CULTURE
& TRUTH

The Remaking of Social Analysis

With a new Introduction

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Introduction
to the 1993 Edition

A NEW EDITION of Culture and Truth provides me with a dual opportunity, initially to reflect on recent developments in higher education and then to address the role of anthropologists in these changes. Broadly speaking, such changes require an analysis of cultural citizenship and educational democracy. Working for institutional change requires coordinated efforts and can be guided by a set of principles for achieving diversity in higher education. The rules of thumb set out in what follows should not be taken too literally, however, because under conditions of rapid institu-
tional change today's wisdom can quickly become yesterday's cliché.

The past twenty-five years of increasing inclusion in higher education show a clear pattern: the lower the level in the institutional hierarchies the greater the degree of inclusion achieved. At the present time, changes in student bodies have been greater than those in teaching faculties, and changes in teaching faculties have been greater than those in central administrations. Similarly, less powerful humanities faculties have grown more diverse than their social science counterparts, and less powerful social science faculties have grown more diverse than their natural science counterparts. It is also worth noting that the teaching faculty, a supposedly enlightened group, has often proven to be more a part of the problem than of the solution in efforts to promote diversity.

Processes of institutional change appear to have gone through more or less characteristic phases. Initial efforts concentrated on getting people in the door. Institutions of higher learning appeared to tell those previously excluded, "Come in, sit down, shut up. You're welcome here as long as you conform with our norms." This was the Green Card phase of short-term provisional admission in the name of increasing institutional inclusion and change.

In time, institutions found that they had problems retaining newly admitted students, faculty, and staff. The newcomers entered only to exit shortly thereafter as dropouts. The door of admission turned out to be a revolving one that whisked people out as quickly as they came in. Colleges and universities were not hospitable to their new members. Problems of retention for racialized minority students had to be faced. Such efforts as building a critical mass of minority students, creating ethnic studies centers, establishing positions for minority deans, opening minority student centers, and developing ethnic theme houses helped construct an environment where minority students could become long-term, contributing, more fully enfranchized members of their colleges and universities.

More recently, the issue of institutional responsiveness to educational content has come to the foreground. In one case I witnessed, students stunned a university president by taking over his office and then demanding an education that responded to their concerns, one that recognized their existence and their distinctive goals in pursuing higher learning. Certain changes in institutional norms, curricula, and pedagogies appear crucial for democratizing educational institutions over the coming decade.

At one time students and faculty in women's and minority communities debated intensely about whether their programs should risk dilution by becoming mainstream or retain purity by remaining separate. By now many agree on the need for both; the prime time of mainstreaming and the safe house of separateness. Mainstreaming plays a critical role because of the scope and prestige of prime time. To articulate divergent perspectives and to inspire coming generations, diversity must be present in institutional authority. How otherwise can diverse groups articulate their intellectual visions to greatest effect? How otherwise can diverse groups become full citizens of the Republic of X (supply the name of your college or university)?

Why then do institutions need safe houses? Safe houses can foster self-esteem and promote a sense of belonging in often alien institutions. Such factors have proven critical in the retention of students and should not be minimized. The benefits of creating safe houses also include intellectual contributions. Safe houses can be places where diverse groups—under the banners of ethnic studies, feminist studies, or gay and lesbian studies—talk together and become articulate about their intellectual projects. When they enter mainstream seminars such students speak with clarity and force about their distinctive projects, concerns, and perspectives. The class is richer and more complex, if perhaps less comfortable, for its broadened range of perspectives.

The general goal is to achieve diversity in all rooms, decision-making rooms, classrooms, faculty rooms, rooms of all kinds, shapes, and sizes. In order to democratize higher edu-
cation, people need to work together to change the present situation where the higher the perceived social status of the room the less diverse its membership. When people leave a decision-making room and one hears that a consensus was reached, remember to ask: “Who was in the room when the decision was made?” Introducing diversity in such rooms will slow down the process. Decisions will be harder to reach and the process will be less comfortable than via the old method, but the decisions made will find broad support and prove more effective in the long run.

Achieving diversity in classrooms follows a distinctive pattern. It produces instant changes and calls for a series of further changes. One reaction is predictable. People who once had a monopoly on privilege and authority will suddenly experience relative deprivation. True to anthropological theory, they will feel diminished and may in certain cases find themselves drawn to nativist movements, perhaps to the National Association of Scholars or other groups bent on practicing curricular apartheid. When people become accustomed to privilege, it appears to be a vested right, a status that is natural and well deserved, a part of the order of things. In the short run, the transition to diversity can be traumatic; in the long run, it promises a great deal.

Consider the following representative yet hypothetical case. There once was a place where people of the male persuasion gathered. It was called the old boys’ room. At times it seemed that men went there only to talk about absent parties, