but still knew them to be profane rather than sacred objects.

They knew well that the idols were the works of their hands, dead and without a divine nature; but they held them in reverence on account of what they represented, and because they had made them with so many ceremonies...<sup>24</sup>

The clearest piece of evidence comes from the Mayan origin myth itself.

Some of the old people of Yucatan say that they have heard from their ancestors that the land was occupied by a race of people, who came from the East and whom God had delivered by opening twelve paths through the sea. If this were true, it necessarily follows that all the inhabitants of the Indies are descendants of the Jews, since having once passed the Straits of Magellan, they must have extended over more than two thousand leagues of land which now Spain governs.<sup>25</sup>

The easterly origin of these peoples, and the symbolic significance of the number twelve, would have alerted Landa to the signs of God's will and the presence of the Jews.

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<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 16-7.

For the Friars Las Casas, Diego López de Cogolludo, and Juan de Torquemada, the evidence was clear. The Indians were not descendants of the Jews. Rather, they were fallen Christians. They prophesied the Spaniards' arrival. They prayed to the cross. They believed in a good God in Heaven and in the immortality of the soul.

In the hands of Las Casas, protector of the Indians from the Spaniards, this meant that the Indians deserved mercy and understanding. They needed to be set back upon the right path—converted back to the Catholic fold rather than exploited and brutalized in slavery to the *encomenderos*.

By the time Oviedo shelved his manuscript for the revised and expanded edition of the *General and Natural History*, the conquest and his relationship to it had changed. He was more established now as the official Royal Chronicler and had stepped away from his active role in the conquest and government of the New World. With this distance he reflected more on the excesses of Spanish rule, the hypocrisies and cruelties perpetrated against noble and just Indian *caciques*. His concern shifted towards the restraint and reform of the Spanish government, and away from legitimizing the subjugation of the Indians.

In the hands of the royal bureaucrats this balanced and deliberative take on the conquest was typical. The jurist de Vitoria frequently concluded that the answer to difficult questions was: it depends! Could Indians be converted against their will to Christianity? Let's spell out the criteria for making a sound judgment. One was if their

parents were Christian. If a person had a Christian parent, then that person could be justly coerced into becoming (or remaining) Christian. From there, he agrees that this still holds even if the grandparents were Christian. Then, how far back can it go? In theory, forever, says he. But because it is so difficult to establish such information beyond reasonable doubt, it is not practicable to forcibly convert anyone who might have a Christian ancestor within their family history.

"A FINAL DOUBT ARISES whether unbelievers who have not themselves received the faith, but whose parents were converts who have since apostasized, can be forcibly baptized? In other words, can someone who is not baptized but whose father was baptized be compelled to accept baptism? ... I believe that in this case they should indeed be compelled. But against this, it would follow that the Christians can compel Saracens any of whose forefathers were baptized. For example, let us suppose for the argument that the present-day Saracens are separated from these forefathers by ten generations; the argument then runs that the Church had the right to baptize the children of their forefather nine generations back, and hence the children of their forefather eight generations back, and so on down to the present generation; *ergo*. In reply, one may say that if it could be established beyond doubt that these Saracens were the distant descendants of Christians, and if they could be forcibly converted without provocation, then it ought to be done. But the Church does

not do so, because it cannot be established, and also because of the inevitable unrest which would ensue."<sup>26</sup>

Vitoria cautions throughout his lecture that even if it were legal to forcibly convert someone, it must first be determined whether the social upheaval and potential for rebellion outweighed the benefits of the conversion. In short, the situation and the law should be taken into account together before making a sovereign decision. In this subtle way, Vitoria addresses the pre-Christian thesis, but finds that it is too contestable to orient one's framework about Christian rule in the colonies.

In the final analysis, it was the Indians themselves who made the greatest contribution to the pre-Spanish thesis. The Spaniards dutifully fashioned tools of empirical study and applied them to human beings, their beliefs, their environs, and their local lifeforms. To study the New World before Spanish hegemony, the Spaniards relied upon native informers to recount ancient myths, explain their sciences, and describe unfamiliar plants and animals. Pané began this attempt at systematically recording Indian testimonies, based on his training and discipline in the famous Order of St. Jerome (*Ordo Sancti Hieronymi*). The Late Oviedo continued this systematizing effort in order to highlight the tragedy of Spanish misrule in the colonies.

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<sup>26</sup> Francisco de Vitoria, "On the Evangelization of Unbelievers," in *Political Writings*, ed. and transl. Anthony Pagden and Jeremy Lawrance (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), reprinted in *Colonial Latin America*, 77.

However, the Indians were too shrewd to merely recollect their history. They knew that these promptings were opportunities to refashion themselves, to consolidate alliances and cultivate protection among the Spaniards. The stakes of survival, the growing power of the Spaniards, meant that testimony was a chance to align themselves with Christian values. They too could wield history as a weapon and say that they were Christian all along.

The Fathers, Remesal and Torquemada, say that a priest, Chilam Balam or Chilam Calcatl, a short time before the Spaniards arrived, prophesied their arrival...and that then he showed the sign of the cross which had been made in stone and placed in the courts of the temples...This was the reason (they also say) because when the *Adelantado* D. Francisco de Montejo arrived, and the Indians saw that the Spaniards also made obeisance to the cross, they knew what their great prophet said was true.<sup>27</sup>

So it is that some old men alleged that they had prophesied the coming of the Spaniards in visions before the invasion. The foreign men would be completely clothed, pale-skinned, and bearded (i.e., opposite in appearance to the Indians), and the Indians' gods would cease to speak. Other informants reconstructed their creation myths to become congruent with the Catholic ones, at the very least in order to ensure the greatest

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<sup>27</sup> Landa, *Relación*, ed. and transl. Tozzer, 207 note 1154. In this note, Tozzer is translating and quoting from Fray Diego López de Cogolludo. The original source is Diego López de Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucathan* (Madrid: Juan Garcia Infanzon, 1688), accessed online at <http://bdh.bne.es/bnearch/detalle/bdh0000092795> courtesy of Biblioteca Digital Hispánica.

chances of understanding with their interviewers. The line between analogy and identity was especially blurry in those days. So it was that a storytelling Indian fashioned his god Echuah into a kind of Jesus Christ—and so his Spanish interpreter could conclude that Echuah *was Christ*, garbled by time and the devil.

'He [Las Casas] says that this clerk [Francisco Hernandez de Cordoba] wrote him how he had found a chief principal lord, who, when he was asked about his belief and the old religion which they had been accustomed to have in that kingdom, the chief told him that they knew and believed in God who lived in heaven and that this God was Father and Son and Holy Ghost, and that the Father was called Izona, and had created men and all things, and the Son had for a name Bacab, who was born from a virgin called Chibirias, that she was in heaven with God, and that the mother of Chibirias was called Ischel, and they called the Holy Ghost Echuah. About Bacab [who is the son] they say that Eopuco killed him and had him whipped and they placed a crown of thorns upon him and they placed him with his arms stretched upon a beam and they did not understand that he was nailed to it, but only tied and there he died, and that he stayed three days dead and on the third day returned to life and went up to heaven and there he sits with his Father, and after this came at once Echuah, which is the Holy Ghost and filled the land with all of which there was need. When he was asked what these names of the three persons meant, he said that Izona meant the great father, and Bacab the son of the great father, and Echuah the merchant and in truth the Holy Spirit sent down good merchandise into the world, since it filled the earth, that is the men of the earth, with its gifts and its grace was copious and divine; and when asked also how he had knowledge of these things, he answered that

the lords taught their sons and thus this doctrine descended from hand to hand.<sup>28</sup>

The parallels with Christian theology are inescapable. In this old religion, during the time of infidelity, there was still reverence to the God who lived in Heaven. There was a Father—Izona, Son—Bacab, and Holy Ghost—Echuah. The Son, Bacab, was born to the virgin Chibirias. Here, the Holy Trinity shines forth as well as the Marian miracle—that Christ was born to the virgin Mary. Then Eopuco murders Bacab the Son, whips him, binds him to a pole and places upon him a Crown of Thorns, much as the Pharisees had Christ crucified. Then as in the Christian telling, when Christ rose up to Heaven, the Son Bacab does the same, and fills the Earth with blessings. The line between what the informant says and what the investigator wants to hear is blurred. The Indians anticipated what was expected to them, used these promptings as opportunities to demonstrate their faithfulness, the better to protect themselves from Christian

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<sup>28</sup> Ibid. Elsewhere in this same note (as endnote xxiv, above), Tozzer is quoting and translating from Juan de Torquemada, *Monarquía indiana* vol. 5, Book 15, Chapter XLIX. The third edition—in Spanish—is available online at <https://historicas.unam.mx/publicaciones/publicadigital/monarquia/index.html> courtesy of Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM). This edition was published from 1969-1971, so please note that this is not the version which Tozzer translated and reprinted. The first edition was published in Seville in 1615 AD.

punishment and torture. The fear and threat of punishment compelled them to validate this purportedly universal faith.<sup>29</sup>

The modern anthropologist L. Antonio Curet has made the case for a new universalized framework: symbolic reservoirs.<sup>30</sup> Curet imported this framework from archaeologists studying ancient Africa and applied it to the study of ancient Taíno life. For him, the great value of symbolic reservoirs is that they rescue agential decision-making from the normative and monolithic view that Taíno represents some kind of cultural unity given in advance. These reservoirs accumulate symbolic and narrative resources that Taíno individuals can choose from and deploy in varied situations. They do so in order to construct and to legitimate a cultural tradition that is responsive to political and environmental challenges. As Curet puts it,

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<sup>29</sup> The Mayans dreaded torture at the hands of the Franciscans. One technique had the victim suspended from a rope by the wrists, with a weight tied around the ankles. The torturer might also whip or beat the suspended victim. Water torture involved pouring large amounts of water down the esophagus, using iron prongs to keep the victim's mouth open. There is evidence that some Mayans captured by the Franciscans would commit suicide to escape these debilitating and sometimes lethal punishments. For more on Franciscan torture during the 1562 Inquisition of Yucatan, see Victoria Reifler Bricker, *The Indian Christ, The Indian King: The Historical Substrate of Maya Myth and Ritual* (Austin, University of Texas Press, 1981), 20. For more on torture in the Spanish Inquisition, see the primary source reader *The Spanish Inquisition, 1478-1614: An Anthology of Sources*, ed. and transl. Lu Ann Homza (Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., 2006).

<sup>30</sup> L. Antonio Curet, "The Taíno: Phenomena, Concepts, and Terms," *Ethnohistory* 61:3 (Summer 2014), 467-495.

...the symbolic reservoir can be tapped and its symbols and other ideological "contents" manipulated at different times in history. Some symbols and their material expression can be chosen over others and, more importantly, their meanings can be manipulated, negotiated, redefined, reinterpreted, or rejected according to the particular social and political conditions at one point in history.<sup>31</sup>

Thus, the symbolic reservoir is akin to a framework, a toolkit for responding to different types of events in order to develop good enough effectiveness and situational control. It orients and operationalizes particular ways of doing things based on a shared palette of symbols and beliefs. Finally, symbolic reservoirs coordinate meaning making and action between groups of people by scaffolding innovative practices within intelligible bounds.

As the Iberian historiographers and ethnographers—such as Ramón Pané—constructed knowledge about the Indians, they also lived and evangelized among them. Their ideas could not help but join the multiple symbolic reservoirs the Indians had been drawing upon since "ancient times."<sup>32</sup>

Pané's story of the miraculous yams exemplifies this joining of symbolic reservoirs. In embedding himself with the caciques of Hispaniola, Pané found himself caught up in preexisting rivalries between their various communities. After two years,

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<sup>31</sup> Curet, "The Taíno," 481.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 482.

he left one cacique—Guarionex—to find one more pliable with respect to Christianization. So, Ramón Pané embedded with the cacique Mabiatué.<sup>33</sup> He ran a chapel there with a Christianized Taíno family.

According to Pané's interpretation, Guarionex sought retribution for Pané's departure. He sent men to invade the chapel and steal some images Pané had placed there to aid in comfort and prayer.

Having left the chapel, those men threw the images on the ground and covered them with earth and urinated on them, saying "Now your fruits will be good and great."<sup>34</sup>

Pané interpreted these events in the worst possible light. He believed that Guarionex intended to destroy the images. For him, the men did this "as a vituperation."<sup>35</sup> In the ensuing struggle between the Spaniards and the Taíno, the Viceroy of Hispaniola Don Bartolomé Columbus ordered that Guarionex's men be publicly burned. Pané also interpreted Guarionex as someone intent on killing Christians. In his obstinacy he succeeded in having several men killed—including the Christianized Taínos Juan Mateo and his brother Antón. They also, finally, dug up the images and destroyed them.

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<sup>33</sup> Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: Chronicles of the New World Encounter*, ed. José Juan Arrom, transl. Susan C. Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), 34-5.

<sup>34</sup> Pané, *Antiquities*, 36.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*

In the end, several yams grew in the shape of the cross where the images had been hidden.

It was not possible for anyone to find such a cross, and nevertheless it was found by the mother of Guarionex, the worst woman I have known in those parts, and she took it to be a great miracle, and she said to the commander of the fortress of Concepción: "This miracle has been wrought by God where the images were found. God knows why."<sup>36</sup>

Pané seems to have interpreted the events as if the outcome—the destruction of the images and the killing of Christianized Taínos—had been Guarionex's objective all along. Yet if that were the case, then why would the men have buried the images and urinated upon them instead of destroying them when they had the chance? Why, if they had taken the images by force from the chapel, did they not kill the chapel's custodians when they had the chance?

Arrom notes that Pané misunderstood their objectives as a vituperation. The Taíno were acting "as part of an agricultural rite in which they had the custom of burying a little representation of Yúcabu Bagua Maorocoti in their cultivations so that he might fertilize the sowing."<sup>37</sup> Indeed, the men buried the images somewhere in a

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 37.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 36 note 155.

"cultivated field."<sup>38</sup> It makes more sense to conjecture that the Taíno saw the Christian images as akin to their own representations of the god Yúcabu Bagua Maorocoti. They tapped their own symbolic reservoir in order to make sense of the Christian one. Hence, they sought to improve the sowing and to take control over the power of those images.

Furthermore, stealing the images was not beyond the bounds of customary competitive practice between the caciques. Christopher Columbus himself observed that the caciques hid and stole zemis from one another.

"And the *caciques* and their people take pride in having better zemis than others do...they take their zemi or zemis and hide them in the forest for fear that the Christians might take them away. And, what is more laughable, they have among themselves the custom of stealing the zemis from each other."<sup>39</sup>

The Christians came and took zemis away, both for the purpose of Christianizing the Taíno and for the purpose of showing the zemis to their European correspondents. It is reasonable to suppose that the Taíno witnessed these practices and presumed that the Spaniards were participating in their preexisting custom of appreciating, stealing, and hiding the zemis just as they had done between themselves.

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> José Juan Arrom, "Appendix A: Christopher Columbus," in *Antiquities*, transl. Susan C. Griswold, 44.

In fact, Guarionex might not have intended to harm Christians from the outset. Rather, he organized the killings of Juan Mateo et al as a retaliation for the trial and public burning of his men.<sup>40</sup> Only at that point did his men return to the images they hid and had them destroyed. This prevented others from repeating the rite with the same images, and perhaps also was a retaliation so that the Christians' fields would become barren.

The outcome of these lethal misunderstandings was one of symbolic concordance, however. Perhaps Guarionex sent his own people to check what had grown where the images were interned. This would explain why his mother eventually obtained the cross-shaped yams. Acting on their own ritual logic, these Taíno checked the earth in order to confirm their expectations that burying the images would have some sort of agricultural effect.

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<sup>40</sup> The trial and public burning was based on the *auto de fé*. 'Autos' included capital punishment against people who transgressed divine law but did not repent of their crimes against God. The traditional form of capital punishment was a public burning outside of city limits—the better to make an example of the unrepentant.

Under normal circumstances, ecclesiastical officials would conduct the trial. They would establish that the transgression had taken place and that the criminal was unrepentant or had repeated transgressions too many times. If they convicted the defendant and sentenced him to death, then the ecclesiastical officials would turn the convicted person over to secular officials for capital punishment. The Viceroy of Hispaniola acted upon these precedents when he burned Guarionex's men for desecrating the chapel.

For primary source documentation of *autos* carried out in medieval Iberia, see Olivia Remie Constable, ed. *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, with the assistance of Damian Zurro, second edition, (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

By unearthing the yams, they created an opportunity for reinterpreting these unfolding events. The mother of Guarionex (unnamed) foregrounded this concordance of Taíno and Christian symbolic reservoirs by informing the Spaniards that a miracle had taken place. Were it not for her, Pané may have never heard this part of the story. He accepts the mother's interpretation by giving his chapter this title: "Concerning what happened to the images and the miracle God worked to show his power."<sup>41</sup>

In the Indians' own writings about their pre-Spanish beliefs, these tactical universalizations become even more pronounced. The anonymous Christianized Inkan who penned the Huarochirí Manuscript plays with the idea of being both Christian and Inkan. The writer inscribes the beliefs of the old Huaro Cheri people, the stories about their gods.

"In ancient times the world wanted to come to an end.  
A llama buck, aware that the ocean was about to overflow,  
was behaving like somebody who's deep in  
sadness. Even though its [father] owner let it rest in  
a patch of excellent pasture, it cried and said, "in,  
in," and wouldn't eat.

The llama's [father] owner got really angry, and he threw  
the cob from some maize he had just eaten at the  
llama.  
"Eat, dog! This is some fine grass I'm letting you rest in!" he  
said.

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<sup>41</sup> Pané, *Antiquities*, 36.

Then the llama began speaking like a human being.  
"You simpleton, whatever could you be thinking about?  
Soon, in five days, the ocean will overflow. It's a  
certainty. And the whole world will come to an  
end," it said."<sup>42</sup>

So, the father becomes scared and listens to the llama. They take refuge on top of Villca Coto mountain, where they meet many other animals sheltering there. The man and his llama came just in time, for the flood happened right when they got to the mountaintop. Five days later, "the waters descended and began to dry up."

"The drying waters caused the ocean to retreat all the way  
down again and exterminate all the people.  
Afterward, that man began to multiply once more.  
That's the reason there are people until today.  
Regarding this story, we Christians believe it refers to the  
time of the Flood.  
But they believe it was Villca Coto mountain that saved  
them."<sup>43</sup>

Here the author contrasts the Christian story of Noah, who built an ark and rescued humanity from the Great Flood after God told him what to do, with the beliefs of the Huarro Cheri.

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<sup>42</sup> "1. The Ancestors of the People Called Indians: A View from Huarochirí, Peru (ca. 1598-1608)," reprinted in *Colonial Latin America*, 11-12.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

In the next chapter, the author tells the story of how the Sun disappeared for five days.

"In ancient times the Sun died.  
Because of his death it was night for five days.  
Rocks banged against each other.  
Mortars and grindstones began to eat people.  
Buck llamas started to drive men.  
Here's what we Christians think about it: We think  
these stories tell of the darkness following the death of Our  
Lord Jesus Christ.  
Maybe that's what it was."<sup>44</sup>

In this mysterious last line, the author suggests that it isn't clear whether the Christian version or the Huaro Cheri version of the story is correct. The author identifies with the Christians by using the personal pronoun "we," but also preserves the old stories of the Inkan ancestors from within the Christian history of the Great Flood. The author draws on both symbolic reservoirs to perpetuate the Inkan stories while giving lip service to the priority of the Christian framework. So—is Christianity universal? For this Inka poet, "Maybe" discloses both doubt and a willingness to engage with the Gospel on the poet's own terms.

In the Chilam Balam of Chumayel, the underground Mayan priesthood used similar tactics to protect their sacred knowledge from destruction at the hands of the

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

Christians. Driven to secrecy, these Jaguar Priests used books and oral storytelling to conserve their authority and lore. The book is conceived as a sort of testament, that future generations of Mayans might use it to reconstruct their sacred knowledge, to remember their old ways of orienting themselves in the world, before Spanish hegemony. As the authors put it in the last line: "Who will be the prophet, who will be the priest who shall interpret truly the word of the book?"<sup>45</sup>

The authors do this by meeting their future Mayan readers halfway. These Christianized Mayans will have a confused understanding of the hieroglyphs and symbols which the jaguar priests traditionally used for transmitting and monopolizing sacred knowledge. So, the authors of the Chilam Balam of Chumayel interlaced their Mayan knowledge with Christian knowledge to allow for translations and equivalences between the two traditions. They used the image of the Christian cross to signify lordship in their depictions of the Lords of the Katuns and made up Latin incantations in descriptions of sacred rites.<sup>46</sup> So they took what was familiar to Christianized Mayan men and used it to lead those men back, to what they saw as the true Mayan knowledge.

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<sup>45</sup> *The Book of Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, ed. and transl. Ralph L. Roys (Washington, DC: Carnegie Institute of Washington, 1933), 169.

<sup>46</sup> One example of this is in the description of "The Ritual of the Angels," in which the author wrote incantations in corrupted Spanish and Latin-sounding words: "*Sustina gracia, trece mili, uno cargo bende.*" Ralph Roys believes that the meaning is unimportant. He suggests that the sound and cadence add to the ritualistic atmosphere. I take this to be an indication of spiritual appropriation of the power behind the Latin incantations. *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, ed. and transl. Ralph L. Roys, 35.

One of the most important domains of Mayan sacred knowledge combined what we conventionally distinguish as horology, astronomy, and astrology. For them, the periodical timing of the rise and fall of certain stars could be read to divine the course of existence. The modern historian Tzvetan Todorov concluded that the Mayans and the Mexicans understood time as something that was reversible due to this cyclical periodicity. It was as if history flowed from future, to present, to past, and back again. The past contained the seeds of the future, the future contained the key to understanding the past.

Therefore, the hope that true Mayan worship would return, that the Spaniards would someday be defeated, and that Christianity would come to an end, was embedded in the Jaguar Priests' cyclical view of history.<sup>47</sup>

Bishop de Landa was acutely aware of the importance of this knowledge to the old ways. Acting on his faith and his understanding of the Holy Bible—that divination was a sin and an affront against the One True God—he organized the destruction of the astrological books. However, the Jaguar Priests preserved their knowledge of the calendar and its concordance with the movement of the stars and recorded it in the

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<sup>47</sup> Victoria Bricker concluded, "Although the Maya philosophy of history probably worked to the advantage of the Spaniards during much of the Colonial period, it later became a source of anxiety to the Spanish authorities. For, according to any cyclical view of history, no cycle lasts forever." Bricker, *The Indian Christ*, 28.

book. They drew the glyphs and explained the names behind each of the months and years. They showed its concordances with the Christian calendar:

"The beginning of Katun 11 Ahau was in the year <space> 1513"<sup>48</sup>

"11 Ahau was when the mighty men arrived from the East. They were the ones who first brought <disease> here to our land, <the land of> us who are Maya, in the year 1513."<sup>49</sup>

"7 Ahau was when Bishop de Landa died."<sup>50</sup>

So, the priest implies that the Mayan ways survive, even after the death of one of their greatest adversaries. He implies that they will survive for as long as the Mayan people live.

"<This is> the history of the world in those times, because it has been written down, because the time has not yet ended for making these books, these many explanations, so that Maya men may be asked if they know how they were born here in this country, when the land was founded."<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, 84.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 138.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 98.

In this way, the authors gave future Maya a trail of breadcrumbs, to work their way from a Christian orientation towards reality, back to a Mayan orientation towards reality such as it was before the Spaniards came. As the authors put it, life was good before the Spaniards came.

Four four-hundreds of years and fifteen score years as the end of their lives [those whose emblems were the bird, the precious stone, the flat precious stone and the jaguar]; then came the end of their lives, because they knew the measure of their days. Complete was the month; complete, the year; complete, the day; complete, the night; complete, the breath of life as it passed also; complete, the blood, when they arrived at their beds, their mats, their thrones...Then everything was good.

Then they adhered to <the dictates of> their reason. There was no sin...There was no sickness; they had then no aching bones; they had then no high fever; they had then no smallpox; they had then no burning chest; they had then no abdominal pains; they had then no consumption; they had then no headache. At that time the course of humanity was orderly.<sup>52</sup>

This passage presents the history of the old order as one of harmony and alignment with the stars. The periodic motions of existence make their complete circles—from the twinkling stars to the very blood of man.

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 83.

After the Spaniards came, life was thrown out of balance. Their arrival heralded a time of misery and chaos, where even Mayans were divided amongst themselves.

"The foreigners made it otherwise when they arrived here. They brought shameful things/when they came. They lost their innocence in carnal sin...No lucky days were then displayed to us...we had no sound judgment."<sup>53</sup>

Victoria Bricker argues that the Priests deliberately conflated the Itzá invaders of an earlier cycle with the Spanish invaders of the current cycle. The convergence of these cyclically identical times of suffering meant that the name of one could stand in for the name of the other.

This cyclical history becomes more central to universalizations in history when the Jaguar Priest records the prophecies from before Spanish hegemony, foretelling the arrival and catastrophes wrought by the invaders across the sea.

"The prophecy of Chilam Balam, the singer, of Cabal-chen, Mani.

On <the day> 13 Ahau the katun will end in the time of the Itzá, in the time of / Tancab <Mayapan>, lord. There is the sign of Hunab-ku on high. The raised wooden standard shall come. It shall be displayed to the world, that the world may be enlightened, lord. There has been a beginning of strife, there has been a beginning of rivalry,

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

when the priestly man shall come to bring the sign <of God> in the time to come, lord. A quarter of a league, a league <away> he comes."<sup>54</sup>

Such prophecies allow the Jaguar Priest to subordinate the Christian arrival to the universalized framework of Mayan astrology and divination. If they correctly predict future events of great significance, then the methods are valid. Since the methods are valid, they should be safeguarded from the zealous Christian evangelists.<sup>55</sup>

They also display evidence of a struggle within the Mayan priesthood to wrest control from the Christians over their One True God. The friars reconstructed Maya language in order to educate their charges in the Gospel, aiming at simplicity, beauty, and semantic equivalences to bridge the gulf between Spanish and Mayan tongues. To translate the One God (*única Dios*) into Maya, they rendered it semantically as *Hunab-ku*. They appropriated *hunab* out of the Maya vocabulary for its semantic value, literally meaning "unique." They did the same for *ku*, where it could refer to any god. For the

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 167.

<sup>55</sup> Bricker also describes a case in which the Itza, ruled by a man named Canek, refused to let two Friars evangelize among them until it was the correct time for them to abandon their old Gods, according to the *chilams'* prophecies. This first refusal took place in 1618 AD. True to their word, nearly eighty years later, the Itza allowed the Spaniards to evangelize among them at the appointed time. In doing so, they subordinated the Christian orientation to their Itza orientation, making their system universal since it foretold and controlled when they would accept the Gospel. This acceptance, of course, implied that they could repudiate Christianity when this cycle ended while keeping their own cyclical orientation intact. Thus, the Gospel was contained within a cyclical cosmic order which transcended it. Bricker, *The Indian Christ*, 21-22.

writers of the Chilam Balam of Chumayel, they created a cult of Hunab-ku as an original Mayan deity in a bid for spiritual takeover.

The Jaguar Priest continues:

"Great is the discord that arises today. The First Tree of the World is restored; it is displayed to the world. This is the sign of Hunab-ku on high. Worship it, Itzá. You shall worship today his sign on high. You shall worship it furthermore with true good will, and you shall worship the true God today, lord. You shall be converted to the word of Hunab-ku, lord; it came from heaven."<sup>56</sup>

Here then the Jaguar Priest appropriates the signs of the Christian universal truth and uses them as proof of his own universalized framework. The wooden standard and the First Tree of the World correspond to the Christian Cross but also foreshadow it in the Tree of Knowledge of the Book of Genesis. Hunab-ku is the only true God—the only permanent, living God. In this universalization, Hunab-ku appears as a tactical strategy for diverting the spiritual fervor instilled by the Christian evangelists. This grab at spiritual power can be taken to the point of logical inversion: it makes the Christian God seem like a Eurasian appropriation of the universal Hunab-ku!

I have called the Chilam Balam of Chumayel a palimpsest. It is a collection of various chapters, some chronicles, others myths and rituals, still others drawings and

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<sup>56</sup> *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, 168.

explanations that conserve astrological knowledge. They were deposited and transmitted over time, kept secret from the Christians so that they would not be destroyed. They reflect a continuous attempt to constitute a spiritual orientation, handed down and adapted to the times from Priest to Priest. They are a miscellany meant to last for ages, and an assertion of the integrity of a cyclical historical and prophetic tradition under assault by the Spanish evangelists. More importantly, the books are also an active construction of universals to cover for a tactical reconquest of spiritual power. They yield to a Christian universal—the One True God—in order to claim it for the Jaguar Priesthood.

Still other Mayans aimed at something else. They had mastered the universals of Christianity to such an extent that they put them to their own use. They subverted the authority of the Churches and the Orders and began their own, unauthorized ministries. They accepted the universality of the Gospel so thoroughly, that they wrested it from Spanish control and harnessed it on their own terms. As the modern anthropologist and historian Victoria Bricker put it:

"The Indians accepted Catholicism and practiced its rites to the best of their knowledge. Religious revitalization movements after that date [the end of Landa's Inquisition of Yucatan] did not reject Catholicism per se. What they

did reject was Spanish monopolization of the ecclesiastical hierarchy."<sup>57</sup>

Like the followers of Jesus of Nazareth, who appropriated the prophecies of the Old Testament in order to justify the New, some Mayans embraced the Apostolic tradition of wandering and preaching to awaken their communities. Here is one harried account, recorded by Friar Diego Lopez de Cogolludo:

"There were two Indians, one named Alonso Chablé and the other Francisco Canul. [In 1610 AD] the former pretended to be the Pope and supreme pontiff and the latter, a bishop, and they announced themselves to be such among the Indians. Also they caused themselves to be venerated, deceiving the wretched Catholic Indians with their infernal doctrine. They said mass at night dressed in the sacred vestments of the church which no doubt the sacristans had given them. They profaned the holy chalices and consecrated oils, baptized boys, confessed adults and gave them communion, while they worshipped the idols which they placed on the altar. They ordained priests for service, anointing their hands with the oil and the holy chrism, and when they ordained them they put on a miter and took a crozier in their hands. They commanded the Indians to give them offerings and openly taught other deadly heresies."<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Bricker, *The Indian Christ*, 20.

<sup>58</sup> Roys, "Appendix G: The Americanization of Christianity," in *Chilam Balam of Chumayel*, 202.

The original text reads as follows: "Dos Indios, uno llamado Alonso Chable y otro Francisco Canul, aquel se singió Papa y Sumo Pontifice, y estotro Obispo, y por tales se publicaron entre los Indios y se hizieron venerar, engañando à los miserables Indios Catolicos con infernal doctrina. Estos dezian Missa de noche, revestidos con los ornamentos Sagrados de la Inglesia que sin duda se los daban los Sacristanes. Profanaban los Santos Calizes, y Oleos

If Cogolludo is correct, then Chablé and Canul appropriated the signs and vestments of the Catholic Church. In doing so, they not only validated Christian universality, but drove it to its logical conclusion. For if this faith were truly universal, then how could the Spaniards claim to have a special, chosen role to spread it to the ends of the earth? Were not all men equal before God?

In the Bible, it is said that the End of Days will bring the end of all authority of men over men. God would return, to rule men directly by His guiding hand:

"Then the end will come, when he hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power."<sup>59</sup>

Thus, the Spaniards, astonished at the varied and devout ways in which the Mayans took in the Good Word, reaffirmed their own faith in the universality of their

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consagrados, bautizaban muchachos, oían de confession à los adultos, dabanles comunión, adorando los Idolos, que en el Altar ponían. Ordenaban Sacerdotes para servicio de ellos, ungiéndoles las manos con el Oleo, y Chrisma Santo, y quando los ordenaban se ponían Mitra, y baculo en la mano. Mandaban à los Indios les diessen ofrendas y professaban otras gravissimas hereçias." Cogolludo, *Historia de Yucathan*, Book 9: Chapter 1, 468.

<sup>59</sup> 1 Corinthians NIV 15:24, accessed online at <https://www.biblica.com/bible/niv/1-corinthians/15/>. Ibid. LV: "deinde finis cum tradiderit regnum Deo et Patri cum evacuaverit omnem principatum et potestatem et virtutem", accessed online at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/text?doc=Perseus%3Atext%3A1999.02.0060%3Abook%3D1+Corinthians%3Achapter%3D15%3Averse%3D24>.

God of Abraham. The Word was Truth and its triumph in the world had been long foretold in the Scripture. So, the universalization of the Gospel came from both the peoples of the Old World and the peoples of the New. As the colonizers and missionaries looked for proof of Christianity before Spanish hegemony to validate their various interests, they found ample proof in Indian tactics to use Christianity for the same. Both Indians and Christians waged spiritual warfare alongside military warfare, and both attempted to outbid one another as masters of the New World's history from before Columbus came ashore.

## 8. Refutatio I

*But what if they were just stupid? Surely these hotheaded Spaniards were just fumbling with crude investigatory instruments. They were like children, roaming about the world with sharpened sticks, jabbing at unfamiliar things.*

*The postmodern Caribbean archaeologists William Keegan and Corinne L. Hofman dismiss the early modern Spaniards for their incompetence and lack of professionalism. None were trained ethnographic methods.<sup>60</sup> Ramón Pané deserves special mention. The writer of the "first ethnography" of the Antilles, according to historian José Juan Arrom, failed to impress his own contemporaries. Las Casas' opinion is that the Fray says, "things that are confused and of little substance, as a simple person who did not speak our Castilian tongue altogether well, since he was a Catalan by birth."<sup>61</sup> Shall we dismiss Pané's research for lacking any kind of insight about the Taíno peoples?*

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<sup>60</sup> Personally, I find this criticism paradoxical. On the one hand, professionalized ethnographic methods had not yet been invented for them to master in the first place. On the other hand, the Christian Spaniards had a long and profound historical experience with studying and documenting the differences of other peoples in their midst. This gave rise to a complex and politically charged discourse around "customs" which I cannot do justice to here.

The excellent primary source reader *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable with the assistance of Damian Zurro (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), has many sources pertaining to the discourse on customs—especially with respect to clothing. These include European woodcut engravings portraying women in supposedly everyday apparel, to Morisco protests against the overreach of sovereign power in the name of community privileges.

<sup>61</sup> Las Casas, quoted in Arrom, "Introductory Study," in Ramón Pané, *An Account of the Antiquities of the Indians: Chronicles of the New World Encounter*, transl. Susan C. Griswold (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1999), xxvii.

*On the historiography of the Maya, Alfred Tozzer scoffed at the "insanity" of the pre-Christian thesis.<sup>62</sup> For these modern and post-modern social scientists, it would seem that the early modern Spaniards' forays into history and ethnography are hopelessly naïve.*

*No real social scientist would project their own society's values so clumsily on the peoples they study. Such knowledge would be worthless about those peoples. At best, it would only tell us about the scientists' own biases and assumptions adulterating the knowledge they have created.*

Still, we should be alert to the scent of progress narratives, however perfumed. In actuality, the Spaniards were hardly neophytes in the long history of learning conserved by the Roman Catholic Church. Even the unschooled Oviedo demonstrated his command of ancient historiography when he 'proved' that the Spanish Indies were indeed the famed Hesperides. For this demonstration, he trotted out Aristotle, Eusebius, Berossus, Pliny, and more. Tomas Medel, a less famous governor-historian, legitimated his history by citing Eusebius, to theorize about the origins of idolatry in the New World.<sup>63</sup> In addition to the long history of Christianity's disputations with competing cosmologies throughout Europe, there was the Old Testament—the ancient knowledge of the Hebrews.

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<sup>62</sup> Diego de Landa, *Landa's Relación de las Cosas de Yucatan*, a translation, transl. Alfred Tozzer (Cambridge, MA: The Peabody Museum, 1941).

<sup>63</sup> Tomas Medel, "Appendix," in *Landa's Relación*, transl. Tozzer, 223.

### **8.1 Have We Really Come a Long Way from the Spaniards' Historiography?**

Just in time for 1992—the year of the Columbian Quincentennial—the historical anthropologist Gananath Obeyesekere published a monograph that would touch off intense debates over the purpose and validity of social scientific research. *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook* was scholarly polemic. Obeyesekere's goal: to stir anthropologists into overcoming the pernicious legacy of European mythmaking. For him, this unfortunate legacy not only legitimized European domination around the world, but it also corrupted the scientific empiricism central to the anthropological discipline.

In terms of scholarship, Obeyesekere used empirical methods to cast doubt on the most influential anthropological narratives surrounding the death of Captain James Cook—the idea that his Hawai'ian killers had done so to fulfill a sacred ritual.

Obeyesekere took especial aim at his colleague Marshall Sahlins, a venerated anthropologist who used British accounts of Captain Cook's rise to Godhood in the Hawai'ian cosmology to substantiate an overarching interpretation of the native mentality. Obeyesekere produced alternative sources based on Hawai'ian and European participants and cast doubt on the more familiar empirical record. He carefully tracked where the record did not permit knowing the real circumstances of the killing and inferred where Sahlins used dramatic license to cover up the gaps in his own narration of the event.

But Obeyesekere also drove home a polemical challenge to the entire discipline. Obeyesekere condensed the social sciences into a game, and then reversed the rules.

Here is the game as it is normally played, according to Obeyesekere. An anthropologist develops his mental framework, which originates in Europe and is honed by disciplinary training. Then he goes out into the world for field research: he goes and describes the mental structures of "native" peoples around the world, who are usually neither industrial nor literate. "...[T]he normal anthropologist, you might say, is someone who is either in Europe or in France or in England, studying another culture which he was not nurtured or socialized in."<sup>64</sup> Then the anthropologist goes back to the West, reassured that he has distilled and documented another rigid and inflexible culture for the benefit of the creative and flexible Western world.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Interview between Gananath Obeyesekere and Harry Kreisler, "Gananath Obeyesekere—Conversations with History" (19 March 2003); accessed online via YouTube courtesy of University of California Television, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PEeaUGDw1PY>.

<sup>65</sup> The anthropologist David Scott made a related critique, puncturing the Western anthropologist's self image as coming from a relativistic culture (open to contextual variation and creative innovation), to go forth and study nominalistic cultures—closed off, rigid, and driven by ritualistic norms with the force of law:

"For whom is culture partial, unbounded, heterogeneous, hybrid, and so on, the anthropologist or the native? Whose claim is this, theory's or that of the discourse into which theory is inquiring? For surely on the very antifoundationalist grounds established by the new theory itself, the unboundedness or otherwise of culture cannot be something given but must, rather, be something that *gets established* in forms of authoritative discourse. So that whereas to stand on the a priori claim that culture is now partial rather than whole works well as a *subversive* claim turned against older essentialisms, as part of an ironic undoing of the meta-narratives of the West, it does less well as a principle upon which to seek a new positive yield for a politics of difference." (Emphasis in the original). David Scott, "Culture in Political Theory," *Political Theory* 31:1 (2003), 101.

Obeyeskere flipped the game on its head by arguing that it was in fact the anthropologists who were inflexible and rigid, bound by a stagnant mental structure. The Hawai'ians—especially King Kamehameha, the protagonist of *Apotheosis*—amply demonstrate a flexible and creative "pragmatic reason." This pragmatic reason allowed them to adapt to and ultimately incorporate Cook's life and death into a contest for sovereign hegemony in the islands. But because of the rigid mental structure of modern anthropology, academicians can only ritualistically repeat the conclusion that natives think stereotypically wherever they find natives. They are so enthralled by their game, that they are incapable of noticing contrary evidence, even when this evidence is plentiful across the historical record.

Then Obeyesekere takes the game and throws it into the ash heap of history. For this is what Europeans have been doing all along. Long before anthropology came on the scene, especially in Cook's time, Europeans had been taking elements of their own culture which they had repressed in the name of scientific advancement and industrial progress and kept projecting those elements onto the natives they crashed into in their voyages around the world. Obeyesekere used psychoanalysis—in particular, the idea of the shadow—to characterize this phenomenon of plastering one's own demons onto the faces of unfamiliar peoples.

We know that the idea of the savage constructed by the civilizer can easily be seen as the hived-off part of the civilizer's own being, his shadow side as it were, foisted on the savage.<sup>66</sup>

Anthropologists had failed to use their scientific training to overcome the legacy of Captain Cook. They failed to understand the radical Otherness of the natives. Instead, like Cook, they could only see the natives in terms of the rejected pieces of the Self.

Sensing an attack on his personal credibility as a scholar, Marshall Sahlins reacted vigorously to Obeyesekere's challenge. He issued a polemic of his own in 1994 with the University of Chicago Press. The sound and fury among bruised anthropologists tarnished the debate—their ad hominem attacks detracted from the real issues at stake.<sup>67</sup> Lost in this tempest was the idea that Sahlins was really just an avatar of the discipline.

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<sup>66</sup> Gananath Obeyesekere, *The Apotheosis of Captain Cook: European Mythmaking in the Pacific*, 1st edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992), 12.

<sup>67</sup> Obeyesekere summarizes and laments this degeneration in his Preface to the second edition of *Apotheosis*:

"In general, I have found that literary critics and historians have been sympathetic to my work, but anthropologists have been harshly negative. This is not surprising because in the course of my book I am somewhat critical of my own discipline, though constructively, I hope. One Pacific ethnographer has suggested that I derived my idea of Cook's Kurtz persona after having seen the movie *Apocalypse Now*, a snide reference to my lack of education in English literature. (Ironically, I was trained in English literature before I became an anthropologist.) Another, writing in a professional journal, is surprised that *The New York Times* could have demeaned itself by reviewing such a bad book. Others have found that I have gratuitously attacked the great anthropological tradition that has emphasized 'difference' and cultural relativism—which is quite true. Yet others have been upset because, like Sahlins, they have tended to idealize Cook. One can therefore expect Sahlins also to respond in a similar tone and

If anything, the man who should have been most angry with Obeyesekere was Tzvetan Todorov. If Sahlin had sinned against the social sciences, it was really in Todorov's image.

Let me briefly examine the human scientist's myth of the Other and the dilemma it involves by a brief critique of one of the most provocative books of our time, Todorov's *The Conquest of America*, the immediate intellectual precursor of Sahlin's own work.<sup>68</sup>

Obeyesekere goes on to summarize Todorov's argument—how the Europeans defeated the Aztecs by way of signs. Todorov set up a bifurcation between the Spaniards, who were flexible and pragmatic, and the Aztecs, who were rigid and abstract. Then Obeyesekere charges Todorov with unwittingly smuggling the Self-Other bifurcation back into the argument by way of the flexible/rigid bifurcation. This is a serious problem, since Todorov's very objective is to trouble our categories of Self and Other.

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manner in *How "Natives" Think*. That work is stridently polemical and vituperative. I am dismayed that a leader thinker in our field has adopted this form of writing." "Preface (1997)," *Apotheosis*, 2nd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), xiii-xiv.

<sup>68</sup> Obeyesekere, *Apotheosis* (1992), 16.

Todorov seems unaware of the peculiar bind in which he is caught. He quotes extensively from Spanish texts that describe the brutalization of the Indians, but these are the very texts that represent the Indians' stereotypic Otherness. The modern scholar accepts the accuracy of these older accounts of the Indian because they fit the theory of signs which tells us that the Indians are bound by signs; consequently they can be easily subjugated by the Spanish who have mastery over signs. Todorov does not recognize that *his* representation of the Aztec is a by-product of sixteenth-century Spanish representations, mediated, however, by his theory of signs. In effect, the difference between the two is one of ethical orientation and not one of divergent representation. Todorov's vision of the Other is a continuation of a major Spanish (and European) myth model dealing with the savage mind.<sup>69</sup>

So, a historical anthropologist's book about Hawai'ian mythmaking actually rehearsed itself using a discussion of Mexican historiography. Obeyesekere was talking not about Sahlins per se, but Western social science as a structure of thinking. The problem is much deeper than whether or not we use European sources to figure out how natives thought. It is about how our very framework of interpreting the world has a dark side, in which myths and truths merge to summon terrible and murderous calamities.

If you accept Obeyesekere's argument, then you will agree that from 1492 to 1992, Western knowledge of the other has not really made much progress. The

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid., 17.

scientization of the disciplines—anthropology and history included—which started at the end of the nineteenth century has done more to perfect European mythmaking rather than to end it.

But this chapter is a *Refutatio*, and so I expect that if you are reading it, then you do not agree with Obeyesekere's conclusions. Perhaps it is because you think that he is wrong, and that anthropology has in fact made great strides towards a truly scientific, impartial understanding of the world and its peoples. Perhaps it is because you think that he is right for 1992, but that beyond 2022, anthropology has successfully integrated Obeyesekere's challenge into its structure of thought.

Indeed, I think the latter is what Obeyesekere wanted to achieve with this mix of scholarship and polemic. He was trying to become the event which would force a conjuncture in the discipline, that the discipline would have to change and reform itself as a result of his spirited challenge. The goal was not to destroy anthropology, but to redeem it. For Obeyesekere well knew that the empirical methods he used in order to unmask European mythmaking that posed as science, were also part of the Western scientific tradition. His project is to expurgate myth from the social sciences, to make good on its original promise to lay bare the world as it really is. He let on as much in his epigraph, when he quoted from the Old Testament:

He shall break the also the images of Beth-she'-mesh, that  
*is* in the land of Egypt; and the houses of the Gods of the  
Egyptians he shall burn with fire.<sup>70</sup>

This is an appropriation of the master's tools. The missionary-ethnographers of Cook's age looked to the Scripture for guidance. And the Scripture oriented them towards seeing pagan cosmologies in terms of the cursed idolatry and divination of the Ba'al worshippers—the peoples not written in the Book of Life from whom the Jews would wrest the Promised Land. Now, Obeyesekere has taken the Scripture for his own mission to reform the discipline.

One may say, then, that Obeyesekere succeeded. His publication and the ensuing debate are proof that the social sciences listened. He helped to turn the discipline in a positive direction, to turn away from its temptations to idolatry.

But if you think that anthropology has redeemed itself, then you have in fact embraced another way in which our structures of thought have not come very far at all. For the very narrative of progress, the banishment of idolatry, takes us back to the heart of the Christian claim that the Gospel redeemed the spirit of Mosaic law, which in the Christian telling, the Jews failed to uphold. I think that in the purification of anthropology as a discipline, in the banishment of stereotypic reproduction from the field, the proper framing metaphor is not exactly destruction of the false gods of Egypt

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<sup>70</sup> Jeremiah 43:13, as quoted in the epigraph to *Apotheosis* (viii).

in the name of Truth. Really, it is to be found in the disputations between the Christians and the Pharisees, as told in the Gospel. For it is here that the conflict between sincere worship and stereotypical worship became central to the New Word.

After Jesus died, the Apostles fulfilled his testament. They preached far and wide and set up churches where they went. In Jerusalem, Paul and Barnabas found themselves challenged by the Pharisees:

Then some of the believers who belonged to the party of the Pharisees stood up and said, "The Gentiles must be circumcised and required to keep the law of Moses."

The apostles and elders met to consider this question. After much discussion, Peter got up and addressed them. "Brothers, you know that some time ago God made a choice among you that the Gentiles might hear from my lips the message of the gospel and believe. God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith. Now then, why do you try to test God by putting on the necks of Gentiles a yoke that neither we nor our ancestors have been able to bear? No! We believe it through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we are saved, just as they are."<sup>71</sup>

Throughout the Gospel, Christ accused the Pharisees of being hypocrites. They obeyed the Mosaic laws to the letter, but they did not practice justice, nor help the poor.

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<sup>71</sup> Acts 15:5-11 NIV.

Instead, they fixated on material wealth and power. In academic terms, the Pharisees epitomized stereotypic reproduction. They followed the laws but did not love God.

Thus, the Christians claimed to defend Moses from his devotees. For it is Moses who commanded the Jews in the desert, to prepare them for the Promised Land:

"Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer."<sup>72</sup> Time and again the Apostles would cite this verse to show that they had redeemed and surpassed Moses. "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."<sup>73</sup> In his Epistle to Titus, Paul does not hold back his condemnation:

For there are many rebellious people, full of meaningless talk and deception, especially those of the circumcision group. They must be silenced, because they are disrupting whole households by teaching things they ought not to teach—and that for the sake of dishonest gain. One of Crete's own prophets has said it: "Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons." This saying is true. Therefore rebuke them sharply, so that they will be sound in the faith, and will pay no attention to Jewish myths or to the merely human commands of those who reject the truth. To the pure, all things are pure, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both

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<sup>72</sup> Deuteronomy 10:16 NIV. It is interesting that Obeyesekere cites Jeremiah in his epigraph, for this book also contains the verse: "Circumcise yourselves to the LORD / Circumcise your hearts." Jeremiah 4:4 NIV.

<sup>73</sup> Galatians 5:6 NIV.

their minds and consciences are corrupted. They claim to know God, but by their actions they deny him.<sup>74</sup>

Obeyesekere defines stereotypic reproduction as "the propensity of a society to replicate its structures continually, such that for example, the theme of a god who returns from beyond the sky can be replicated in a large number of myths that, while sharing substantive differences, embody a single structural theme."<sup>75</sup> He then goes on to accuse Sahlins of perpetuating stereotypic reproduction in anthropology, by summoning once again the myth of the apotheosis of Captain Cook. It is the anthropologist who is trapped in reproducing this myth. However, because in his own self-image, the social scientist has transcended stereotypic reproduction as an affiliate of the creative and dynamic Western world, he projects his own stereotypic reproduction onto the natives.

The idea of the prelogical or childlike native, or one who lives in a 'cold' society, or given to unreflective traditional thought, or governed by a rigid cosmic or mythic world picture, is the social scientists' myth of the Other. Whatever form the myth takes, it must explicitly or implicitly postulate a radical disjunction between Western self and society and those of the preindustrial world. By contrast I want to render fuzzy these binary distinctions...<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Titus 1:10-16 NIV.

<sup>75</sup> Obeyesekere, *Apotheosis* (1992), 55.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

For Sahlins Hawaiian culture is specially conducive to 'stereotypic reproduction.' But it is possible to argue that it is his theory that promotes this form of replication in the empirical record. The examples I have quoted are stereotypic replications entailed by the theory, forcing a peculiar interpretation of events, seeing consonance where there is disjunction or a failure of replication.<sup>77</sup>

Like the Pharisees who circumcised their flesh but not their hearts, and like the stiff-necked Jews who copied the Philistines and worshipped Ba'al, contrary to the Mosaic Laws, anthropology has apparently been corrupted by stereotypic reproduction. Like a prophet or a man of God, coming to warn the city, Obeyesekere wants us to burn these idols and stop this ritualistic foolishness. He identifies himself with Jeremiah, who enjoined the Israelites to burn the Egyptian idols. And so, he unwittingly takes us to the very horizon of Western reality, where stereotypic reproduction and creative truth blend indiscriminately together once again. Obeyesekere's attempt to purify truth and discard ritual—purify science and discard myth—leads him right back to the very indistinction he claims to escape. Is he not reproducing the Christian injunction to circumcise our hearts? Is he not doing battle once more against the Pharisees?

This is also a way to critique the Western self-image as a Chosen People, from whom the rest of the world is cast out. So, Obeyesekere warns social scientists that the

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 58-59.

'natives' had "practical rationality" all along. "...the process whereby human beings reflectively assess the implications of a problem in terms of practical criteria."<sup>78</sup> In doing so—as a historical anthropologist—he returns these historical Others of social scientific myth retroactively to the fold of the human community. For him, rationality is in all.

Here there is no Gentile or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all.<sup>79</sup>

So Obeyesekere breaks one stereotypic reproduction by using another. Should it still be said that we social scientists have come a long way?

Part of Obeyesekere's moral high ground is founded on the link between anthropology's stereotypical reproduction of the rigid and ritualistic native, and the European colonizer's rationalizations for exploiting and subjecting them to the imperium. The moral reasoning behind his work goes: if we can overcome the sins of the social sciences, then we can wash the blood of empire from our hands.

But the crusade against stereotypic reproduction also has a bloody legacy of its own. It too is based on subjection and dispossession. This same zeal lent Scriptural authority to the Spanish Crown, when it moved to expel the Jews from Spain. The

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>79</sup> Colossians 3:11 NIV.

*conversos* had promised to accept the Good Word and renounce the Law of Moses, but they stood accused of perpetuating—shall we say, stereotypically reproducing? —the Jewish rites in secret. And though the Jews who did not renounce their faith were herded into ghettos, they persisted in impressing upon Christians their erroneous beliefs. The Spanish Inquisition turned its greatest energies to stopping this "Judaizing" crime. And as the Catholics surged in political and military power, they upset the delicate balance of *modus vivendi* which once characterized interfaith life.

In this climate, hearing in one ear dire reports from their hardline Grand Inquisitor—Francisco Jiménez de Cisneros—and in the other ear, dire reports from the cities, Isabel and Ferdinand moved to expel the Jews from Spain and take their land for the Crown. Here is some of the text from their 1492 Edict on the expulsion of the Jews:

...we procured and gave orders that inquisition should be made in our aforementioned kingdoms and lordships, which as you know has for twelve years been made and is being made, and by it many guilty persons have been discovered, as is very well know, and accordingly we are informed by the inquisitors and by other devout persons, ecclesiastical and secular, that great injury has resulted and still results, since the Christians have engaged in and continue to engage in social interaction and communication they have had and continue to have with Jews, who, it seems, seek always and by whatever means and ways they can to subvert and to steal faithful Christians from our holy Catholic faith and to separate them from it, and to draw them to themselves and subvert them to their own wicked belief and conviction,

instructing them in the ceremonies and observances of their law, holding meetings at which they read and teach that which people must hold and believe according to their law, achieving that the Christians and their children be circumcised, and giving them books from which they may read their prayers and declaring to them the fasts that they must keep, and joining with them to read and teach them the history of their law indicating to them the festivals before they occur, advising them of what in them they are to hold and observe, carrying to them and giving to them from their houses unleavened bread and meats ritually slaughtered, instructing them about the things from which they must refrain, as much in eating as in other things in order to observe their law, and persuading them as much as they can to hold and observe the law of Moses, convincing them that there is no other law or truth except for that one. [...]

Therefore, we, with the counsel and advice of prelates, great noblemen of our kingdoms, and other persons of learning and wisdom of our council, having taken deliberation about this matter, resolve to order the said Jews and Jewesses of our kingdoms to depart and never to return or come back to them or to any of them.<sup>80</sup>

In this passage, the sovereigns exhaustively summarized the ways in which the Jews have perpetuated their rites of worship and won converts from the Christians to their faith—a gravely spiritual crime. It is as if a whole people were being read their convictions and their sentence in criminal court. Here the Catholic Majesties expurgated

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<sup>80</sup> *Medieval Iberia: Readings from Christian, Muslim, and Jewish Sources*, ed. Olivia Remie Constable (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1997), 353-4.

The said kingdoms were "Castile, León, Aragon, Sicily, Granada, Toledo, Valencia, Galicia, the Balearic Islands, Seville, Sardinia, Córdoba, Corsica, Murcia, Jaén, of the Algarve, Algeciras, Gibraltar, and of the Canary Islands..." followed by various counties, duchies, and marquisates. *Ibid.*, 353.

stereotypic reproduction according to their own situation. If ritualized mythmaking in anthropology is tainted with the blood of European conquest, then so is its expurgation.

Thus, in order to exorcise one ghost, Obeyesekere became enthralled to another.

Our modern social sciences remain haunted, by the many spirits set loose in 1492.

***8.2 But even if our historiography has come a long way from the Spaniards, we are just like them in the sense that we, too, are products of our own time***

Alfred Tozzer's career as an archaeologist took him to Chichen Itza, where he mapped and studied the limestone pyramids there. His strategy of delegitimizing certain aspects of Spanish historiographies relies on pointing out absurd conclusions that fail to pass muster according to modern scientific standards. Chief among these absurdities is the thesis on pre-Spanish Christianity in the New World.

William F. Keegan and Corinne L. Hofman, postmodern archaeologists of the Caribbean, do double-duty. Like Tozzer, these fellow American archaeologists stake their scientific ability to speak the truth by striking down early modern Spanish research. In addition to that, they legitimize the whole project of Caribbean archaeology by implying that all early modern Spanish ethnographies are tainted by methodological imperfections.

"Beginning with Columbus's *diario*, a few Spaniards wrote reports that described interactions with indigenous

individuals and communities. All of these reports derive from specific contexts...[t]hey offered their interpretations of indigenous practices, and provide accounts of colonial policies dictated by the Spanish Crown. The tendency has been to accept these descriptions as ethnography... or ethnohistory... Yet the chroniclers had no training in anthropology or history. They wrote to support political and religious goals, and their interpretations were based solely on their knowledge of medieval European culture.<sup>81</sup>

Only in modern, scientific archaeology can the artifacts and objects left behind by the precolonial Caribbean peoples really speak for themselves, played off against the conquerors' gaze: "...to appropriately use Spanish descriptions, we need more empirical, archaeological evidence..."<sup>82</sup> Keegan and Hofman's project is understandable. They are trying to reform the discipline of archaeology and liberate it from what they see as a flawed and unscientific legacy.

However, their project also raises the specter of an impossible criterion. When has science ever been practiced in a manner free from "political and religious goals"?

Keegan and Hofman see their project in terms of creating scientific, non-political knowledge of the pre-Columbian Caribbean. This advances the status of modern archaeology over and above historiography based on tainted European materials. It also throws cold water on modern attempts to constitute politicized indigenous identities for

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<sup>81</sup> William F. Keegan and Corinne L. Hofman, *The Caribbean before Columbus* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2017), 243.

<sup>82</sup> Keegan and Hofman, *The Caribbean*, 255.

nationalist causes and federal protections in the United States—as with the creation of the "Taíno" identity among New York Puerto Ricans.

...nativist revivals are redefining "Taíno" to meet modern political agendas...A major objective is to gain U.S. federal recognition of indigenous status. The driving force behind "Nuevo Taíno" comes from Puerto Ricans who currently live in the New York metropolitan area...Yet we have shown that the indigenous population of Puerto Rico was never "Taíno"...<sup>83</sup>

The kind of scientific inquiry Keegan and Hofman commit to styles itself as objective and nonpartisan. It is unafraid to yield inconvenient evidence that obstructs myriad social and political agendas all over the world. Yet the vision of Caribbean precolonial history that this duo champions may in fact fail their own test, because it closely resembles those social and political values which became central to the United States' national identity during the Cold War.

Our goal has been to highlight and to sort through the diverse expressions that define their identities. This perspective involves embracing diversity and emphasizing the processes responsible for a multivalent Caribbean. An important component of which is the heightened

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 247.

participation of professionals and students from the islands.<sup>84</sup>

Their emphasis on diversity and contingency in the making of identity drinks deeply from the well of the American Establishment's response to the Soviet challenge throughout the Cold War conflict. For them, American values were characterized by individualism and freedom whereas Soviet values were characterized by collectivism and conformity.

Keegan and Hofman's rejection of competing paradigms also carries echoes of Cold War ideological conflict. Their view resonates with the critique of the Marxian development theory of economic systems, which move from feudal, to capitalist, to socialist, before achieving perfection in communism. They reject the "evolutionary framework" proposed by Rouse and Siegel because it implicitly staged "Taíno Culture" as the norm to which other Caribbean inhabitants "sought to obtain."<sup>85</sup> They also reject the "*modo de vida*" paradigm—"influenced significantly by Marxist theory"—which emphasized tracking "socioeconomic stages of development that progressed through a sequence of dialectical transformations."<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 259.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid., 247.

<sup>86</sup> Ibid., 20.

The kaleidoscope metaphor Keegan and Hofman use to describe their vision of the pluralistic and multivalent Caribbean also conjures up unintended associations with an agential, self-sovereign subject who freely associates with others insofar as it is beneficial to do so: "Indigenous Caribbean societies were dynamic combinations of elements that are constantly in motion."<sup>87</sup> The members of these societies "experimented" with various craft methods.

...even though the number of different elements was limited, individuals demonstrated enormous personal creativity and artistry in creating a vessel, while still preserving the modes of the culture.<sup>88</sup>

Here we hear unintentional echoes of the cultural logic of postmodernism, projected back into the prehistorical Caribbean past. The archeologists' sensitivity to detail, their focus on surfaces and aesthetics, on endless variegation, seem to have been cultivated in the milieu of postmodern American culture rather than in the broken pottery of the ancient ones.

What happens when Keegan and Hofman confront the very same homogeneity and repetitive design that inspired Irving Rouse and the *modo de vida* developmentalist paradigm? Even here, they find their clever ways to return our focus to variegation.

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid., 1.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 20.

There is obvious repetition in complex vessel shapes and in the motifs and designs used to decorate them, yet each vessel is distinctively unique.<sup>89</sup>

Keegan and Hofman even go so far as to explain homogeneity across artifacts in terms of exchange rather than in the imposition of a cultural norm:

There is homogeneity of style in Saladoid pottery that is a sign of intense interaction...<sup>90</sup>

Here, "homogeneity of style" emerges not from the rigidity of a single cultural norm, but the flexibility of pluralistic cultural interchange.

These Cold War congruences might be safely dismissed as coincidences, were it not for the fact that the United States historiography of this era aimed at an evangelical kind of historical knowledge that both described the past and also converted peoples around the world to democratic governments and capitalist economic programs. The goal was to steer the destiny of the whole world, and to protect politically naïve and recently independent nations from the false promises and heretical economics of the Communist bloc.

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<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 75.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 75.

These Cold War congruences might also be safely dismissed as coincidences, were it not also for the fact that the Caribbean became a region of great political significance to American strategic planners throughout the Cold War thanks to fears of Communist penetration into the Western Hemisphere. Not only was Fidel Castro's Cuba implicated in the Cuban Missile Crisis—the closest the world had ever come to nuclear warfare up to that point in history—but it was also a major player in promoting leftwing revolutions in Latin America and Africa independently of the Soviet Politburo's official line.

Thanks to this Cold War legacy, defining who the Caribbean peoples were in the precolonial past cannot help but have political implications, because this historical period continues to attract interest over who the Caribbean peoples really 'are' and who they should aim to always be.

As we will see in the following Chapter, American social scientists developed a master narrative of the Third World in which the European empires represented an aberration from their true course of development. Keegan and Hofman partake of this Cold War master narrative when they called for the liberation of Caribbean history from the falsehoods and simplifications set in place by European authors:

It is our opinion that archaeologists have placed too strong of a reliance on the European descriptions of life on the

islands. The observations of untrained observers have been wrongly elevated to the status of ethnohistory.<sup>91</sup>

European authors represented island life as exotic, despite the fact that many of them also lived on islands. Literary treatments vacillated between islands as Utopia...and Hell. Today, the islands remain exotic in the minds of the millions of tourists who visit annually. To accommodate these visitors, the past is rapidly being replaced by modern development...The tendency has been to homogenize the islands to provide these visitors with an aseptic experience. It would be a shame to do the same to the past.<sup>92</sup>

So it is that Keegan and Hofman frame the Europeans in the Caribbean as interlopers. When the Europeans are scholars, they project their values and politics onto the societies they are supposed to be describing. When the Europeans are tourists, they are distorting the Caribbean. Worse still, in both cases, the scholars and the tourists created perverse incentives for Caribbean peoples themselves to mutilate their historical and cultural heritage in order to cater to these foreign needs. It is implied then, that Keegan and Hofman are on the right side of Caribbean archaeology: their scientific methods are the only way to guarantee helping the Caribbean people know and become their true selves.

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 22.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 259-260.

But American military power casts a dark shadow in these islands, and it is impossible for these American archaeologists to ignore it. In spite of their mission to rescue Caribbean Studies from the triple distortions of religious, political, and capitalist foreigners, they cannot completely whitewash their enmeshment in those same forces:

We also need to consider the effects of the natural deposition of mollusk shells along the coast. In some cases these former beach deposits are well inland of their original location. Thus, some shell deposits are probably the product of natural forces. A natural deposit of shells on Medio Cay, Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, has been described in detail.<sup>93</sup>

Jameson warned us about the dark side of postmodernity:

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 35.

The source they refer to is much more explicit about discussing the political geography of dig sites in Guantanamo Bay, as well as how the military's presence "hampers archaeological investigation." Jonathan M. Hansen, *Guantánamo: An American History* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2011), 360 note 7. Hansen is summarizing the source in question, which I have not been able to obtain: Timothy R. Sara and William F. Keegan, *Archaeological Survey and Paleoenvironmental Investigations of Portions of U.S. Naval Station Guantánamo Bay Cuba* (Newport News, VA: Geo-Marine, 2004).

In these complaints, I am reminded of the ways the early modern Spanish friars complained about the conquistadors, not realizing that it was the conquistadors who protected those same friars from attack. As Ian Cowan puts it, "The soldiers, in short, contributed greatly to the spiritual conquest the missionaries were carrying out, just as the missionaries contributed greatly to the project the soldiers were carrying out. Yet these groups often failed to see how they were really working together, focusing instead on their rivalries and power struggles with each other." Jon Cowans, "41. Letter from Five Franciscans (1552)," in *Early Modern Spain: A Documentary History* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 69. It strikes me that with this criticism, the American archaeologists of the postmodern Caribbean are engaged in analogous struggles against their United States Southern Command counterparts.

Yet this is the point at which I must remind the reader of the obvious; namely, that this whole global, yet American, postmodern culture is the internal and superstructural expression of a whole new wave of American military and economic domination throughout the world: in this sense, as throughout class history, the underside of culture is blood, torture, death, and terror.<sup>94</sup>

By 2017, when Keegan and Hofman published their book, Guantánamo Bay had already become a global symbol of that same military domination.

So, what criteria could we even establish, to decide whether Keegan and Hofman's ideas are free from religious and political influences? If it is impossible to set such criteria, then isn't it unfair to burden early modern Spanish scholars with a standard that not even postmodern Americans can bear?

I do not have time here to discuss the connection in full, to render a stronger connection between American archaeology and American military power in the postmodern Caribbean. But we will see in the next chapter how archaeology, history, and hegemony intersect in a historical case study.

I have also done just enough to reveal another trend among professional historians, in which they stake their legitimacy on overcoming the limitations of their

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<sup>94</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 5.

intellectual ancestors. Sometimes this relationship becomes quasi-Oedipal. For Keegan and Hofman, Irving Rouse is the antagonist who has captured the true essence of Caribbean prehistory in his normative theory of Rousian series. Only when they kill him—intellectually, of course—can they liberate that essential prehistory and marry it for themselves.

Other archaeologists are less Oedipal, but no less interested in making old generations obsolete. L. Antonio Curet, a contemporary of Keegan and Hofman in the field of Caribbean archaeology, deploys a variety of strategies to claim a space for his interpretative framework. For him, the problem of understanding precolonial Caribbean history on its own terms rests with the word Taíno. Among its many issues are that it is a seductively convenient concept which, unfortunately, obscures more than it reveals. Taíno does not match up with the archaeological evidence, no matter how hard scholars try to make it fit. It overestimates the homogeneity of tools, materials, methods, and styles indicated by the artifacts and underestimates their heterogeneity and leads archaeologists astray into fruitless generalizations about the essence of the precolonial peoples there.

Furthermore, Taíno has a confused and difficult etymological history, borne out of a misunderstanding. Curet takes the position that Taíno is an Arawak word that ought to be glossed as "good guys", as a way to signal that they were friendly to the

European arrivals as opposed to their enemy bad guys.<sup>95</sup> Columbus and his men misunderstood the term to indicate the name of the peoples in their native language.

Finally, Curet converges with Keegan and Hofman's perspective that Taíno is hopelessly laden with political and cultural baggage due to the circumstances of a revitalization in Puerto Rican identity politics. Curet also suggests an unfortunate anti-black strain in the Taíno cultural 'revival' because it tends to overshadow "the African influence, despite the fact that large parts of the population [of Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic] show strong cultural and biological connections [with it]."<sup>96</sup>

All these things are important and paint an overall picture of Taíno as a concept that is epistemologically, etymologically, and politically unusable for serious scholars of Caribbean history. It is an illusion, and therefore has no place in scientific archaeology—especially in a field that has grappled for so long with the legacy of the Spaniards' evangelical historiography.

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<sup>95</sup> "Once they met the Spaniards, they used the term *tayno* or *tainon* to mean that they were 'good'...something similar to the traditional 'we come in peace.'" L. Antonio Curet, "The Taíno: Phenomena, Concepts, and Terms," *Ethnohistory* 61:3 (Summer 2014), 470.

Yucatán is another famous plausible instance of misinterpretation leading to a proper noun. It has now become the stuff of social scientific legend. Tzvetan Todorov uses it to support his semiotic analysis in *The Conquest of America*, transl. Richard Howard (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 99. Alfred Tozzer offers a much more comprehensive survey of the many different early modern accounts of the origin of the name Yucatan. These range from corruptions of sensible translations—such as from *lucam citam*, "land of the peccary"—to the legendary story of "We do not understand what you say." Tozzer, *Landa's Relacion*, 4-5, footnote 17.

<sup>96</sup> Curet, 473.

The last, and most portentous move Curet makes in order to de-legitimize Taíno actually applies to a recent attempt by Reniel Rodríguez Ramos to reform this concept. Ramos uses "Taínoness" to try to harmonize the homogeneous and heterogeneous aspects of the archaeological record. His use of the adjectival suffix -ness is supposed to remove the objectification of Taíno which the noun form of the word implies. Curet, however, is cautious about the emancipatory potential of "Taínoness" for social scientists:

Moreover, if [Taínoness is] applied incorrectly, we may run into the same epistemological problems that concepts such as Taíno, culture, and Rousian series have. These are concepts that are normally applied from top to bottom and are seen as determinant of social behavior. They are concepts that were developed in the first half of the twentieth century where cultural norms took a privileged position in determining people's behavior. Therefore, members of the same culture (ethnographic or archaeological) will follow the same behavioral tendencies imposed by the cultural norms. This type of reasoning is a trademark of normativism that has haunted the discipline at large for decades and that continues to be prevalent in the Caribbean...<sup>97</sup>

Here, Curet casts Taínoness (and Taíno, as well as several other unworkable terms) into the ash heap of history. They were all products of their time, a moment in the

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<sup>97</sup> Curet, "The Taíno," 482.

"early twentieth century where cultural norms took a privileged position in determining people's behavior." There are two implications here. One is that concepts belonging to the early twentieth century should stay in that century. Two is that the early twentieth century scholars were naïve and projected their values onto the precolonial past.

To implication one, Curet's century—the twenty-first century—deserves concepts of its own. He adopts "symbolic reservoirs" from Africanist archaeology as a politically neutral, semantically flexible, and empirically capacious concept to replace or supplement Taíno-ness. There is nothing wrong with every age reinventing history in its image.

But to implication two, the idea that the early twentieth century scholars were ventriloquizing with their subjects, there are big problems. Using Empathy (Chapter 1.2, "Change"), we know that we can reverse these roles. If the early twentieth century could speak, then what would it say to Curet as the representative of our twenty-first century? It could concede that it saw the world in terms of cultural normativity. But having made that concession, it could reverse the logic of his criticism. The early twentieth century would accuse Curet of repeating its scholarly sin: you are merely projecting the assumptions of the early twenty-first century into the precolonial Caribbean past. Whereas my assumptions were that top-down, centralized cultural norms determine human behavior, your assumptions are that bottom-up, decentralized, individual selves determine human behavior.

Indeed, this is how Curet recommends using symbolic reservoirs and Taíno-ness as analytical concepts. They work best when used critically rather than normatively, at small scales to answer concrete questions rather than at large scales to arrive at sweeping generalizations. Symbolic reservoirs and Taíno-ness identify an agential and individualized interest within a set of stable, seemingly homogeneous core values. They culminate in asking questions about decisions to use or to ignore different resources within the reservoir to legitimate certain actions or to discourage alternatives:

What kind of interactions were involved in the development of the spectrum or the reservoir and between whom? What particular ideological elements are included and why? Why are some ideological elements emphasized in one region or in a period more than others? What were the social and political conditions that led to that decision, and how were the symbols adopted within this panorama? Who made those decisions? Who was affected by the decisions?<sup>98</sup>

Curet's vision centers an agential precolonial Caribbean subject. This subject emphasizes some elements of their core values over others, in order to arrive at some kind of decision that may or may not have had community repercussions. At the heart of this historiographical construct is someone who can choose elements of their past in order to serve the needs of their present. It is a good definition for our times, and I am

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<sup>98</sup> Ibid., 483.

happy for Caribbean archaeologists who can make use of it for their research. But what is true for us, does not necessarily have to be true for our descendants.

I would like to also emphasize that Curet's construct acts within a context which resembles the cultural logic of postmodernism, as told by Fredric Jameson. First, the evaporation of a singular cultural norm gives rise to a dispersal of diverse material practices and styles.

If the ideas of a ruling class were once the dominant (or hegemonic) ideology of bourgeois society, the advanced capitalist countries today are now a field of stylistic and discursive heterogeneity without a norm.<sup>99</sup>

Without reference to a norm to anchor experience, without reference to a unitary self that regulates expression, the postmodern subject has nowhere else to go. They are forced to grope for similarities and differences, to bind heterogeneous discourses and styles together. The goal for this cultural algorithm is not to make sense of them (because sense, in the sense of deep, interpretive understanding, is becoming hollowed and flattened out). The goal is to order these styles and discourses, and commodities too, into categories of the familiar and the unfamiliar.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 17.

<sup>100</sup> Adorno discussed this phenomenon in what he saw as the decline of musical culture. The new criteria for music as a commodity was not "is it good," or "is it artistic," but now, "do I like it?" and "does it remind me of what I already like?" Theodor Adorno, "On the Fetish Character in Music

One of the cases Curet uses, to illustrate what symbolic reservoirs can do for Caribbean archaeology, concerns variegation in the design of ceremonial stone courts in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic.

The concepts of Taínoness and symbolic reservoir can be used in a simple way to 'explain' the similarities and differences of ceremonial architecture in the region. It is clear that many of the islands have at least a few examples of specialized, ceremonial structure and space. At the same time, they vary in number, construction materials, size, shape, and location between islands and even between regions in the same island. Thus this variability shows how this concept of ceremonial space has been adopted by many but not by all groups and manipulated, reinterpreted, and molded to the political and social interests of the actors. In other words, the similarity in structures and their accompanying paraphernalia is because these 'symbols' belong to the same spectrum, but their differences are because different individuals, factions, or power groups have manipulated their uses, meanings,

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and the Regression of Listening," *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J. M. Bernstein (London; New York: Routledge, 1991).

In everyday life, we can find ample examples in the field of algorithmic advertising. "Users who bought this product, also bought..." and "Users who watched this movie, also watched..." Household names Netflix™ and Amazon™ are now famous for employing these systems to increase user engagement with their services.

I am grateful to Steven Rings for introducing me to Adorno's thought in an introductory seminar on music theory—in the form of "Bach Defended Against his Devotees." I am also grateful to Catherine Liu, for helping me to understand the context behind Adorno's intellectual arc in her seminar on "The Frankfurt School."

and functions within the sociopolitical structure differently.<sup>101</sup>

Curet then discusses specific variations of the placement of petroglyph idols (*cemis*) between ceremonial courts in Puerto Rico and the Dominican Republic. Some are "concentrated" in the center of the plaza, some are "usually found outside the plaza."<sup>102</sup> He concludes that these different spatial arrangements and social implications may be "the result of different political manipulations or other historical processes."<sup>103</sup> Curet frames this as an intellectual innovation that stands to contribute to the historiography of the Caribbean. He is not necessarily wrong to do so—but it is also symptomatic of our times, that the attunement of scholars to these variations in artifacts and architectures is the result of growing up postmodern, becoming sensitized to aesthetic differences because material culture has changed under the weight of new dynamics in commodity production. As we saw, Keegan and Hofman constructed a similar order of things when they offered their own classification schemes for Pre-Columbian pottery, based on exchange and individual creativity. Taken together, Curet, Keegan, and Hofman all evoke Jameson's observations on aesthetic production in late capitalism:

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<sup>101</sup> Curet, "The Taíno," 486.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid.*

What has happened is that aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally: the frantic economic urgency of producing fresh waves of ever more novel-seeming goods (from clothing to airplanes), at ever greater rates of turnover, now assigns an increasingly essential structural function and position to aesthetic innovation and experimentation.<sup>104</sup>

Is this the progress of an empirical discipline, taking steps ever closer to the past as it essentially happened? No, I think that Caribbean archaeology is taking a postmodern turn, in which modern norms have been dissolved into decentralized actors appropriating from a spectrum of shared objects and practices. What seems to be new trends in a revitalizing field, is in fact evidence that postmodernity has reconstituted academia in its image, just as it has so many other things.

Finally, my critique of Hofman and Keegan, about how American military hegemony in the Caribbean cannot help but inflect the scholarship Americans produce about the Caribbean, applies just as well to Curet. Curet borrowed the idea of the "symbolic reservoir" from Roderick McIntosh, archaeologist of the prehistoric Niger River Delta. As we will see in the coming chapters, McIntosh's "symbolic reservoir" as a universal for studying African legitimated American hegemony in Western Africa and fell neatly in line with its strategic vision for that region. There is no separating scientific knowledge from great power politics.

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<sup>104</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 4-5.

### ***8.3 But even if we aren't like the Spaniards, and we aren't mere products of our own time, future historians will still try to make us obsolete***

Even if Curet and Keegan and Hofman were not riding the postmodern wave into the twenty-first century, even if they were not expressing the spirit of our times, and even if they achieved the incredible goal of writing science free from political and religious goals, Empathy still teaches us that there are future historians awaiting their places in the republic of letters. Right now, those future historians are liquids, pooling in mother's womb. But someday they will replace us as Caribbeanist social scientists, and they will scoff at what they will find, in the dead letters of our publications. And they will say, "look, here is how the early twenty-first century thought about the past. Look at how naïve they were."

The legitimation strategies contemporary social scientists wield today, will turn against them tomorrow. Just as Curet tried to banish Rousian series to the ash heap of history, so some new Caribbean historian will come along and toss out Curet's symbolic reservoirs. What will the 22nd-century social scientists have to say about us? Doubtless, it will involve criticism. Like us, they will till and sow in the orchards of knowledge and uproot our cherished apple trees as if mere dandelion weeds. After all, we are the ones who will teach their parents how we did it, in our own youth.

Let us then be humble, when we plow up the old Spaniards' trees to plant our precious seeds.

## 9. Before American Hegemony

*"Can a nation organized and governed such as ours endure? That is the real question. Have we the nerve and the will? Can we carry through in an age where we will witness not only new breakthroughs in weapons of destruction—but also a race for mastery of the sky and the rain, the ocean and the tides, the far side of space and the inside of men's minds?"*

—John F. Kennedy<sup>105</sup>

*"As the communists pressed to influence and to control international organizations and movements, mass communications, and cultural institutions, the United States responded by involving American private institutions and individuals in the secret struggle over minds, institutions and ideas."*

—The Church Commission,  
Final Report<sup>106</sup>

At the end of the war against the Axis Powers, the victors conferred to put the world back together. Time and again their discussions ran aground.

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<sup>105</sup> Papers of John F. Kennedy. Pre-Presidential Papers. Senate Files. Speeches and the Press. Speech Files, 1953-1960. "The New Frontier," acceptance speech of Senator John F. Kennedy, Democratic National Convention, 15 July 1960. JFKSEN-0910-015. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Videorecording and transcript accessed online at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/acceptance-of-democratic-nomination-for-president> courtesy of the Library.

<sup>106</sup> Church Committee Final Report, Book 1, page 179, accessed online at <https://www.senate.gov/about/powers-procedures/investigations/church-committee.htm> courtesy of the United States Senate.

Who represented the legitimate government of Poland—the rightwing exiles in London or the leftwing survivors in Warsaw? When were the powers to withdraw their troops from occupied Germany, and what kinds of reparations were acceptable and just without creating the conditions of another Weimar crisis? What did the imperial centers, now physically and fiscally broken, owe to the colonized peoples who fought on their behalf and were now supplying the labor to rebuild Europe under the Marshall Plan?

Out from this chaos, the United States of America (USA) and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) stepped forth to stabilize the world on their own terms. All methods were on the table, ranging from overt military occupation to covertly radicalizing national political parties. The era generated so many abbreviations to make sense of this massive disorientation: soft power, Marxist-Leninism, hearts and minds, The Establishment, garrison state, mutually-assured destruction, brinksmanship, military-industrial complex—indeed, even the 'Cold War' itself.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> The speculator and statesman extraordinaire Bernard Baruch coined the term 'Cold War' in an address before the South Carolina House of Representatives. The occasion was a celebration in his honor. In his speech, he emphasized how work—economic productivity in industry—would be the key to stabilizing the Allied nations after the war and defeating leftwing challengers to the emerging status quo.

"Make no mistake: our military lines are no stronger than the industry behind them. Unless we work, we shall see a vast inflation; unless we work, we shall not be able to maintain our claim to power...

"Let us not be deceived—we are today in the midst of a cold war. Our enemies are to be found abroad and at home."

The elites of this world saw themselves as waging an unprecedented conflict. For the first time in human history, the most powerful national states of the age possessed arsenals capable of destroying the entire world many times over. In this atomic weapons standoff, the concept of "culture" acquired a new aspect. Under circumstances when the doomsday clock ticked to midnight, when nuclearized warfare hung like a different kind of 'nightmare on the brains of the living,' culture became a safer target. So, a new battlefield opened up to the global contest: war on the "inside of men's minds."

Thus, history was enlisted to fight the Cold War, to study and understand cultures so that the U.S. establishment could fashion respectful alliances with friendly states. For their part, the states themselves thirsted for foreign capital and expertise, to end the desolation wrought by imperialist plunder. The African continent was the principal site of this new phenomena—this era of decolonization. The former colonies took many paths to nationalization—some reluctantly, others eagerly, and many fell prey to fierce wars for territory and independence.<sup>108</sup> In this chaotic situation, the US-

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Bernard Baruch, "Address by the Honorable Bernard M. Baruch," *Journal of the House of Representatives of the First Session of the 87th General Assembly of the State of South Carolina being the Regular Session Beginning Tuesday, January 14, 1947* (16 April 1947), 1085.

<sup>108</sup> For overviews of the global Cold War that do not take the US and USSR positions as starting points, see Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War: Third World Interventions and the Making of Our Times* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005); and see Paul Thomas Chamberlin, *The Cold War's Killing Fields: Rethinking the Long Peace* (New York, NY: HarperCollins Publishers, 2018). I am grateful to Kelsey Zavelo for the Westad reference and to Adriane Lentz-

American social scientists and historians applied their professional skills to navigate these brackish waters. Naturally, they were called upon to answer one fundamental question: If the regeneration of independent Africa was to take place, then what were African societies like prior to the European empires? Hence professional history was drawn up into the Cold War episteme: the regeneration of Africa would have to take into account what Africa once was, and where it now stood as a result of decolonization.

### **9.1 Noon: *The Sickle and the Cross***

The intellectual leaders of this noontime stage in the Cold War were the economic historian Walt Whitman Rostow and the economist Max Millikan, two members of the economics faculty at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. Their influential "modernization theory" set the tone for the Eisenhower administration's dealings with non-aligned nations around the world and eventually became a concrete paradigm for later administrations. Rostow was concerned that the past presidential administrations had focused too much on Europe and neglected the rest of the world. This meant that Latin America, Asia, and Africa were free for the Communist taking.

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Smith for inviting Paul Chamberlin to our History Department for a guest lecture. He discussed his *killing fields* book with us on 19 September 2019.

For the variety of paths to nationalization, see for instance Frederick Cooper, *Citizenship between Empire and Nation: Remaking France and French Africa, 1945-1960* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2014). Thanks to Adam Mestyan for teaching this text in his seminar on global sovereignties.

The outbreak of the Korean War gave Rostow the proof he needed in order to gain influence in Washington DC. The Truman Administration and their South Korean ally—the militarist rightwing regime of Syngman Rhee—were taken by surprise by the North Korean invasion. Rostow interpreted the event to indicate that the Soviet Russians and Communist Chinese were ready and willing to conquer the world through aggressive military takeovers, unless the United States mounted a campaign of its own on behalf of the free world.

It has become a commonplace that we are in the midst of a great world revolution. For centuries the bulk of the world's population has been politically inert. Outside America and Western Europe, and even in parts of the latter, until recently the pattern of society remained essentially fixed in the mold of low-productivity rural life centered on isolated villages. The possibility of change for most people seemed remote, and political activity was confined to an extremely small elite. Within the past forty years two world wars and a phenomenal increase in the ease and effectiveness of communication have fundamentally altered the perspectives of hundreds of millions of people.

...This revolution is rapidly exposing previously apathetic peoples to the possibility of change.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Max Millikan and W.W. Rostow, *A Proposal: Key to an Effective Foreign Policy* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1957), 4-5.

After Truman, Rostow convinced President Eisenhower to take decisive action against the spread of left-wing movements in the Third World. Rostow and Millikan's overall position was that if appeasement failed against Hitler's government during the Second World War, then appeasement would certainly fail against the Communist regimes.

Rostow also saw the peoples of the Third World as tutees of democracy and the free market. Although they may have lacked political experience, they had the will to modernize. However, they needed capital and guidance in order to make modern democratic and capitalist governments feasible. If the United States did not provide this guidance, then the newly political Third World peoples would turn to violence, the kind of disruption which he believed the Communists fed upon:

The danger is that increasing numbers of people will become convinced that their new aspirations can be realized only through violent change and the renunciation of democratic institutions. That danger has no single cause. It is inherent in the revolutionary process. But it is greatly increased by the existence of communism—not because of any authentic attractions in its ideology but because the Communists have recognized their opportunities to exploit the revolution of rising expectations by picturing communism as the road to social opportunity or economic improvement or individual dignity and achievement or national self-respect, whichever fitted a given situation.<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 5-6.

Thus, Rostow and Millikan saw Communists as opportunists, racketeers, and confidence men. They exploited desperate and fearful people who, lacking political experience, did not know how to distinguish between trustworthy and nefarious allies. The third world did not understand the danger of the Communist threat because they lacked the experience to understand it, because they were desperately impatient for solutions to their profound and legitimate crises. The leaders of the third world, in Rostow's vision, were not capable of realizing that Communism would betray them and lead them into long term enslavement to the Soviet Politburo. There were self-interested reasons too. For Rostow, if the Establishment left the Third World to its own devices and focused exclusively on their own issues and the European ones, then America would forfeit a great chance to spread freedom abroad and may find itself isolated and diminished in the world.

So, the social scientists and diplomats behind Rostow and Millikan set out to break the pattern of isolationism that had followed every previous war in their history. They joined forces with the major foundations for supporting social scientific research: the Carnegie, Rockefeller, and Ford. There was a world to win, and they needed to learn about that world. If the third world needed to develop democratic and capitalist institutions adapted for their local needs, then it was incumbent that the American experts on economic development would need to know what those local conditions

were. Among them came the anthropologists and the historians, who were tasked with understanding the cultural and the historical dynamics of those local conditions. Once understood, the American Establishment would be well placed to support organic, homegrown varieties of democracy and free trade the world over.

But this still begged the question: how, pragmatically speaking, could the Establishment achieve these goals? How was one to introduce politically naïve peoples—who had undeniable expectations and national pride—to the realities and prospects of mature political consciousness?

Rostow and Millikan proposed that the United States of America needed to act as a beacon for the world, a nation for others to emulate. As a corollary to that, the United States needed to offer a set of solutions to local problems and a set of values that would appeal to the third world. It would not do to simply abide by military force and material wealth: if the United States was going to defeat Communism, it would need to offer an alluring global vision and moral principles to live by. America would have to define itself by what it *was*, rather than defining itself by what it was *not*.

The fight against international communism is neither sufficiently meaningful nor sufficiently related to the current hopes of most of the peoples of the

underdeveloped areas to mobilize their political activity...it is a fight against and not a fight *for* something.<sup>111</sup>

What were those values going to be? Liberty, responsiveness to popular aspirations, stability "in the sense that they are capable of rapid change without violence," and sharing political power widely throughout society.<sup>112</sup> Backing this was Rostow and Millikan's patriotic vision of a triumphant United States of America. To them, their nation had achieved the best of all possible worlds and needed to share the elements of that success with the world:

Our great opportunity lies in the fact that we have developed more successfully than any other nation the social, political, and economic techniques for realizing widespread popular desires for change without either compulsion or social disorganization.<sup>113</sup>

So it was that because the Americans had found the secret to growth with stability, the secret of change without violence—according to Rostow and Millikan—the American government had the duty to lead the rest of the world in this direction.

When John F. Kennedy came to power, it was Rostow who advised the new President and wrote several of his speeches. Time and again, the themes of *A Proposal*

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 8.

shined through in sundry presidential addresses to the nation and the world at-large. Rostow and Kennedy wanted to show the world that American values were aligned with the values of the peoples of the third world, to prove that casting their lot with the 'free world' was their best hope of happiness and fulfillment in this world. So, they looked back to history, to the mythologies of the American Founding, to link the revolutions of the twentieth century to the revolutions of the eighteenth:

But as we welcome the spread of the American revolution to other lands, we must also remember that our own struggle—the revolution which began in Philadelphia in 1776, and in Caracas in 1811—is not yet finished. Our hemisphere's mission is not yet completed. For our unfulfilled task is to demonstrate to the entire world that man's unsatisfied aspiration for economic progress and social justice can best be achieved by free men working within a framework of democratic institutions.<sup>114</sup>

So it was that the American Establishment wanted to align itself with and guide worldwide revolutionary movements. Revolution itself acquired the connotation of prestige—rightwing nationalists and leftwing nationalists rallied around this concept, even though they often spilled blood over what this was supposed to mean for their national governments. The Americans, the Soviets, the Cubans, and the Communist

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<sup>114</sup> John F. Kennedy, "Address to Diplomatic Corps of Latin America" (13 March 1961), Miller Center of the University of Virginia, accessed online at <https://millercenter.org/the-presidency/presidential-speeches/march-13-1961-address-diplomatic-corps-latin-america>.

Chinese all competed with one another to prove that they were the most supportive sponsors of worldwide revolution. Anything short of revolutionary awakening smacked of racist isolationism or imperialism. In this ideologically competitive environment, Kennedy mobilized history in order to position America as a truly revolutionary country that had matured and reflected on its experience, unlike the brash and impertinent Soviet Union.

Kennedy's vision hewed to the Establishment line, but outside the halls of federal power, intellectuals and academicians developed their own understanding of the Cold War situation. For Malcolm X, the problem was not that black people were coming to political consciousness for the first time, but that they had never been heeded by white colonists until now. It was white ignorance and disregard that created the impression that the third world had only recently arisen from a semi-feudal stupor.

For him, America had betrayed its own ideals by choosing slavery over freedom. The Yankees had no right to guide the revolutions of the twentieth century. Drawing from Third World political discourse, Malcolm X championed "a truly black revolution" that promised solidarity for the oppressed peoples of Africa, Asia, and Latin America.<sup>115</sup> Europe and North America had no place in his vision for the future. The wretched of the

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<sup>115</sup> Malcolm X, "13.11 Malcolm X on the United States and the World, 1964," reprinted in *The Cold War: A History in Documents and Eyewitness Accounts*, eds. Jussi Hanhimäki and Odd Arne Westad (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), 437.

earth had had their freedom until Europe came, and it was high time to restore their venerable power and self-possession before it was snatched away again by capitalists and communists alike.

So, history became a weapon of the weak. It established the basis for their past claims to culture, civilization, freedom, and wealth. They were not fumbling their way out of the darkness of feudal history, but proud ancestors of esteemed civilizations, who had been temporarily laid low by rapacious imperialists. Malcolm X was joining a global referendum on world history. In Nigeria, five years before he had even joined the Nation of Islam, the feminist activist Fumilayo Ransome-Kuti glossed over centuries of history to contextualize British misrule:

Before the British advent in Nigeria, life there was mainly agricultural, and there was division of labour between men and women. The men cultivated the land and sowed, and it was chiefly the duty of women to reap. Women owned property, traded and exercised considerable political and social influence in society. They were responsible for crowning the Kings on Coronation days. Whatever disabilities there were then endured both by men and women alike. With the advent of British rule, slavery was abolished, and Christianity introduced into many parts of the country, but instead of the women being educated and

assisted to live like human beings their condition has deteriorated.<sup>116</sup>

The Guyanese historian Walter Rodney wrote the definitive treatise on how those rapacious imperialists sullied the majestic African civilizations. That book—*How Europe Underdeveloped Africa*—included a chapter on precolonial history to establish contrast against the destructive effects of European colonization.

Rodney challenged the Rostowian view that Africans were emerging from feudal stagnation thanks to new expectations raised by telecommunications from the West. That self-serving narrative failed to recognize what was actually a highly stable and peaceful dynamism within the African civilizations.

For Rodney, the African civilizations were too diverse for broad generalizations. They tended towards "communalism" rather than feudalism, which meant that families rather than strong, centralized states dominated the continent. Violence was infrequent, merchant life vibrant, foodstuffs diverse, handicrafts elaborate and skillful, and slavery nonexistent.<sup>117</sup> The only kind of class struggle in communalism according to Rodney was that between the elders and the youth, but even this "was not the type that caused

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<sup>116</sup> Funmilayo Ransome-Kuti, "We Had Equality Until Britain Came," *Daily Worker* (London), August 18, 1947 (4), reprinted in *The Essential Feminist Reader*, ed. Estelle B. Freedman (New York: Modern Library, 2007), 248.

<sup>117</sup> "...the African diet was previously more varied, being based on a more diversified agriculture than was possible under colonialism"; "...superior brand of red leather...superb local cloths..." Walter Rodney, *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London; New York: Verso, 2018), 287, 47.

violent revolution."<sup>118</sup> What might appear to be stagnation was in fact peaceful equilibrium in action.

Communalism and socialism, moreover, were a natural fit for one another.

Rodney defined these terms in such a way as to advance his argument for developing Africa along socialist lines. Socialism would take what was best about communalism while correcting its shortcomings in the modern world:

Socialism has reinstated the economic equality of communalism, but communalism fell apart because of low economic productivity and scarcity. Socialism aims at and has significantly achieved the creation of plenty, so that the principle of egalitarian distribution becomes consistent with the satisfaction of the wants of all members of society.<sup>119</sup>

For Rodney, there was no real alternative—'free market' or capitalist development were just symbolic smokescreens for a new phase of imperialism, which he dubbed "neo-colonialism."<sup>120</sup> The United States was hardly free from this taint—Rodney was wary of the legacy of American slavery, the contemporary underdevelopment of

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<sup>118</sup> Ibid., 44.

<sup>119</sup> "The reason behind this lack of scale is because of the small batch production of goods for household use and the labor-intensity of the process. Although the quality was excellent...[i]t was at the level of scale that African manufactures had not made a breakthrough." Ibid., 12.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 236.

Latin America, and the emergence of similar exploitative practices in US-African relations:

In recent times, they [the Western European capitalists] were joined, and to some extent replaced, by capitalists from the United States; and for many years now even the workers of those metropolitan countries have benefited from the exploitation and underdevelopment of Africa.<sup>121</sup>

In short, for Rodney and his followers, the United States was picking up where the European imperialists left off. Reconstructing communalism was not an option because communalism was not a mode of production sufficient to meet popular demands for goods and services. Socialism was not merely the only way forward. It was good, too, because it continued the values of egalitarian distribution of wealth inherent to communalism, while correcting the limitations of communalism in achieving productive scale.<sup>122</sup> So it was that socialism would benefit all Africans without exploiting

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<sup>121</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>122</sup> Rodney's activism and scholarship impacted the international black power movement, including young American academicians. Angela Y. Davis (now emerita at UCLA, Department of Gender Studies) described meeting Rodney in 1973 during her first trip to Dar es Salaam:

"...I witnessed firsthand for a brief period of time the revolutionary urgency generated within the scholarly and activist circles surrounding him...at the University of Dar es Salaam on the relation between African Liberation and global contestations to capitalism..." Angela Y. Davis, "Preface," in *How Europe Underdeveloped Africa* (London; New York: Verso, 2018), x.

For her activism, Davis would eventually win the Lenin Peace Prize. On 5 December 1979, she received it personally, at a ceremony in Moscow. The Associated Press has uploaded a short videorecord of the event. AP Archive, "UPITN 5 12 79 ANGELA DAVIS RECEIVES LENIN

them and would preserve the cohesion and integrity of the African way of life while enhancing it for modern expectations.

The middle Cold War—the period characterized by Domino Theory, decolonization, and détente—offered a variety of ideological frameworks to historians and social scientists. Academicians and intellectuals around the world would then use empirical methods and theoretical frameworks to validate their ideological positions.

For Rostow, Millikan, and their colleagues at the CIA-funded Center for International Studies, the Third World national leaders were politically juvenile. Inexperience, high expectations, a desperate need for capital and sovereign legitimacy, combined to make the Third World leaders vulnerable to the big, false promises of the 'Sino-Soviet Bloc.'<sup>123</sup> For Rostow and his colleagues, Communism was a false doctrine of

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PEACE PRIZE," *YouTube* (24 July 2015), accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=24iCqYQPpPA>

For an intellectual biography of Walter Rodney, see Leo Zellig, *A Revolutionary for our Time: The Walter Rodney Story* (Chicago, IL: Haymarket Books, 2022).

<sup>123</sup> Vice President Nixon used the 'politically naïve Third Worlder' framework to characterize Fidel Castro, after the latter's first state visit to Washington DC. In his report, Nixon summarized: "It was this almost slavish subservience to the prevailing majority opinion—the voice of the mob—rather than his naïve attitude toward Communism and his obvious lack of understanding of even the most elementary economic principles which concerned me most in evaluating what kind of a leader he might eventually turn out to be. [...]"

"...he is either incredibly naïve about Communism or under Communist discipline—my guess is the former and as I have already implied his ideas as to how to run a government or an economy are less developed than those of almost any world figure I have met in fifty countries." *The Cold War*, 388, 390.

development. It was threatening only because it was seductive, predatory, and fundamentally destructive to making the world safe for America.<sup>124</sup> For this camp also, the pre-colonial history of the Third World was neither helpful nor important to solving the problems of the present. It was stagnant and feudal and could not be recreated in the modern world. Instead, in their eyes, American history was the key to modelling a new set of global values. America had succeeded in fulfilling its revolutionary aims and had created the most successful society humanity had ever achieved. For them, America's history held the answers to the world's postcolonial future.

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<sup>124</sup> The American Establishment's framework for seeing Russian Communism as a fundamentally destructive force in the world began with the Woodrow Wilson administration. They took umbrage with the Soviet Union's stated aims of toppling elected governments and empowering Communist parties around the world. One of the major problems Wilson had with this position was that it disrupted the expectation that diplomats bargained with one another with mutual respect for one another's government. This justified Wilson's perception of the USSR as a rogue state which aimed to disrupt the extant international world order rather than a willing and cooperative participant in the community of sovereign nations.

The Wilson Administration concluded that it would not recognize the Bolshevik government because "...the existing regime in Russia is based upon the negation of every principle of honor and good faith, and every usage and convention, underlying the whole structure of international law; the negation, in short, of every principle upon which it is possible to base harmonious and trustful relations...The responsible leaders of the regime have frequently and openly boasted that they are willing to sign agreements and undertakings with foreign Powers while not having the slightest intention of observing such undertakings or carrying out such agreements. This attitude...they base upon the theory that no compact or agreement made with a non-Bolshevist government can have any moral force for them." reprinted in *The Cold War*, 9.

For their part, the Bolsheviks adopted a strategy of turning workers in the bourgeois states against their rulers. This began as a way to distract and withdraw their militaries from the Russian Civil War, so as to prevent foreign aid and coalition forces from supporting the Tsarist loyalists. It evolved into a general program of securing Soviet Russia's sovereignty in a hostile international arena. See "Lenin to American Workers" in *Ibid.*, 3-5 and "Stalin on International Communism" in *Ibid.*, 10-13.

Yet for the opposition—including Walter Rodney and Malcolm X—the Third World's precolonial past held the answers to the Third World's postcolonial future. For them, capitalism and democracy were the false doctrines of development. Those universals were mere smokescreens for imperialist exploitation, just as Christianity and the civilizing mission were smokescreens for imperialism in ages past. Indeed, the Cold War bore witness to a revival of Islam among Black Power activists who wished to repudiate Christianity as a faith tainted by its association with slavery and the white power movement—a phenomenon that ushered Malcolm X into the fold of the Nation of Islam.<sup>125</sup> Likewise, Socialism was one way that the Third World could pursue modernization on its own terms and repudiate the power of capitalist imperialism.

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<sup>125</sup> Black Power activists signaled their political consciousness and ideological affiliations through symbolic name changes. Stokely Carmichael repudiated his 'slave name' and embraced Kwame Ture, constructing a kind of black authenticity rooted in his vision of a precolonial, powerful African past. Malcolm Little became Malcolm X for similar reasons—but chose instead to emphasize how his real family name was irreparably destroyed due to saltwater slavery. He changed his name again to El Hajj Malik El Shabazz as he started to develop his own personal relationship to the global Islamic community, independently from the strictures of Elijah Muhammad's Nation of Islam. For more on Malcolm X's changing relationship with Islam, see for instance Malcolm X, *The Autobiography of Malcolm X, with the assistance of Alex Haley* (New York: Grove Press, 1965).

Black Muslims had ample Scriptural examples for turning away from the Christian faith. Throughout the New Testament, the apostles counsel slaves to obey their masters out of respect for the authority of God over all humankind and out of the importance of enhancing human harmony.

Still others sought to redeem Christianity, in order not to judge the faith by those who manipulated it for worldly gain. The Reverend Doctor Martin Luther King Jr. chose to keep both his name and his faith. In the Scripture, it is written: "Were you a slave when you were called? Don't let it trouble you—although if you can gain your freedom, do so. For the one who was a slave when called to faith in the Lord is the Lord's freed person, similarly, the one who was free when called is Christ's slave." 1 Corinthians NIV 7:21-23.

Third World leaders were divided on whether the Soviet Union and China were trustworthy partners, or just new vultures waiting to dip their beaks in African blood. Nevertheless, they agreed fundamentally on the idea that economic development needed to happen on their own terms.

### **9.2 *Twilight: The Star-Spangled Sky***

The fragile international order characterized by détente and decolonization could not last. National states in the Third World pursued regional hegemony and flirted with *realpolitik*, paying little heed to the ideological distortions this could cause. They appealed to the Great Powers to aid them in these bids for power. Sometimes they played both powers off of one another in a cynical attempt to bid up commitments in terms of financial and technological aid.

In many cases, the Powers themselves only reluctantly got involved, but then misinterpreted each other's international commitments as proof of eager aggression. In this confounding smog of fear and misinformation, the US establishment and the Soviet Politburo were primed to accuse one another of betraying détente.

Africa presented some of the earliest occasions for the breakdown of détente.<sup>126</sup>

The anticolonial wars against the Portuguese Empire boiled over and became civil wars.

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<sup>126</sup> In President Jimmy Carter's 15 February 1977 letter to General Secretary Leonid Brezhnev, Carter expressed his wishes that the Soviets would leave decolonial Africa alone: "In southern Africa, we believe that the Africans should solve their problems without outside interference. It is

The warring factions sought to internationalize the conflict, drawing in US and Russian aid in order to consolidate military and political advantages. In Angola, the United States and South Africa backed the FNLA and UNITA parties and tried to cajole their leaders into working together.<sup>127</sup> The Soviet Union and Cuba backed the MPLA.

In what became known in the US as the "Horn of Africa" crisis, the socialist government in Ethiopia requested aid from the USSR over a bitter war against the socialist government in Somalia. Rather than seeing this conflict as serious breach within the Communist International community, the US National Security Council interpreted Russian attempts to aid Ethiopia and broker a peace with Somalia as evidence of a new and aggressive interventionist Soviet Union, poised to spread Communism across the African continent. The Soviets flatly denied these accusations of intervention. Both sides gave up their shared vision of the global order and accused one another of destabilizing it.<sup>128</sup> In this situation, the Carter Administration decided on the need to punish the

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with this goal in mind that we support a peaceful solution, which corresponds to the will of the majority, and have limited actions which could increase the potential for violence." *The Cold War*, 536.

<sup>127</sup> The CIA officer in charge of the Angolan operations, John Stockwell, describes further stages of the internationalization of the Angolan war in his memoir *In Search of Enemies: A CIA Story*. The CIA attempted to recruit military advisors and troops from all over the world, including South Vietnam. Eventually they found allies in South Africa, Congo (Zaire), and French mercenaries. *The Cold War*, 521-523.

<sup>128</sup> In this excerpt of minutes from a meeting between President Carter and Ambassador Gromyko, the two officials fail to come up with a shared understanding of the African wars:

Soviets for their alleged involvement in 'the Horn.' National Security Advisor Zbigniew "Zbig" Brzezinski pushed for this hardline approach, against protests from Secretary of State Cyrus Vance:

Zbigniew Brzezinski (ZB): "On the business of souring relations with the Soviets, the real question is why are they being soured? Do the Soviets want to sour these relations? If they can do what they want in the Horn without getting evidence of concern from us, we are going to have major problems with them in the south. We should communicate to the Soviets that they do not have a free hand and that

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"[Carter:] Soviet presence there [in Africa] had increased to alarming proportions...The Soviets usually claimed that Cuba was an independent country that made its own decisions; we knew, however, of the enormous economic support the Soviet Union was rendering Cuba and could not believe that the Cubans could put 40 or 50 or 60 thousand men into Africa without the Soviet Union's tacit approval or encouragement..."

Here are the minutes of Gromyko's response to Carter:

"Gromyko said that the Soviet leadership had certainly noted some of the President's recent statements on African matters, which, whether the President liked it or not, also somewhat exacerbated and heated up the atmosphere as regards relations between our two countries...There was no increasing Soviet presence in Africa. The Soviet Union did not have a single soldier with a rifle in Africa and did not intend to send any to that area. The Soviet Union had indeed sent some quantities of arms to some African countries, as well as a very small number of experts who were helping the Africans master the use of the arms supplied. Not a single Soviet individual had fired a single shot in the course of the latest clashes in Africa, and not a single Soviet individual had taken part in any operation in that part of the world..."

[...]

He [Gromyko] called the presence of a Soviet general in Ethiopia a myth. Had the Soviet Union been invited to send a general there, it would have refused. There was no Soviet Napoleon in Africa. Evidently the President [Carter] was being fed completely fantastic information."

The staffer is using the word "fantastic" in the sense of unreal, or like a fantasy. *The Cold War*, 537-8.

what they do entails risks. Otherwise, what will they think?

[...]

ZB: "They must understand that there are consequences in their behavior. If we do not react, we are destroying our own posture—regionally and internationally and we are creating the conditions for domestic reaction."<sup>129</sup>

The Reagan Administration deliberately backed away from détente as a foreign policy objective and gleefully sought to turn Afghanistan into a Soviet quagmire, through military aid to the mujahideen "freedom fighters."<sup>130</sup> Their aim was to increase American military preponderance over the Soviet Union. Their hope was to place the Soviet Union in a disadvantageous position before resuming arms reduction talks.<sup>131</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Here is how Vance reacted to Brzezinski:

"I think the key still remains SALT. If we make progress on SALT, they a lot of things will fall into place that do not fall into place otherwise.

[...]

"This is where you and I part. The consequences of doing something like this [reacting to the Soviets] are very dangerous."

Both men championed specific policies that would have favored their respective departments. Vance's State Department, naturally, was in charge of SALT diplomacy. Brzezinski's National Security establishment, naturally, was in charge of punitive combat operations around the world. *The Cold War*, 544.

Brzezinski capitalized on the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. To the Politburo, this was a reluctant response to Taraki's request for direct military intervention, since his government faced imminent collapse in the face of Islamist rebellions. Brzezinski successfully reframed the dominant American interpretation of the event in terms of Great Power politics—the Soviets wanted to fulfill an "age-long dream...to have direct [Indian] Ocean [access]..." *The Cold War*, 550.

<sup>130</sup> Reagan Library, "President Reagan's Photo Ops. in the Oval Office on June 16, 1986," YouTube (20 June 2017), accessed online at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaK\\_CZk-0Rg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VaK_CZk-0Rg).

<sup>131</sup> "I know that all of you want peace, and so do I. I know too that many of you seriously believe that a nuclear freeze would further the cause of peace. But a freeze now would make us less, not

They also took this opportunity to assert American military and economic dominance worldwide, wherever power vacuums mottled the old order.

Out of this circumstance a generation of academicians steeped in the currents of the age reflected the triumph of American values in their historical scholarship. They continued to pose the questions which earlier Cold Warriors and Third Worlders posed, on what the world could expect from its postcolonial nations and continents. They continued the search for a precolonial legacy that could steer the direction of the Third World into a constructive and happy future for her peoples.

The American academician Roderick McIntosh, archaeologist and historian of the Niger River Delta region, contributed to this discourse on using the precolonial past to find the postcolonial future. First, he positioned the colonial era of African history as an aberration:

With the end of the Cold War, a vast speculative literature has sprung up around the question of Africa's political future. At this critical transform [sic] in global relations

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more, secure and would raise, not reduce, the risks of war. It would be largely unverifiable and would seriously undercut our negotiations on arms reduction." Address to the Nation on Defense and National Security (23 March 1983), *Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum*, transcript accessed online at <https://www.reaganlibrary.gov/archives/speech/address-nation-defense-and-national-security>. Videorecord accessed online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=srtgQdpdArE> on YouTube courtesy of the Reagan Presidential Library.

among nations, is it an inevitability that Africa will continue down the path of absolutist states? Must Africa conform to the model of rigid bureaucratic statism imported from the metropolitan nations (especially France) and refined into the coercive, one-party socialism of the 1960s through 1980s? Or, as some now argue, can all citizens of African nations achieve a form of self-determination by local forms of Civil Society? The ideal of the Civil Society encourages the local evolution of pluralistic complexes, many competing interests in society that, together, challenge the power-seeking impulses of the state.<sup>132</sup>

Here, in his Introduction, McIntosh signals the values common to Afrocentric discourse. Africa must find homegrown solutions to its problems. The European model of statecraft is "imported." Moreover, the socialist bureaucracies are merely refinements of this system. McIntosh doesn't even need to call Communism by its own name—for him, this "coercive, one-party socialism" built around centralized state power is nothing more than a continuation of the European imperial state rather than a valid Marxist-Leninist dictatorship of the proletariat. Instead, the goal is to build civil society in such a way as to distribute power peacefully and equitably within the postcolonial African national communities.

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<sup>132</sup> Roderick James McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold* (Malden, MA, USA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), 6.

However, McIntosh presented Rostowian ideas with a historical twist. Not only was civil society the goal for African development, but it was also an original, African solution to African problems, rooted in its precolonial heritage.

The Civil Society debate is vigorous, but is rather conducted in a deep-historical vacuum. Proponents of Civil Society in Africa would be heartened if they knew more about long historical trajectories. The archaeology and earliest history of many parts of the continent, and of the Middle Niger most especially, show unambiguously that Africa has long lived its own versions of Civil Society.<sup>133</sup>

McIntosh is so insistent that the precolonial past is relevant to the postcolonial present that he even narrates Niger as a kind of "third world" sandwiched between the more famous, expansionist world-systems to the north and to the east:

The Middle Niger is a case-study in these processes. Here, heterarchy worked as a stable alternative to hierarchy when Middle Niger cities such as Dia or Jenne-jeno emerged and thrived independent of the stimulus of the Arab or Mediterranean worlds.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>133</sup> McIntosh, *Middle Niger*, 7.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

McIntosh identifies Heterarchy—a plurality of different sources of authority and leadership in a society—with something original to the Middle Niger. It developed there on its own terms, without the "stimulus" of the "Arab and Mediterranean worlds." Here McIntosh sets up a historical parallel between the precolonial and the postcolonial: the peoples of the Middle Niger developed their own 'third way' between the hierarchical alternatives of its time. The Arabian and Mesopotamian worlds then were akin to the despotic Eastern one-party states and the despotic Western colonial states that Africans now must overcome.

The Rostowian paradigm licensed American hegemony around the world. It stated that the precolonial history of the Third World was stagnant and feudal. It was hopeless to find answers to the challenges posed by Cold War modernization in that past. There was only one historical model that could save the Third World from the false promises of Communism and the immaturity of its leaders: the United States of America's revolutionary history. Rostow was Americentric in his vision of the world.

McIntosh's innovation was to keep the aims of Rostowian development theory but reject its Americentrism. The African past itself would have to yield democratic and liberal values, to legitimate the project of development as a return to Africa's true identity. In other words, McIntosh signals the achievement of a synthesis between Rostowian development theory and Afrocentric politics. As a result, he could not simply come out and say that Africa used to be democratic and liberal. Instead, McIntosh

coined the term "symbolic reservoirs" to legitimate his vision of Africa before European hegemony:

As a bare-bones, working definition of symbolic reservoir, I use the term to indicate the fluid landscape of ideologies, symbols, and myths that gives evolving complex societies their structured dynamism over deep time. The symbolic reservoir is that wellspring of symbols and ideologies into which different sub-groups of a society dip in order to extract, craft, and visually display a legitimating tradition to serve their own sectional interests.<sup>135</sup>

This vision of precolonial Africa—the vision which postcolonial Africa is supposed to reconstruct in order to triumph in the emerging new world order—is a kind of liberal society in which competing "sectional" interest groups negotiate over the meaning and direction of their society. The process is dynamic rather than despotic, collaborative rather than monopolistic, complexified rather than simplified. We have already seen McIntosh characterize this same society as heterarchical rather than hierarchical, a civil society rather than a statist society. At the same time, McIntosh uses these binaries in order to delegitimize any historical vision of Africa that runs contrary to his symbolic reservoirs and epochal "core values". As foreign, "Mesopotamian" or

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<sup>135</sup> Ibid., 16.

"Arab" or "Mediterranean" values, they fail the Afrocentric test for whether or not they pose African solutions to African problems.

McIntosh links his Afrocentrism to anti-Eurocentrism. By explaining to his readers what precolonial Africa was about, he shows what an emancipated, postcolonial Africa might become. The Europeans imposed their ideas on Africa to suit their projects of exploitation and domination. Now, it was time to let Africa speak on her own terms.

Other scholars working within the same Cold War episteme, on other parts of the continent, advanced a more explicit critique of Eurocentrism than McIntosh. For them, development theory was implicitly Eurocentric because it prejudicially characterized the Third World as backwards and stagnant relative to the standards of European history. They charged social scientists influenced by development theory with cloaking those relative standards behind the language of universality. It was presumptuous to believe that Europe had solved the mystery of development and that this wisdom enabled her nations to dominate the world for over fifteen generations.

Janet Abu-Lughod penned one of the most sophisticated accounts of the pre-colonial third world in her aptly titled monograph, *Before European Hegemony*. Her project took explicit aim at the most influential academic history of development of her time: Immanuel Wallerstein's *The Modern World-System*. Wallerstein argued that factors intrinsic to the 'West' enabled it to leave the 'rest' of the world behind—the "take-off" stage of Rostow's theory of economic stages. But Abu-Lughod countered that the

historical record revealed an exceptionally dynamic world-system of peaceful trade that linked China to the Venetian city-state. The two great conduits of this trade were the Silk Road (terrestrial) and the Indian Ocean system (maritime). They were supported, respectively, by the military preponderance of the Mongol Empire on land and the Chinese Imperial Navy on sea. Both powers found it profitable to keep the peace. They assured safe passage for caravans laden with profitable (and durable) luxury goods, and regulated marketplaces with an eye to stability. They deterred malicious business practices and enforced contractual obligations between partners.

What then shattered this thriving system? Why didn't modernity dawn in the East? Abu-Lughod's answer: the twin catastrophes of Timur's wars of conquest and the Black Plague ravaged the East far more than the West. The very same networks that lubricated this brisk and profitable trade dispersed plague rats far and wide. Ships and cities concentrated both wealth and human beings, making for efficient contagious conditions. Related to the mass death wrought by the plague, Timur, the brilliant Mongol Commander, led a rampage in order to enforce falling tributes from a dying world. His harsh response to scarcity heralded yet more devastation and broke the back of the Afro-Asian world-system. It was this upheaval that gave Europe a chance for global preeminence, to remake the world in her own image.

Abu-Lughod's sophisticated study established that there are many paths to capitalism. She argued that Arab and Chinese merchants in particular developed

techniques of credit, insurance, and paper notes that may have in fact influenced European developments down the line.<sup>136</sup> Active Venetian and Genoan contact with said merchants ensured that fiscal knowhow spread alongside commerce.<sup>137</sup> For her, it turns out that the precolonial Third World gave the First World a kick-start, by sharing their expertise and leading by example.

Compared to McIntosh, Abu-Lughod's study is not explicitly pragmatic. She does not state any interest in finding a path to development for the decolonizing Third World. Her stance is far more intellectual—she is concerned with correcting Eurocentric bias among economic historians like Karl Marx and Immanuel Wallerstein. Her interlocutors are historians who assume that capitalism began in the West before it was

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<sup>136</sup> "...recognized currencies were a *sine qua non* of international trade, with developments in western Europe coming much later, and, if our contention is correct, derivatively...in all three regions, [Asian, Middle Eastern, and Western] states played an important role in minting, printing, and guaranteeing such currencies...It was not until after the middle of the thirteenth century that some Italian cities (Florence and Genoa) began to mint their own gold coins, but these were used to supplement rather than supplant the Middle Eastern coins already in circulation."

As well, "...the social role of 'banker' was found in the Orient long before it appeared in the form of the 'benches' or 'banco's' of the Italian merchants who set them up at the trade fairs of Champagne." Janet Lila Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony: The World-System A.D. 1250-1350* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989), 15, 16.

Abu-Lughod continues the discussion along these same lines, showing how the Orient developed sophisticated institutions to pool risk and distribute profits.

<sup>137</sup> "One of the striking findings of the research was that similarities between trading partners in the thirteenth century far outweighed differences, and, wherever differences appeared, the West lagged behind. This seemed to contradict the usual assumptions. Furthermore, in spite of the tendency of western scholars dealing with the 'Rise of the West' to stress the *unique* characteristics of western capitalism, comparative examination of economic institutions reveals enormous similarities and parallels between Asian, Arab, and Western forms of capitalism." Abu-Lughod, *Before European Hegemony*, 15.

imposed upon the East, and historians who assume that medieval societies were feudal and therefore had no connection to capitalism. Her overall goals are to stress continuities across the medieval and the modern epochal categories, and to emphasize that capitalism had global rather than European origins. The Cold World revolutions factor in her study only to the extent that she is aware that the world seems to be in a state of transition. She perceives a contemporary shift of the balance of global power, in which the world might now be reactivating its historical Afro-Asian motors. She predicts that the People's Republic of China, in particular, will once again play its historic role in cranking this massive engine. In this light, Premier Deng Xiaoping's inauguration of a post-Mao Party Line—based on accumulating nationalized capital in order to develop true socialism—was not a deviation from Chinese history, but a return to form in preparation for a world After European Hegemony.<sup>138</sup> The greatest failure of U.S. anticommunist policy—the rise of Red China—had been redeemed.

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<sup>138</sup> Deng Xiaoping took the helm of the Chinese Communist Party by defeating his main political rivals—the "Gang of Four"—in a hotly contested power struggle which broke out after Mao Zedong died. In February 1984, Deng formulated the new direction for China's economic program for the Central Committee:

"Where shall we begin in developing China's economy? A Japanese friend has made two suggestions: first that we begin with transport and communications, which are the starting points of economic development; second, that we encourage high wages and high consumption. Being in a different situation from other countries, we are not in a position to adopt the second suggestion as our policy nationwide. However, as we develop the coastal areas successfully, we shall be able to increase people's incomes, which accordingly will lead to higher consumption. This is in conformity with the laws of development. We shall allow some areas to become rich first; egalitarianism will not work. This is a cardinal policy, and I hope all of you will give it some

Abu-Lughod's thesis posed serious challenges to Rostow's theory of the stages of economic development. She falsified the general thesis on worldwide feudal stagnation. She reframed the master narrative from one of gradual straight-line progression to the economic take-off point, to one of periodic oscillations between the primacy of the European World System and the primacy of the Afro-Asian one. In its strong form, Abu-Lughod's thesis implies that the age of European dominance was an aberration, an

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thought." *The Cold War*, 560.

In this speech, Deng cites Japan—which developed an exceptionally powerful economy along capitalist lines by that time—as a guiding example. He considers "egalitarianism" unrealistic: wealth will have to develop along unequal lines before the whole of China can be uplifted. The goal is no longer ideological purity, as was the case during the Cultural Revolution. Now it is infrastructure and foreign capital investment, especially from the Chinese diaspora. "The Xiamen Special Economic Zone is too small. It should be expanded to cover all of Xiamen Island. If this is done, we shall be able to absorb a large amount of investment from overseas Chinese, from Hong Kong and Taiwan and from many foreigners and to stimulate surrounding areas..." Ibid. Up to that point, Japan was seen as a mortal enemy of the People's Republic—an imperialist aggressor. To use Japan as an example worthy of imitation—with an anecdote about a friend—signals an abrupt change in foreign policy orientation.

Thinking about the Tiananmen Square student uprising as it unfolded, Deng reiterated belief in his course of action. He credited economic reform with stabilizing the country by raising standards of living across classes. This meant that even though it unleashed some of the forces of political reform, those forces would be contained rather than spreading into a general rebellion against the Communist Party.

"Our economy has improved a lot in recent years. The people have food to eat, and clothes to wear—as anybody can see. The economy is still the base; if we didn't have that economic base, the farmers would have risen in rebellion after only ten days of student protests—never mind a whole month. But as it is, the villages are stable all over the country, and the workers are basically stable too. This is the fruit of reform and opening." *The Cold War*, 598.

For more on the struggle for power within the Chinese Communist Party during the Cultural Revolution, see *Can't Get You Out of My Head*, directed by Adam Curtis (London: BBC), 2022, Accessed online at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/iplayer/episodes/p093wp6h/cant-get-you-out-of-my-head>. This source is region-locked and will require either a VPN or pirated sources to view it.

interruption of what would have been a continuous path to Eastern modernization. In other words, for her, the West rose due to an accident of history.

*Before European Hegemony* was a coup against the priests of economic history in its time. But her academic assault came at a high ideological price. By telling the story of the world Before European Hegemony in terms of capitalist development, Abu-Lughod effectively choked off Communist and Socialist claims to a basis in historical precedent. She never considers these ideas for explaining the dual economic motors of the Silk Road and Indian Ocean Trade. Her rejection of the stages of economic development not only present a serious blow to Rostow's framework, but also to Karl Marx's framework—the man who systematized the idea of capitalism in order to make it suitable for economic analysis.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> According to the Oxford English Dictionary, William Makepeace Thackeray first coined the word capitalism in his novel, *The Newcomes*. For example:

"Sam Higg, whose name was very good on 'Change in Manchester and London, joined the direction of the Anglo-Continental. A brother had died lately, leaving his money amongst them, and his wealth had added considerably to Madame de Florac's means; his sister invested a portion of her capital in the railway in her husband's name. The shares were at a premium, and gave a good dividend. The Prince de Moncontour took his place with great gravity at the Paris board, whither Barnes made frequent flying visits. The sense of capitalism sobered and dignified Paul de Florac: at the age of five-and-forty he was actually giving up being a young man, and was not ill pleased at having to enlarge his waistcoats, and to show a little grey in his moustache. His errors were forgotten: he was bien vu by the Government." William Makepeace Thackeray, *The Newcomes: Memoirs of a Most Respectable Family* (London: Bradbury and Evans, 1854-55), no page number. Accessed online courtesy of Project Gutenberg at <https://gutenberg.org/cache/epub/7467/pg7467-images.html>.

In this excerpt, the heiress Madame de Florac has invested her portion of an estate into railroad shares in order to accumulate even more money. I think Abu-Lughod gets the last laugh. Her definition of capitalism mirrors Thackeray's use of the word. It is a pursuit of surplus value

By projecting capitalism back into the history of the precolonial world, Abu-Lughod strips this economic system to its skeleton. For her capitalism is a system of producing and reinvesting surplus value—the subject of Chapter One in *Das Kapital*.<sup>140</sup>

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by means of private ownership. It harbors no eschatological expectations, unlike Marx's capitalism.

Abu-Lughod challenges Marx's ideas about capitalism being driven by forces internal to European development. Throughout *Before European Hegemony*, she counters that the West developed capitalism by trading with the East and assimilating her market institutions and innovations. Thus, the spread of capitalism for her is driven by circulation rather than contradiction, and sophisticated social relations rather than 'primitive accumulation'. Ibid., 372, note 2.

<sup>140</sup> In Chapter One of *Capital*, Marx introduces capitalism as a shift in exchange relations between buyers and sellers. For the noncapitalist, the point of money is to buy goods which he needs in order to live, that he will use in order to improve or to maintain his living. When he goes to market to obtain money, he does so by selling his own goods.

For example, here is John The Basketweaver. John takes baskets and sells them to people who need baskets. John's shoes have holes in them and he needs food for the week, so he takes the cash proceeds from selling baskets to pay the fishmonger and the cobbler. Now he has shoes to wear that won't ruin his feet, and fish to fill his belly.

In abstract (universalized) terms, John the Basketweaver takes a Commodity, sells it for Money, and uses that cash to buy another Commodity which he may take home and consume.

But the capitalist aims at starting with money, and growing it for more money. She takes Money to the market, buys some Commodities, and then finds another market in which she can sell those same goods for an even larger amount of Money than where he bought it. Were she immortal, she could continue this process to infinity. The specific commodities don't matter—it could be fish, shoes, crude oil, railroad company shares—just anything that she can own as private property. They aren't intended for home use—just for her to sell her ownership of these goods to some other buyer in a profitable market at a profitable time.

Both John and the capitalist—let's call her Madame de Florac—depend on having a property interest in their goods. John needs a property stake so that he can legally sell the items he brings to market. He needs a property stake in order to say that he owns the cash he received from this legitimate sale. He needs a property stake in order to protect and control the fish and shoes he buys. Nobody can legally take the fish nor the shoes from John unless they submit to his power—be it in a trade or in return for a favor. But the Madame de Florac does not care for fish and shoes and railroads. She cares for profits. What she is selling (or able to sell at any time) is

Her uptake of this idea completely strips it of the fundamental characterizations crucial to Marx's theory of communism.

For Marx, the contradictions of capitalism create new social classes, and those contradictions drive the struggle between those classes. Communism is the result of the struggle, the result of the contradictions inherent to capitalism. But for Abu-Lughod, there is no contradiction driving capitalism into repeated crises of its own making.

Plague and a war occasioned by that plague stop the world motor—not a market crash, not a general strike by the enslaved.

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her property stake in those objects—it is property itself that is the source of her wealth. Property allows her to choose why she owns those goods: for their future appreciation in value.

Marx famously described these chains of value as C-M-C and M-C-M', which is why I have bolded the letters here. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy, Volume One*, transl. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (Moscow, USSR: Progress Publishers, 1965). His work is accessed online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf> courtesy of the Marxists Internet Archive.

The legal scholar Morris R. Cohen penned my favorite analysis of property. He argues that property is not about the relationship between a person and her goods, but actually a right to exclude other people from using things she owns, provided that she respects their reciprocal rights against herself. "...the essence of private property is always the right to exclude others...the law of property helps me directly only to exclude others from using the things which it assigns to me. If then somebody else wants to use the food, the house, the land, or the plow which the law calls mine, he has to get my consent. To the extent that these things are necessary to the life of my neighbor, the law thus confers on me a power, limited but real, to make him do what I want.

[...]

...we must not overlook the actual fact that dominion over things is also *imperium* over our fellow human beings." Morris R. Cohen, "Property and Sovereignty," *Cornell Law Review* 13:8 (1927), 12-13.

This leads us finally to a twist ending. Abu-Lughod challenged Rostow for his Eurocentric theory of the stages of economic growth—which for him, the United States perfected in his time. But she achieved this at the price of endorsing Rostow's other radical claim that Communism was a trap, a false ideology that had no credible basis in either economics or history. Capitalism on the other hand, was simply the natural outcome of various social and economic forces in human history. And on this point, in the naturalness of capitalism, Abu-Lughod seems to even surpass Rostow's Americentrism.

It is not possible to determine whether or not Abu-Lughod has rejected Eurocentrism or perfected it with an American twist. For on the one hand, she has freed capitalism from expectations, norms, and standards derived from the particular revelations that European history has afforded us. Yet on the other hand, she has naturalized the outcome of a historically particular developmental process by fashioning it into a world-historical universal.

The Cold War aim of the American Establishment was to steer the newly independent Third World nations towards democratic governments and capitalist free markets. Yet the Establishment had to guide the 'Free World' in such a way that would be palatable to their nationalist pride. Afrocentricists proposed that only African solutions could properly solve African problems. Sukarno, the Indonesian chair of the Non-Aligned Movement, proposed that the Third World as a whole would have to find

its own paths to development independently of American and Soviet desires.<sup>141</sup> Third World cultural nationalists like these irritated the American hegemonists.<sup>142</sup>

What McIntosh and Abu-Lughod perfected was a new strategy for American hegemonists, to project and legitimate their vision of the New World Order. Democracy *is* an African solution to African problems. Capitalism *is* a Third World innovation. In this paradigm, the goal of economic development is not to pour new wine into new wineskins. It is to help ancient peoples become who they were always meant to be, before plague, war, and conquest diverted them from that path.

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<sup>141</sup> Furthermore, Sukarno emphasized that a strong African-Asian bond was crucial to the fate of both the Third World, and the Whole World: "I hope that it [this conference] will give evidence of the fact that we Asian and African leaders understand that Asia and Africa can prosper only when they are [united], and that even the safety of the World at large can not be safeguarded without a united Asia-Africa. I hope that this Conference will give *guidance* to mankind, will point out to mankind the way which it must take to attain safety and peace. I hope that it will give evidence that Asia and Africa have been reborn, nay, that a New Asia and a New Africa have been born!" Sukarno, "11.1 Sukarno Speaks at Bandung, 1955," reprinted in *The Cold War*, 351.

<sup>142</sup> An American report on the execution of Che Guevara gloats about the chilling effect this should have on adversarial nationalist regimes:

"This morning we are about 99% sure that 'Che' Guevara is dead. [...]"

"The death of Guevara carries these significant implications:

"\*It marks the passing of another of the aggressive, romantic revolutionaries like Sukarno, Nkrumah, Ben Bella—and reinforces this trend.

"\*In the Latin American context, it will have a strong impact in discouraging would-be guerillas.

"\*It shows the soundness of our 'preventive medicine' assistance to countries facing incipient insurgency—it was the Bolivian 2nd Ranger Battalion trained by our Green Berets from June-September of this year, that cornered him and got him." *The Cold War*, 400.

## 10. Refutatio II

*Wouldn't you rather live in a democracy than an autocracy? Wouldn't you rather live in a wealthy country than a poor country? Wouldn't you rather enjoy free speech, than risk prison for criticizing the official line? There is no reason to antagonize academicians for enlisting themselves to defend American interests. They were fighting the good fight, and we should be grateful to them.*

*Sure, they made some mistakes, a few fell prey to their own ideological illusions, but didn't they have their hearts in the right place? Didn't they use restraint against a tyrannical rival power, didn't they win the Cold War without exploding the world?<sup>143</sup> So what if the Third World wasn't really democratic—don't the ends justify the means?*

Certainly, there was a great deal of concern and sincerity motivating many Cold Warriors. Flush with victory after the second world war, successfully fighting two theaters simultaneously, free in less than a generation from the worst economic depression in world history, reasonable people believed that America had achieved the highest stage of human development ever known to humankind. It seemed the whole world was in ruins, but for the land of lady liberty.

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<sup>143</sup> President Ronald Reagan: "Historians looking back at our time will note the consistent restraint and peaceful intentions of the West. They will note that it was the democracies who refused to use the threat of their nuclear monopoly in the forties and early fifties for territorial or imperial gain. Had that nuclear monopoly been in the hands of the Communist world, the map of Europe—indeed, the world—would look very different today." TCW 574.

*Excepting the deviants and the mentally feeble, who wouldn't want to evangelize this Good News, to help the peoples of the world achieve the same apex of development? Surely this charity distinguishes the postmodern Americans—the people of plenty—from the fiscally overstretched early modern Spaniards. While their early modern evangelists might also have been sincere, we know now that they were complicit in a brutal conquest, that they ultimately facilitated the mass plunder and rape of an entire continent. Show me the gold the Americans were after. Show me the slaves. Did they not create the Free World at great expense and sacrifice to themselves?*

No scholar likes to think of herself as complicit with the blood tide of militarization and great power politics.

*In fact, isn't the scholar rather like a diplomat, opening channels of communication and exchange worldwide? Don't Fulbrighters and Luce Scholars convince nations to cover up their battle drums, and stow them away? Don't they decry the futility of war, and champion good faith diplomacy in its stead?*

But hegemony is complex like a spider's web. Though it has a structure and a logic, it is messy and difficult to escape once snared. And furthermore, we are not snared the way a fly is snared. A fly darts freely in the wind. It cannot see the threads until it is too late. But we are snared the way a pregnant bat is snared. If mother is caught, then so are we. If her mother is caught, then so is she.

If we are going to reckon with how the Cold War restructured historical knowledge in the United States, then we are going to have to face these issues head on. My goal is to show you that once again, like the Spaniards of centuries past, the Americans used history in order to both study and remake the world in their own image. My point throughout this dissertation—this chapter included—has been to show you how knowledge and conversion have always been linked. This link shows up dialectically, in both the long-term structures of Western history, and in the short-term ideological sparring with its rivals.

### **10.1 Professional History and Professional Intelligence**

*The Central Intelligence Agency has long-developed clandestine relationships with the American academic community, which range from academics making introductions for intelligence purposes to intelligence collection while abroad, to academic research and writing where CIA sponsorship is hidden. The Agency has funded the activities of American private organizations around the world when those activities supported—or could be convinced to support—American foreign policy objectives.*

—Church Committee Final Report<sup>144</sup>

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<sup>144</sup> Church Committee Final Report, Book 1 (U.S. Government Printing Office), page 181, accessed online courtesy of the United States Senate, at [https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755\\_I.pdf](https://www.intelligence.senate.gov/sites/default/files/94755_I.pdf). Emphasis in the original.

The Church Committee was not permitted access to a wide range of materials for its investigation of the Central Intelligence Agency. Two versions of the Report were issued—one, classified, exclusively for government insiders, and one, declassified for the benefit of the public.

The CIA's control over information weakened the Church Committee's inquiry into the nature of CIA relationships with universities, individual professors, and individual students.

Our metaphor of the pregnant bat still needs some working out. It accounts for academicians who would prefer to fight against government interference but end up drawing upon it unawares. But there is another group of academicians, of arachnophilic bats, who launched themselves eagerly into these webs in the name of patriotic duty. These activist-scholars, like Max Millikan and Walt Rostow, believed that their social scientific training gave them powerful tools to assist in the fight against Communist evil.

It is little wonder then, that the man credited by the Central Intelligence Agency itself as 'the father of intelligence' was himself a professional historian. Sherman Kent—  
AB History, Yale University (1926); PhD History, Yale (1922); Professor of History, Yale

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"...certain of the titles and names of authors of propaganda books published after 1967 were denied the Committee; access to files on the contemporary [as of 1976] clandestine use of the American academic community was restricted to information which would provide the numbers of institutions and individuals involved and a description of the role of the individuals [...]. Therefore, the Committee has far from the full picture of the nature and extent of these relationships and the domestic impact of foreign clandestine operations." Church Committee Final Report, Book 1, 181. For historians today working on such materials, it is safe to assume that the penetration of clandestine influence into academic circles will be greater than what the available sources indicate.

(1935-1941; 1947-1949)—also set out to contribute his discipline's empirical know-how to the American mission.<sup>145</sup>

First, Kent embedded historical research methods—which he crystallized through teaching and research at Yale—into his vision of the intelligence discipline.

According to Harold P. Ford, former Vice Chairman of the National Intelligence Council, Kent's guide to writing graduate and undergraduate thesis papers—*Writing*

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<sup>145</sup> Kent's back-and-forth between academia and intelligence makes him one of the original revolving door historians between these worlds, just as they were beginning to undergo their Cold-War transformations. He was pulled into CIA by yet another historian, William Langer of Harvard. Langer was Chief of the Research and Analysis Branch of the OSS (office of strategic security), where he worked with Kent. When President Truman tapped Langer to head the new Office of National Intelligence Estimates, Langer brought Kent with him. Harold P. Ford, "A Tribute to Sherman Kent," in *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Intelligence Estimates: Collected Essays*, ed. Donald P. Steury (Washington DC: History Staff, Center for the Study of Intelligence, Central Intelligence Agency, 1994), 5; accessed online courtesy of HathiTrust at <https://catalog.hathitrust.org/Record/002952973>.

Langer is another example of a revolving door professional historian: "When Langer returned to Harvard in early 1952, Kent succeeded him in both positions [as head of the Office of National Estimates and chairman of the Board of National Estimates], where he remained until he retired at the end of 1967." Donald P. Steury, "Introduction," in *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Intelligence Estimates: Collected Essays*, xii. Steury earned his Ph.D in "European International History from the University of California, Irvine. He joined the Central Intelligence Agency in 1981." J. Kenneth McDonald, "Foreword," in *Sherman Kent and the Board of National Estimates*, viii.

Former CIA Analyst and National Intelligence Officer Jack Davis has a helpful "Selected Career Highlights" of Sherman Kent listed at the end of his essay, "Sherman Kent and the Profession of Intelligence Analysis," *Occasional Papers* 1:5 (November 2002), accessed online courtesy of CIA Reading Room at <https://www.cia.gov/static/aa47b490ac1c52c04c467a248c5cbace/Kent-Profession-Intel-Analysis.pdf>.

For more on Jack Davis, see Andres Vaart, "In Memoriam: Jack Davis (1930-2016)," *Studies in Intelligence* 60:2 (June 2016), accessed online courtesy of CIA at <https://www.cia.gov/static/Jack-Davis.pdf>. Andres Vaart is the managing editor of *Studies in Intelligence*.

*History* (1941)—distilled all the principles of his "theory and practice of professional intelligence... In many of its passages one need only substitute the words 'intelligence officer' for 'historian.'"<sup>146</sup>

This was just prior to Kent's first tour of duty in the intelligence services: in 1941 he became Chief of the Africa Section, Research and Analysis Branch Office of the Coordinator of Information—precursor to the Cold War's Office of African and Latin American Analysis, a tidbit which will become important later in this chapter.

Second, Kent nurtured organs of intellectual exchange within the intelligence community modelled after academia. Kent's essay, "The Need for an Intelligence Literature," became famous within the intelligence community. He laid out his argument so effectively that CIA Director of Training Matthew Baird used it to launch of the first CIA intelligence journal.<sup>147</sup> Thus, *Studies in Intelligence* was born. Here is Kent:

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<sup>146</sup> Ford, "A Tribute," *Sherman Kent and the Board*, 2.

Steury reaches similar conclusions through an interpretation of Kent's thought processes: "In essence, Kent viewed strategic intelligence with the eye of the historian: focused on long-term trends, he tended to think of crises as 'blips' in broader historical continuities." Steury, "Introduction," *Sherman Kent*, xv.

<sup>147</sup> Wrote Baird: "I believe that the production of these *Studies* will be a step in the direction of creating a literature of basic doctrine and methodology useful both to the training activity and to the Agency as a whole. In sponsoring this endeavor, I therefore urge your active participation and support so that we may all benefit in advancing the profession of intelligence by this means." Matthew Baird, "INTRODUCTION: by The Director of Training," *Studies in Intelligence* 1 (September 1955); collected in CIA-RDP78-03921A000300150001-8, accessed online courtesy of CIA Reading Room at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp78-03921a000300150001-8>.

Intelligence today is not merely a profession, but like most professions it has taken on the aspects of a discipline: it has developed a recognized methodology; it has developed a vocabulary; it has developed a body of theory and doctrine; it has elaborate and refined techniques. It now has a large professional following. What it lacks is a literature. From my point of view this is a matter of greatest importance.

As long as this discipline lacks a literature, its method, its vocabulary, its body of doctrine, and even its fundamental theory run the risk of never reaching full maturity.<sup>148</sup>

Kent even had a specific institutional model (and generic anti-model) in mind, which would support and finance this scholastic output:

What my school *must never be* is an intelligence equivalent of the higher service schools. If you feel the need of a model, study *Institute for Advanced Study* at Princeton—the Einstein school.<sup>149</sup>

Overall, Kent's goal was to make intelligence into a *bona fide* discipline, so that it could be more efficient, effective, and cumulatively improve itself in the service of the national interest.<sup>150</sup> And indeed this scientization of the practice snowballed into efforts

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<sup>148</sup> Sherman Kent, "The Need for an Intelligence Literature," *Studies in Intelligence* 1 (September 1955), 3.

<sup>149</sup> Emphasis in original. Sherman Kent, "Valediction," reprinted in *Sherman Kent and the Board*, 25.

<sup>150</sup> "Kent's concern for the intelligence process, however, went beyond the immediate task for producing intelligence reports to a consideration of the nature of intelligence itself, to a passionate interest in the growth of intelligence analysis *as a profession*, and to its establishment as

to recruit historians of all ranks directly into the intelligence service. CIA sent its first delegation—eight staffers from the Office of Political Research—to recruit scholars at the American Historical Association's 1974 Annual Meeting. In a memo to the Deputy Director for Intelligence, the Deputy Director of Political Research expressed optimism that the recruitment efforts went well:

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a scholarly discipline with a well-ordered methodology." Emphasis in original. Steury, "Introduction," *Sherman Kent and the Board*, xiii.

Here, Steury provides an elegant explanation of what it means to use social science for the purpose of total war and how this defined Kent's vision:

"At its most fundamental level, his [Kent's] work began with implicit recognition of *strategic intelligence* (perhaps better thought of as strategic intelligence *analysis*) as a social science. Strategy, by definition, is a plan to achieve some given end. If we think of a national security strategy (or policy) as a blueprint for preserving the life and health of a nation, then there must be some idea of what that nation is: why does it function, how does it function, and what is essential to its survival? Conversely, a strategy to confront another nation in conflict—be it in war or cold war—must consider the strengths and weaknesses of a potential opponent in detail. Central to both lines of thought is a general conception of national existence: what comprises the nation-state, what makes it strong, and what is necessary to its survival and prosperity.

"Strategic intelligence, to use Kent's term, thus takes as its subject the sinews of national life. In its most elevated form, it considers the nation-state to the depth and breadth of its being. This is what Sherman Kent called a nation's strategic stature: not just the means it possessed to wage war, but its total *potential* for war—the resources that are available, or might be made available; the population, industrial plant, and transportation net; the political and social structure, their stability, and the 'moral quality of the people and their strength of values'—their willingness to be mobilized for war and the reasons for which they would fight—and, lastly, the political leadership, their strength and 'genius (or want of it) for organizing men and materials into a community of life and strength.'" Emphasis in original; *ibid.*, xiii-xiv.

I have quoted from Steury at length here because the primary source document—Kent's own words—are classified and therefore unavailable except through Steury's digest. Nevertheless, here is the full citation of the primary source: HS/HC-7 CIA Progress Report: Office of National Estimates (ONE) Section 1 "Intelligence and the Problem of National Foreign Policy," (26 December 1951).

By noon on Monday we had interviewed 185 persons; i.e., some seven percent of those attending the meeting. We judge that some two dozen of those we interviewed are good prospects...This is an excellent time to be recruiting high-quality talent...<sup>151</sup>

The OPR Deputy Director concludes with a summary statement:

We all found this an interesting and stimulating experience; we got a number of promising job applications; and I think we advanced the Agency's reputation through talking, even if briefly, with over 200 people who follow history as a profession. They should now be more aware of the legitimate research and analysis functions of the Agency.

AHA members paid their dues to the premier guild organization of their profession. They were vetted by their professional peers and trained in the empirical research skills which the academic and intelligence communities required of them.

That was 1974, and at that time the OPR staff received a cordial welcome: much more "curiosity" than "hostility."<sup>152</sup> However, in the light of professorial outcry over the

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<sup>151</sup> "OPR Participation in the Annual Meeting of the American Historical Association (AHA), 27-30 December 1974," collected in CIA-RDP86B00985R000100060041-0, accessed online courtesy of CIA Reading Room at [https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiEh6yQ0\\_v-AhV2SjABHYL8C-YQFnoECA4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cia.gov%2Freadingroom%2Fdocs%2FCIA-RDP86B00985R000100060041-0.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3UwmrKslTga7dOHUIR2qhy](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiEh6yQ0_v-AhV2SjABHYL8C-YQFnoECA4QAQ&url=https%3A%2F%2Fwww.cia.gov%2Freadingroom%2Fdocs%2FCIA-RDP86B00985R000100060041-0.pdf&usg=AOvVaw3UwmrKslTga7dOHUIR2qhy).

<sup>152</sup> Ibid.

findings of the 1976 "Church Committee" Senate Select Investigation into intelligence activities, relations between academicians and the Agency became tense. Director of the Central Intelligence Agency Admiral Stansfield Turner responded with a public relations campaign. He aptly chose to speak at the 64th Annual Meeting of the American Association of University Professors (AAUP)—the redoubtable professional organization chartered to defend academic freedom.<sup>153</sup>

Admiral Turner assured attendees that CIA-university partnerships were properly conceived and audited at the highest federal levels. Even better, they were mutually beneficial. Academicians had a lot to offer intelligence. At the same time, intelligence had excellent things to offer academicians. The Admiral singled out archaeologists for an illustrative example:

"We are an untapped source of valuable primary information to the academic community...For example, I recently learned that our photographic capability promises tremendous benefits to archeologists. Excellent photography, a capability which is expensive to develop and carry out, exists in the intelligence community. With

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<sup>153</sup> The AAUP endorsed its first declaration on academic freedom in 1915. In 1940, the organization issued a more clearcut statement of those principles. In 1970, AAUP issued marginal comments on the 1940 Declaration in the interest of establishing due process for regulating academic freedom and tenure. "1940 Statement of Principles on Academic Freedom and Tenure, with 1970 Interpretive Comments," *American Association of University Professors* (2014 [1970]), accessed online courtesy of AAUP at [https://www.aaup.org/file/1940 Statement.pdf](https://www.aaup.org/file/1940%20Statement.pdf).

By speaking at AAUP's 64th annual meeting, Admiral Turner was signaling respect for academic freedom from his embattled post-Church Committee CIA.

this capability, archeological ruins that would otherwise be politically or geographically inaccessible become accessible. And, even when sites are accessible, details not noticed at ground level become apparent when viewed from above. We are eager to share what we can in spheres like this."<sup>154</sup>

In spite of these various appeals to job opportunities and the pure pursuit of knowledge, there were scholars who could only be touched remotely. Sometimes, their independent interests already aligned with the CIA in such a way that an explicit connection was needlessly risky. They worked for democratic institutions and expected to be funded from reputable, independent sources. For these purists of academic freedom, their projects would have to absorb laundered money in order to come to fruition.

The Church Committee revealed an outline of the extent of this type of influence:

"The CIA's intrusion into the foundation field in the 1960s can only be described as massive. Excluding grants from the "big Three"—Ford, Rockefeller, and Carnegie—of the 700 grants over \$10,000 given by 164 other foundations during the period 1963-1966, at least 108 involved partial or complete CIA funding. More importantly, CIA funding was involved in *nearly half* the grants the non-"Big Three" foundations made during this period in the field of

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<sup>154</sup> "Universities and the Intelligence Community," *Academe* (February 1979), 25; collected in CIA-RDP88-01315R000100120001-3, accessed online courtesy of CIA Reading Room at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp88-01315r000100120001-3>.

international activities. In the same period more than one-third of the grants awarded by non-"Big Three" in the physical, life and social sciences also involved CIA funds."<sup>155</sup>

CIA was extremely cautious about involvement with the Big Three foundations, and explicitly forbade using Big Three staff and grantees for intelligence operations. Even so, the Big Three leadership and CIA brass all came from a shared North Atlantic cultural milieu. They frequented the same circles and enjoyed revolving door access to executive positions in both organizations.<sup>156</sup>

McGeorge Bundy, for example, went to the prestigious Groton College Preparatory School, studied mathematics at Yale, was trained as an intelligence officer in the US Navy during the second world war, and lectured at Harvard on US government and international politics. After becoming Dean of Faculty for some time, the Kennedy Administration tapped him for National Security Advisor, a post he continued to hold in the Johnson Administration. Following that, Bundy became President of the Ford Foundation from 1966 to 1980. Following that, Bundy became a professor of history at

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<sup>155</sup> *Church Committee Final Report*, Book 1, 182.

<sup>156</sup> Inderjeet Parmar, *Foundations of the American Century: The Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller Foundations in the Rise of American Power* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

New York University for about a decade, where he taught and published on atomic energy issues.<sup>157</sup>

From top to bottom, the intelligence agencies enmeshed themselves with academia. Some, like Bundy, were at the pyramid's apex. Others were at the base—dabblers in contract and consultant work. There were many tasks to fill, including networking, spying, and drafting propaganda in the guise of scholarship.

*"The Central Intelligence Agency is now using several hundred American academics [including "administrators, faculty members, and graduate students engaged in teaching"], who in addition to providing leads and, on occasion, making introductions for intelligence purposes, occasionally write books and other material to be used for propaganda purposes abroad. [...]*

*These academics are located in over 100 American colleges, universities, and related institutes. At the majority of institutions, no one other than the individual concerned is aware of the CIA link...in addition, there are several American academics abroad who serve operational purposes, primarily the collection of intelligence."<sup>158</sup>*

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<sup>157</sup> I adapted this biographical sketch from the John F. Kennedy Library's website, at <https://www.jfklibrary.org/asset-viewer/archives/MBPP>. The JFK Library also has a collection of Bundy's staff files and oral history transcripts, documenting his tenure as National Security Advisor.

Sherman Kent is another good example of a pathbreaker who both exemplified and helped to create revolving doors between intelligence and academia. His career bounced between Yale's History Department faculty to the Office of Strategic Services, back to Yale History, and then back to the newly reformulated Central Intelligence Agency.

<sup>158</sup> *Church Commission Final Report*, Book 1, 189-90. Emphasis in original. Bracketed clarification of who counts as "academics" is in footnote 11, page 189.

These roles were not set in stone, either. The Church Committee noted that individual academicians who were unwittingly supported by CIA funds could later be worked upon as witting supporters. Each type of academic relationship could easily be converted into another.

Professors, for their part, had a variety of reasons for knowingly accepting CIA partnerships. One of the major structural reasons was the atomization of the profession. The Cold War University underwent a structural adjustment. University administrators realized that they could attract massive federal capital outlays to their universities by enlisting their facilities and faculties to serve government interests. This provocative new paradigm—first implemented at Stanford and MIT—altered the professional demands on university faculties. It disincentivized teaching labor and incentivized an entrepreneurial responsibility for funding.<sup>159</sup> Grant awards and publications quickly

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<sup>159</sup> Stanford was one of the first universities to institute this new paradigm in its STEM departments. "To older professors...departments provided insulation from interreference in academic affairs and disciplinary developments by administrators, who were suspect because of their responsibilities for fund-raising and their connections to the university's board of trustees. To some younger professors...however, departmental autonomy was an obstacle to career aspirations; these professors, who did not see the academic and industrial worlds as diametrically opposed, eagerly joined forces with Stanford's administrators to thwart departmental traditions. Together with the university administrators, they created and celebrated a new academic type—a professor devoted to research and strongly connected to the world outside the university, an entrepreneur in search of research funds upon which his career, and the university's financial well-being and reputation, depended." Lowen, *Cold War University*, 89. Thanks to Dirk Bönker for this reference.

became the currency of the realm, at the expense of graduate and undergraduate instruction, as well as service to the profession.

Naturally, CIA patronage would offer tempting advantages to players in this cutthroat new ballgame. CIA leadership understood this new academic paradigm and used it to legitimize their partnerships with university faculty. They took umbrage with being singled out as a tainted organization, when industrial corporations and university faculty were already developing vigorous and autonomous ties without oversight from university administration. CIA Director George H. W. Bush revealed his insight in several letters responding to the concerns of various AAUP members, including Kenneth Parkhurst, President of the AAUP Ohio Conference. Here is Bush responding to Parkhurst:

"Let me say that any employee of any school with whom we [Central Intelligence Agency] have had an exchange of views in his capacity as employee is free to acknowledge that fact publicly or to his college or university administration. My understanding of these matters leads me to believe, however, that while consulting with any part of our government a scholar usually thinks of himself as a private actor rather than as part of the institution of higher education from which he comes. Thus, he feels neither more nor less obligated to report his relationship with CIA than he would his consultations with other U.S. agencies, with U.S. foreign businesses, or with foreign governments. Since we do not seek scholarly contact from particular schools, but rather reach out for advice from the

best authorities wherever they may be, I see some merit in the scholar's logic."<sup>160</sup>

Finally, CIA wanted more than just intelligence from these academic contacts.

The most important goal lay in producing the nuclear bombs of mental warfare. The small arms of propaganda—news reports, photography, rumors, and the like—were covered too. But nothing was more powerful than the book:

Books differ from all other propaganda media, primarily because one single book can significantly change the reader's attitude and action to an extent unmatched by the impact of any other single medium...this is, of course, not true of all books at all times and with all readers—but it is true significantly often enough to make books the most important weapon of strategic (long-range) propaganda.<sup>161</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> George Bush, Letter in response to Mr. Kenneth Parkhurst, written on Central Intelligence Agency letterhead (5 June [year redacted]). Although the year is redacted, this letter was likely sent in the year 1976. Bush thanked Parkhurst for starting their conversation by referring to that date: "Thank you for your letter of 20 May 1976..." collected in *CIA-RDP88-01315R000100120001-3*, accessed online courtesy of CIA Reading Room at <https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/document/cia-rdp88-01315r000100120001-3>.

During the 1976 AAUP Annual Meeting, Admiral Turner used a similar defense: CIA should not be stigmatized, but rather should be treated just like any other academic-industrial partnership. Said Admiral Turner: "If a university requires that all outside commitments of its faculty be reported to the administration, we fully support the position that a relationship with the CIA should be no exception. However, we disagree that a relationship with the CIA should be singled out as unique, and the only one that need be reported...This assumes that only a relationship with the CIA could endanger an academic's or a school's integrity. With all the opportunities for conflict of interest today, I think that is a naive assumption." Stansfield Turner (revised transcript of panelist remarks), "Universities and the Intelligence Community," 25.

<sup>161</sup> CIA Chief of the Covert Action Staff, 1961, quoted in *Church Committee Final Report Book 1*, 193.

Based on CIA testimonies, the Church Committee concluded that the Agency had stopped publishing books purposefully for the US (domestic) book market—as well as journals,

The types of aid available to campaigns to publish propagandized books ranged from concealed financial support to publishers, to direct relations with authors in which CIA retained full direction over the final draft. In the latter case, officers enforced compliance through cash advances to authors which would have to be repaid if the end product diverged too much from "our operational and propagandistic intention..."<sup>162</sup> For

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newsletters, and magazines after 1967—due to the threat of public exposure of this program to shape public opinion. However, "the CIA has denied to the Committee a number of the titles and names of authors of the propaganda books published since 1967" (194). It is not clear to me whether the claims about 1967 could ever be independently verified—it seems the Committee has been forced to take the Agency at their word, just as they have been forced to comply with CIA restrictions on archival access.

Furthermore, books initially produced for overseas markets could easily find their way back to the domestic market if they became commercially viable and even politically sensational. The Church Committee referred to this phenomenon by using its own atomic age metaphor: "The domestic fallout of covert propaganda." It acknowledged that CIA officers were powerless to stop overseas covert propaganda books from washing ashore in the United States, and could use this to manipulate public opinion with less risk to the Agency and its publishing contacts.

"In the case of books, substantial fallout in the U.S. may be a necessary part of the propaganda process. For example, CIA records for 1967 state that certain books about China subsidized or even produced by the Agency 'circulate principally in the U.S. as a prelude to later distribution abroad.' Several of these books on China were widely reviewed in the United States, often in juxtaposition to the sympathetic view of the emerging China as presented by Edgar Snow. At least once, a book review for an Agency book which appeared in the *New York Times* was written by a CIA writer under contract. E. Howard Hunt, who had been in charge of contacts with U.S. publishers in the late 1960s, acknowledged in testimony before this Committee that CIA books circulated in the U.S., and suggested that such fallout may not have been unintentional." Ibid., 198.

<sup>162</sup> CIA Chief of the Covert Action Staff, 1961, quoted in Ibid., 193.

books that aligned with CIA operational mandates but were not commercially viable, Agency staffers stepped in to get them published anyways.<sup>163</sup>

Structurally speaking, books in the social sciences meet all the criteria for CIA strategic aims. First, the prestige attached to the academic author's disciplinary training and depth of research makes their books ideal vehicles for propaganda. Readers typically seek out these books for impartial, quality information. Readers tend to assume that these books have been vetted by peer review, and therefore they do not guard themselves against possible hoodwinking. Second, the restructuring of the Cold War university placed a strong incentive on professors to publish books as the only viable path to academic tenure. Third, academic books are typically published at a financial loss to university presses—the specialization of knowledge restricts the market for potential buyers. So, for reasons like number three, presses are vulnerable to proffered capital especially when it is accomplished through a concealed source.

## **10.2 The National Security Interest in Africa**

*"US Embassy reporting indicates that since the early 1970s US interests in the Western Sahel have expanded from largely humanitarian concerns to include a major commitment to the region's economic development and a recognition of its geopolitical importance."*

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid.

— "West Africa: Bleak Prospects for the Western Sahel: An Intelligence Assessment"<sup>164</sup>

No idea, however academic, can fully erase the conditions of its making, nor the politics of its time. It does not matter whether Janet Abu-Lughod and Roderick McIntosh were witting or unwitting beneficiaries of clandestine support. It does not even matter whether they received support or not. To say that the Third World originated modern capitalism implicitly licenses affinity with the United States. To say that the Niger River Delta peoples developed autochthonous, pluralistic civil societies does the same.

Africa became a crucial point of contention between USA and USSR in the policy shift brought forth by the Carter Administration. NSC officials perceived Soviet intensification of intervention in Africa, which the Politburo denied (3.1 "Before American Hegemony"). These accusations and beliefs contributed to the breakdown of détente between the two Great Powers.

The hot spots of Africa—in a bid for military aid, energy supply, and capital infusions various political parties aimed to take hold of decolonization movements and affiliate themselves with the Soviet Union. The most pressing at the beginning of the end of détente were Zaire (Rhodesia) and Angola and spread soon after into Ethiopia. The

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<sup>164</sup> "West Africa: Bleak Prospects for the Western Sahel: An Intelligence Assessment," (Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, January 1983; Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 13 July 2011), 1.

Carter Administration's policy, headed by National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, was to ramp up tension with the Soviets by holding them responsible for these socialist overtures.

Compared, then, to the Horn of Africa and Southern Africa at this time, West Africa seemed to be far from Soviet meddling. But with the coming Reagan Administration, West Africa became a new focus of concern. In this region, dominated by former French African colonies, CIA staff in the Office for African and Latin American Analysis (ALA) identified Libya as the main enemy. Muammar Qadhafi seized power in Libya as part of a military coup in 1969 and aligned himself with the Soviet Union. The CIA interpretation was that Libya sought regional hegemony in the unstable West African Sahel region. In the first term of the Reagan Administration, the Office of African and Latin American Analysis (ALA) of the Central Intelligence Agency fixated on this potential threat to American interests.

In a report dated January 1983, ALA analysts constructed the political geography the Niger River Delta nations in terms of a "buffer between expansionist-minded Libya in the north and Liberia, Nigeria, Senegal, and Ivory Coast, where the United States has significant economic and political interests."<sup>165</sup> Those interests included access to "important mid-Atlantic sea and air lanes" as well as "preventing the Soviets from

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid.

gaining military access to bases in the Western Sahel."<sup>166</sup> The problem with this buffer region is that it was politically and economically vulnerable to unfriendly interests.

The ALA diagnosed the Western Sahel's problem in terms of poor integration into the international economy. By and large, the nations were primarily agricultural and host to nomadic and ethnically fractious tribes—a spitting image of Rostow's "feudal stagnation" stereotype. Niger was the only country that had something to offer world markets—fairly large proven uranium ore deposits—but France was their major buyer in a world where other buyers had better options. Dependence on this one export—and therefore the exchange rate of uranium ore—moreover, meant that there was low potential for economic development, based on the Rostowian paradigm.

Also, in line with Rostow's theory, ALA analysts expected that the pro-Western states would increase their reliance on foreign aid in the form of IMF loans, French aid, and increasingly, American aid in lieu of access to private investment capital. Again, true to Rostow's paradigm, ALA staff expected the Soviet Union and Libya to employ "destabilization" to demoralize, disintegrate, and replace the current pro-Western governments in the region with socialist ones.

These impoverished, drought-plagued nations are prime targets for Libyan destabilization efforts and attract Soviet

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<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

political meddling, including efforts to secure airfields and ports. Although substantial Western aid helps meet the region's needs, we believe the underlying political, social, and economic problems are so great that the Libyans and Soviets will for the foreseeable future find openings to exploit <redacted>.<sup>167</sup>

By 1985, the cast of characters had changed. A July report on Niger declines to mention meddling by Moscow.<sup>168</sup> Instead, the pesky bids for influence come from Tripoli—still—and Teheran. The diabolical Libya-Iran duo are the new enemies ready to exploit the same old internal instabilities—ethnic favoritism, poverty, overreliance on one kind of global commodity, and corruption. Iran's interest lay in access to Nigerien uranium for the development of its own nuclear program.<sup>169</sup>

A September 1985 assessment led by the Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA) confirmed the lack of Soviet involvement. Moscow didn't care for anything in the Western Sahel but cheap opportunistic openings for influence.<sup>170</sup> Their relations with

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<sup>167</sup> Ibid., iii.

<sup>168</sup> "NIGER: Challenges Facing Kountche" (Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 25 July 1985; Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 18 January 2012).

<sup>169</sup> "Libya is not the only potential troublemaker for Niger. Iran established an embassy in Niamey last March consisting of six diplomats and a charge. In our view, the new Iranian presence probably is linked to Tehran's efforts to upgrade relations with Islamic countries in Africa and to Niamey's attempt to sell uranium." "Challenges Facing Kountche," 7.

<sup>170</sup> "The Soviets will continue to probe for opportunities that instability may create in Western-oriented countries where they now have minimal influence. Although they have gained little in such situations in recent years, they are likely to persist with low-cost attempts to expand their diplomatic presence, cultivate trade ties, develop intelligence assets, and influence public opinion in a bid to improve their position to take advantage of future developments." "The Soviet

Sahelian leaders had soured by the end of the 1960s.<sup>171</sup> The access to ports and military bases that seemed so threatening just two years ago now appeared to offer little marginal improvement to what the Soviets were already capable of doing in the region.<sup>172</sup>

Finally, ALA tacitly accepted Rostow's theory of political reform: although military rule was an acceptable way for poorly developed countries to begin implementing growth-oriented policies, these governments should transition to civilian rule once the standard of living had reached a high enough level. In Niger:

The US Embassy reports that the timetable for an eventual return to civilian rule was pushed back indefinitely last

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Response to Instability in West Africa: An Intelligence Assessment" (Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, September 1985; Sanitized Copy Approved for Release 20 April 2011), iii.  
<sup>171</sup> "The close relations of the early 1960s proved short lived. African leaders became disenchanted with what they viewed as Soviet meddling in their internal affairs. Moreover, Soviet aid often proved unsuited to African needs and conditions, and the frequently highhanded behavior of Soviet advisers and diplomats offended local sensibilities. Sekou Touré, for example, accused the Soviet Ambassador of interfering in local labor politics. In December 1961 he expelled the Ambassador and moved to scale down Soviet involvement in Guinea. During the 1960s, Moscow's ties to Mali stabilized at a comparatively low, but cordial, level. Relations with Ghana continued to be good until Kwame Nkrumah's fall in 1966 led to a sharp reduction in Soviet presence and influence." "Soviet Response," 1.

<sup>172</sup> Expanded access to West African air and naval facilities could improve the Soviets' capacity to monitor naval activity in the South Atlantic. Such access, in and of itself, however, would not result in substantial improvement in Soviet military capabilities in the region. Ibid., 17.

SOVA analysts still, as their job required them to do, speculated on alternative scenarios in which the Soviet Union under Gorbachev could suddenly devote greater interest to revitalizing West African relations.

month and a draft constitution which was to be ratified in a national referendum in January 1986 has been delayed. The Embassy also indicates that although a civilian National Assembly will eventually be formed, the government does not envision a role for political parties under civilian rule. Moreover, informed Nigeriens have expressed skepticism that military influence will be effectively limited or that Kountche intends to follow through on the transition to civilian government, according to the US Embassy.<sup>173</sup>

This assessment takes for granted the possibility and normativity of eventual civilian rule—that Kountche is not only capable of someday delegating sovereignty to the Nigerien people, but that this would mark the next stage in Nigerien political development. Civil society is, in this framework, the *sine qua non* of political maturity. It is implied that it is not only a desirable goal for Niger, but that it is the endpoint of any nation's political development.

To summarize: by the end of 1985, the African and Latin American Analysis department of CIA had identified Libya as the primary threat to American interests on the coast of West Africa. ALA had interpreted Libyan actions and Nigerien claims about Libyan actions to indicate that that country's socialist military regime, headed by Muammar Qadhafi, desired regional political and military hegemony. In fact, ALA staff proposed that Qadhafi wished to create a "pan-Islamic political entity dominated by

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<sup>173</sup> "Challenges," 4.

Libya and free of French and other Western influences."<sup>174</sup> This proposed State would upset the regional *status quo* and therefore threaten the American coastal interests.

CIA's goals in the region were to build the Western Sahel states—including Mali, Niger, Chad, and Nigeria—as a buffer region that would keep Libya at arms' length from the coastal nations. ALA's assessment was that these national governments were vulnerable to Libyan schemes because of poverty and ethnic strife. They used domino theory and Kountche—as native informant—to predict that the destabilization of Chad was the first step in Libyan designs for the rest of the Western Sahel states.<sup>175</sup> In order to build up the Western Sahel states to serve as an effective buffer against Libya, ALA used Rostow's theory of economic development. The Sahel states needed financial aid, technical assistance, and economic restructuring until their economies were strong

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<sup>174</sup> "Bleak Prospects," 9.

<sup>175</sup> "Kountche believes that Qadhafi has designs on Niger's uranium mines and seeks to incorporate Niger, along with Chad and Mali, into a Libyan-dominated Saharan state. Libya has provided nomadic tribesmen in northern Niger with modern small arms and Libyan identity cards, making it difficult for the thinly spread government forces to control them. Radio Tripoli has also begun broadcasts urging Niger's nomadic peoples to rebel." "Niger: Difficult Crossroads" (Washington DC: Central Intelligence Agency, 2 October 1981; Approved for Release 16 July 2007), 3.

"[Qadhafi] Publicly referred to Niger as 'second in line' after Chad and incited Nigeriens through radio propaganda broadcasts to overthrow the Kountche government. In addition, Qadhafi reportedly has passed out arms to dissident Tuareg and Toubou tribesmen in northern Niger and Mali." "Bleak Prospects," 10.

enough to support political reform. If economic development went according to plan, ALA expected the military governments to devolve power to civil society.<sup>176</sup>

### ***10.3 How Might an Academic Social Scientist Support the National Interest?***

Now, suppose that an academician wished to support the American national interest in West Africa from the 1980s to the 1990s. This academician is based out of an American institution for higher learning, rather than working directly for the CIA History Staff. What ideas would they advance, in order to further the attainment of strategic goals, with the help of their scholarly bona fides and research publications?

I would expect them to advance ideas which strengthened the buffer zone between Libya and the West African coast, to deter Qadhafi from creating a sphere of influence there. What would those ideas be?

1. That the Niger River Delta has long been a region unto itself with its own ecological, historical, and political integrity. This would help throw cold water on

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<sup>176</sup> "Although Kountche has taken some halting steps toward developing political institutions—with the aim of eventually returning the former French colony to civilian rule—he has yet to find a workable power-sharing formula between deeply suspicious military and civilian leaders." "Challenges Facing Kountche," 1.

imagined communities with other blocs, such as socialist states aligned with China or the Soviet Union, or a pan-Islamic state system headed by Libya.<sup>177</sup>

2. That the Niger River Delta region, so constituted, was also self-reliant and did not depend on outside catalysts—be it war, trade, or migration—to develop social practices and political institutions. This would help encourage suspicion of Libyan offers for aid and assistance while also flattering those who bristled at the continuation of French influence in West Sahelian affairs. It would discourage the idea that one could use Libya in order to push France away.

3. That the Niger River Delta region developed political institutions, with no help from outsiders, which indicate a uniquely African path to civil society. This would help

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<sup>177</sup> For more on the concept of imagined community, see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (London; New York: Verso, 2006).

Ann Laura Stoler expands the idea of imagined community so that it is flexible enough to account for a palimpsest of overlapping social and political groupings—not just national ones—that actually work to draw people together who would not necessarily find common grounds to do so. "Colonizers themselves...were neither by nature unified nor did they inevitably share common interests and fears; their boundaries—always marked by whom those in power considered legitimate progeny and whom they did not—were never clear. On the contrary, I argue that colonizers live in what has elsewhere been called "imagined communities...—ones that are consciously created and fashioned to overcome the economic and social disparities that would in other contexts separate and often set their members in conflict." Ann Laura Stoler, "Rethinking Colonial Categories: European Communities and the Boundaries of Rule," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 31:1 (January 1989), 137.

encourage Afrocentrists to see civil society as desirable because it is true to their heritage. It would encourage Afrocentrists to press military governments into creating robust civil society institutions, because this would enhance political stability in nationalistic dress. Finally, it would support the idea that, by accepting the United States' assistance in building democratic governments, West Sahelians would actually become their true selves.

In *The People of the Middle Niger*, Roderick McIntosh hit all three points, and then some.

To point one, McIntosh makes repeated use of maps of the region, listed on page xiii. Some express territorial borders.<sup>178</sup> Others express ethnic migration patterns.<sup>179</sup> One reconstructs "paleoenvironmental" features.<sup>180</sup> In their sum total, these maps achieve what Thongchai Winichakul described as the "geo-body of a nation... a man-made territorial definition which creates effects—by classifying, communicating, and enforcement—on people, things, and relationships."<sup>181</sup> Here, of course, the goal is not a

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<sup>178</sup> Roderick James McIntosh, *The Peoples of the Middle Niger: The Island of Gold* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1998), xvi.

<sup>179</sup> McIntosh, *Middle Niger*, 16.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

<sup>181</sup> Winichakul continues on to say: "Geographically speaking, the geo-body of a nation occupies a certain portion of the earth's surface which is objectively indefinable. It appears to be concrete to the eyes as if its existence does not depend on any act of imagining. That, of course, is not the case. The geo-body of a nation is merely an effect of modern geographical discourse whose prime

single nation but of a supranational kind of Middle Niger bloc, strong and interdependent enough to resist Libyan incursions.

McIntosh also constitutes this Middle Niger geo-body in prose. He characterizes it as a composite of "landscapes."<sup>182</sup> Like European landscape painters who discovered national identity in the rolling country hills, McIntosh characterizes Middle Niger as a continuous and integral territorial formation based on natural, *essential* characteristics of the land.<sup>183</sup>

To the casual visitor, the Azawad [the northernmost Middle Niger dry basin] is a sea of sand and monotony.<sup>184</sup>

To the natural scientist, the Azawad sand plains...tell of the eventual triumph of wind over rain and flood. The Azawad is a mosaic of river, swamp, lake, and wind-borne deposits. So, too, are all six Middle Niger basins. Layered transformation is the best description of the cumulative

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technology is a map." Thongchai Winichakul, *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of a Nation* (Honolulu, HI: University of Hawai'i Press, 1997), 17. My thanks to João Felipe Gonçalves for teaching this monograph in his seminar on "Nations and Nationalisms."

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

<sup>183</sup> McIntosh even goes so far as to use cropped satellite photos to enhance the realism of his Middle Niger geo-body. On page 19 of *Middle Niger*, the "satellite image mosaic" is cropped to extract and decontextualize the Middle Niger from the rest of Western Africa.

For perspectives on landscapes and nationalism, as well as other cultural forces, see the essays collected in *Landscape and Power*, second edition, ed. W. J. T. Mitchell (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2002).

<sup>184</sup> McIntosh, *Middle Niger*, 34.

effects of alternating agencies of rain, river, and desiccation that caused the complex interweave of microenvironments throughout the Middle Niger.<sup>185</sup>

Between these two passages, McIntosh sets up a contrast between the casual outsider and the serious insider—either a native inhabitant or scholar invested in the region. Between the casual and the expert lie a chasm of perceptions. For the casual, the Azawad dry basin seems to be sandy "monotony." But for the expert—and presumably the inhabitants too—it is a "mosaic" of "complex" and interconnected "microenvironments."

McIntosh continues by establishing a primordial bond between the dramatic natural forces that have shaped this region and the ancestral people of the land:

The Azawad will serve to introduce the prehistoric populations' adaptive strategy that led, eventually, to today's distinctive and synergistic accommodation of modern groups in the four live basins. The people of the Middle Niger have risen to the challenge of that environmental volatility by producing a web of specialized, but articulated occupations. Archaeological survey in the Azawad provides the earliest evidence of this adaptation to paleoclimatic surprise and opportunity.<sup>186</sup>

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<sup>185</sup> Ibid., 36.

<sup>186</sup> Ibid., 37.

McIntosh is preparing readers for his argument that civil society institutions were almost literally grown in African soil. They rose up out of dynamic institutional adaptations, the "genius" of the Middle Niger peoples, to live in this complex and harsh landscape.<sup>187</sup> Democratic civil society is not just rooted in the ancient past—but in the purported ancient bond between a people and their homeland. So, McIntosh channels the spirit of cultural nationalism into his scientific survey of this territory.

For point two, McIntosh repeatedly stresses that the peoples of the Middle Niger achieved economic growth and civil society institutions on their own.

During the last millennium BC, the region nurtured some of Africa's oldest metallurgy. As we shall see, early iron working is in part a story of technology and, in part, a growth industry in manipulating the most dangerous occult forces. The clustered hamlets of the pre-metallurgical communities gave rise to the wealthy and highly populous Middle Niger cities, without demonstrable outside help.<sup>188</sup>

It is as if McIntosh had taken Rostow and Millikan's stages of economic development and refitted it for archaeology. In McIntosh's telling, the Middle Niger peoples had in fact mastered the stages of paleoeconomic growth, moving from "hamlets" to "highly populous...cities" all on their own initiative.

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<sup>187</sup> Ibid., 33.

<sup>188</sup> Ibid., 23.

Earlier I referred to the "genius" of the Middle Niger peoples, and in its context, this too is a reference to their independence from the outside world.

All these achievements—the populous cities, the specialists producing their manufactures for distant markets, novel forms of complex governance invented centuries before the 'empires' of Ghana and Mali—all these were the genius of the peoples of the Middle Niger. The populations of the vast inner delta of the Niger did not need the gift of civilization from northern traders, clerics and (by the eleventh century) invaders drawn to the lands south of the Sahara by the lustre of gold. All these accomplishments came into being long before the trans-Saharan gold commerce.<sup>189</sup>

Thus, McIntosh explains that the outsiders did not even arrive early enough to influence the development of Middle Niger civilization. Whatever they might have contributed to this economic growth, happened far too late to count as part of the true Middle Niger symbolic reservoir.

Now to point three. These Middle Niger "specialists" became interdependent, producing crafts and expertise unique to their particular life worlds. The fishermen, the herders, the growers, and the hunters worked together to leverage their comparative advantages and survive in their complex landscapes. Moreover, their expertise became so elaborate that they could not take over one another's roles—each guild had no choice

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 33.

but to respect the integrity of their neighbors' trade secrets.<sup>190</sup> Adam Smith meets prehistoric Africa: it is as if the invisible hand guided these peoples to build glimmering wealth and knowledge. Having surpassed subsistence activity, they manufactured surplus goods for "distant markets." McIntosh even goes so far as to identify the specific social class responsible for making this entire paleoeconomic take-off possible. They are the masters of weapons, the arbiters of death, the band of bands. They are the hunters.

In terms of defining their own moral code, the Mande hunter has no country. Hunters must have these transcendent loyalties because they deal in vast quantities of *nyama* (the earth's and all living things' fundamental life force).<sup>191</sup>

The hunters are the only transcendent class. They alone have the power to mediate disputes and enforce disagreements, and this is because they monopolize the secret knowledge of handling *nyama*—their ability to cultivate and control their killing energies, to exert pressure, persuasion, and force upon animal and human alike. But rather than making war, the hunters make peace, and this peace makes for commercial exchange:

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<sup>190</sup> McIntosh dramatizes these dynamic in his "historical imagination" chapters. For this summary I am drawing on Ibid, 82-3.

<sup>191</sup> Ibid., 87.

Indeed, they [the hunters] are credited with pioneering attempts to control those dangerous life-energies of their animal and human prey. *Nyama* may still be at a purely extractive stage, but the moral imperative to manipulate notions of purity and guardianship of social equilibrium will persist through transformations at the hands of smiths, secular dynasts and, arguably, into modern civil society democracy. Hunters pioneer notions of authority predicated upon *nyama*. And so, too, they invent institutions of closed-membership power associations and magical, sumptuary objects of dangerous power...what is new is their authoritative mediating role; mediating between the community and strangers, between ordered settlement and the wilderness, and within the community between alliance-bound families, clans, and occupation groups. When this new formulation of authority works, specialization can explode.<sup>192</sup>

Once again, McIntosh paleo-tizes Rostow's stages of economic development. The military governments of today are supposed to stabilize societies until they can reach the conditions of economic takeoff (Adam Smith meets Thomas Hobbes). Like a decentralized African Leviathan, these hunters also stabilized their society by force of arms, making room for the Invisible Hand to do its work.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

McIntosh uses a lot of academese in this passage, which made for difficult reading. I suspect that many of the most tortuous phrases are actually euphemisms for rule by terror. Using *nyama* at the "purely extractive stage" is a roundabout way of saying that these hunters plundered and exacted tribute from various peoples. "Closed-membership power associations" sounds like an oligarchy. It strikes a discordant note with the idea of "modern civil society democracy," unless you are fully committed to Rostow's theory of economic growth. In the Rostowian view, military oligarchy is a helpful stage for the emergence of civil society democracy. Whether or not this is CIA-funded scholarship, such academese flatters the public servants of military governments.

The hunter epics suggest that horizontal authority emerged as a solution to our formative crisis. As guardians of social equilibrium, hunters were duty bound to preserve alliances between villages and accords between a community's sub-groups. Hunter's authority in prehistory derived from the horrible sanction of *nyama* as used to maintain peace between the emerging occupationally defined groups. With open exchange, society became increasingly segmented horizontally. The Middle Niger has begun a long journey down the path of heterarchical segmentation to the astonishing human mosaic that prevails today.<sup>193</sup>

From peace and power came economic specialization, exchange, and flexible prehistoric political institutions possible. McIntosh does not need to say it by now: he implies that these hunters are the prehistoric equivalents of the Western Sahel's soldier-statesmen today.

So, McIntosh fulfilled the three criteria I set forth above. One, he constituted Middle Niger as an autonomous historical region. Two, he characterized the peoples of this region as self-reliant— independent of outside influences. Three, he characterized these peoples as geniuses who developed their own civil society institutions in African prehistory. By projecting Rostow's stages of development into Africa's prehistory, McIntosh merges knowledge with conversion. The Western Sahel already mastered the

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<sup>193</sup> Ibid. 87.

arts of economic growth and civil society on their own terms, deep within their heritage. All that they need to do now is to recover that African wisdom and apply it to the problems of the present.

But I have said that McIntosh did more than just fulfill the three points above. Throughout the book he repeats his belief in a direct link between West Sahelian prehistory and the West Sahelian present. He even goes so far as to reflect on the Mali academic community and interdisciplinarity as an authentically African dynamism:

"We can describe paleoclimate history as a synoecic process. So, too, are the generation and accommodation of ethnic and corporate groups, of farming, fishing, and pastoral practices. [...] It may be pushing the concept, but the various research projects concerned with the physical and social evolution of the Middle Niger have also been synoecic in their great interactive diversity. Archaeology is just an example."<sup>194</sup>

So, for McIntosh, prehistory blends seamlessly into the present, like one continuous stream. But if that were so, then where are the Libyans? Shouldn't we expect to find a primordial enemy who is trying to impose foreign domination upon his plucky Middle Niger heroes?

In McIntosh's telling, the greatest foreign threat comes from Tuareg raiders:

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 20-21.

Timbuktu is a town at the frontier of the Niger's dead and live deltas. It is a city long wounded by conflict between desert Tuareg and riverine Songhai. The conflict has roots sunk centuries, if not millennia deep. It has sprouted again, briefly, in the early 1990s. A violent Sahara-based Tuareg separatist movement (Front Islamique Arab pour l'Azawad) was resisted in Timbuktu by an *ad hoc* civilian militia, provocatively named in Songhai, the "Owners of the Land." Thus, the contest for dominance continues today between desert-born and river-sired peoples, as it has for centuries, and for millennia.

McIntosh highlights the foreignness of the Tuareg by characterizing them as Saharans and peoples of the desert. In other words, they have descended upon a riverine region and riverine peoples: an environment and a civilization not connected to them by birth. Once again, McIntosh blends prehistory and the present together to create an archetypical conflict—foreign Tuareg encroach unfairly upon the intelligent, self-reliant peoples of the delta.

If the Tuareg are foreigners, then who are their ancestors? What kind of people are they?

"They [the Tuareg] are of Berber origin, speak a Berber language (tamasheq) and use a Berber alphabet (tifmar). They are more properly called the Kel Tamasheq after their ancestral language, at which point any certainty about their origin ceases. Most reconstructions place them as descendants of the so-called Libyco-Berber. Libyco-Berber

is a generic term given to a cluster of Saharan groups with a history deep in the pre-Christian period. The ancestors of Tuareg were very probably related to the Garamantes of Herodotus. They may already have been a southern stream of the ancient Libyans (sometimes called paleo-Berbers). These are the so-called *guerriers libyens* (Libyan warriors) depicted on horse and war chariot in the Saharan rock art. Depictions in the art of battle and chase scenes demonstrate that relations with Black neighbors were already strained."<sup>195</sup>

McIntosh continues on to explain how the Tuareg "encroached" into other lands as well, fleeing the desertification of the Sahara.<sup>196</sup> They were opportunists, who "took advantage of the political chaos after the Moroccan invasion of 1591 to take root along the river and northernmost lakes."<sup>197</sup> McIntosh does not comment on links between the prehistorical Tuareg and the modern Libyans. With his characterization of the ancient Libyco-Berber Tuareg aggressors, it hardly needs to be said.

So, McIntosh projected the politics of the Cold War back into Africa's prehistory. But I wish to remind you, reader, that I am using his scholarship as an avatar of Cold War American social sciences as a whole. McIntosh is an avatar of our social scientific epistemology, which blends knowledge with conversion, truth with evangelism. Our history — archaeology (McIntosh), economic history (Rostow), and historical

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<sup>195</sup> Ibid., 127-128.

<sup>196</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>197</sup> Ibid., 128.

anthropology (Obeyesekere) inclusive—is based on an epistemology of the Gospel. We look to the past to transform ourselves and others for the future. We have a kind of duty to become, in the future, who were truly were in the past. It is this framework that we unwittingly impose upon the Other when we attempt to decoct their differential essence.

McIntosh is also an avatar for that other pole of the dialectic of universalization. The social sciences have always been linked, not just to a deep Western structure of thought, but also to the shallow exigencies of our present circumstances. Gonzalo Oviedo y Valdes used historical arguments in order to advance the interests of the Spanish Crown. He 'proved' that the New Indies were the mythical Hesperides, and furthermore, that the Hesperides were by ancient right current possessions of the Spanish Crown (Chapter 2.1). It is easy for us to judge him for this audacity, with the benefit of our hindsight. But it would be hypocritical for us to use this judgment in order to whitewash our own historical research. For we too are responsive to the needs of our present and enmeshed in the sovereign powers of our times.

## 11. Conclusion

*“God bless me!’ said Sancho, ‘did I not tell your worship to mind what you were about, for they were only windmills? And no one could have made any mistake about it but one who had something of the same kind in his head.’”*

*“Hush, friend Sancho,’ replied Don Quixote, ‘the fortunes of war more than any other are liable to frequent fluctuations; and moreover I think, and it is the truth, that that same sage Friston who carried off my study and books, has turned these giants into mills in order to rob me of the glory of vanquishing them, such is the enmity he bears me; but in the end his wicked arts will avail but little against my good sword.’”<sup>198</sup>*

In the long run, the Western structure of thought does not distinguish between knowledge of the other and conversion of the other. To know the world as it is has become inseparable from imagining what it should be. In the West, both themes—truth and evangelism, knowledge and conversion—are one and the same.

This is because the Other is a kind of accident of the Self, in the epistemology of the Gospel. Knowledge and conversion are linked, because the goal of this tradition has always been to unify—to make one people out of many. We must become One, because we *were* One, according to Christian tradition.

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<sup>198</sup> Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, *The History of Don Quixote*, transl. John Ornsby, accessed online courtesy of Project Gutenberg at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/996/996-h/996-h.htm>.

...so in Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others.<sup>199</sup>

Just as a body, though one, has many parts, but all its many parts form one body, so it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit so as to form one body—whether Jews or Gentiles, slave or free—and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. Even so the body is not made up of one part but of many.<sup>200</sup>

So it is that the conversion of the world presumes that this original body, whose members have fallen away, shall be gathered up, and put back together again.

At the high tide of science in America's 20th century, it seemed that the criteria had been settled once and for all. It seemed that knowledge had triumphed over conversion. It seemed that Western science described and classified the world as it was—unlike the totalitarian Communists, who described what they wanted it to be.<sup>201</sup> And so, we became the noblest, most powerful, and most Christian Knight of the Free World. We galloped off into the distance on a great white horse. We did battle with that unholy Friston, to save the fool peasant Sancho from both himself and that dark mage. Someday, we promised, we shall give Sancho the Governorship of the Isla, when he has

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<sup>199</sup> Romans 12:5 NIV, available online courtesy of Biblica.

<sup>200</sup> 1 Corinthians 12:12-14 NIV, courtesy of Biblica.

<sup>201</sup> "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." Karl Marx, *Theses on Feuerbach*, transl. Cyril Smith and Don Cuckson (Marxists.org, 2002 [1845]), accessed online at <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/theses/>.

proven himself honorable enough to execute such solemn duties. Such is the epic of our First, Second, and Third Worlds.

Evangelists developed empirical thought thanks to their sublime confidence in the One True God. In whatever archives they collected, whatever they encountered, they would find evidence of the knowing hand of their universal Creator. Thus, empirical study could only enhance the Christian faith, strengthen it against its enemies, and provide irresistible proofs of the Good Word. The empirical record supplied the trumps for spiritual disputations.

This historical partnership between empiricism and evangelism once bound academicians to the Apostolic churches. Now it binds academicians to universities and national states. The evangelical empiricism of our times works in the service of geopolitics and global development, at the confluences of sovereignty and capital, cultural imperialism and soft power. We find time and again that what humanity was is what it must become, what humanity is becoming is what we originally were.

The justification for conversion remains at the heart of historical knowledge. Professional history, in other words, is a kind of folklore of the state, in which the past holds the key to the future. It is folklore in the sense that characterizing this past, safeguarded by empirical methodologies and rigorous peer review, is a technique for manipulating the interests, prejudices, and ideologies of the present. There is no pure empiricism, waiting for some future historian to get exactly right. It is because the truth

*is* our folklore, etched in our holiest Books. It is embedded deep within the caverns of Western thought, yet always whispering at the mouth.

In this dissertation, you have seen how the American hegemonists—among them, distinguished professional social scientists—placed their empirical folklores in the service of the Establishment agenda. They constructed knowledge of the peoples of the Third World, before the Europeans came, to tell them what they were like when they were free. These social scientists found civil society and capitalism waiting for them, whispering deep in the florid grottoes.

But they did one more thing in order to assure themselves that they worked in the interest of Truth: They planted their universals in the same orchards as their predecessors. They developed tools to universalize their own truths, while de-universalizing the truths of ages past. In so doing, they sacrificed the early modern historiographers on the ash heap of history. 'Those Spaniards were fools to project their Abrahamic God into the New World's ancient past.' So said the generation who found capitalism whispering across the ancient seas.

De-legitimizing old universals to make way for the new does not mean that the new ones will stand for all times. What the postmodern Americans did to the early modern Spaniards, we know can be done again. As empires ebb and flow, some distant power will come alive. They will ransack our orchards and heap our trees upon the pyre. "What knowledge is this that these Americans have made?" Are we—the West—

not like Don Quixote de la Mancha, when he laid upon his deathbed watching Sancho mourn his passing? Do we not see, in the clarity of our final moments, the follies of our confident days?

But so long as there are folksingers, we shall remain. Our bodies will cast shadows upon the things we leave behind. It will be our ink, and our blood, and our locks of hair, that lay drying in the archives of the future. Our descendants will erect cemeteries to bury our broken dreams, great tombs to lock away our undead longings. They will raise statues to salute our triumphs and our joys. Will we not haunt our own future, having learned this from the ghosts of our own past?

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## **Biography**

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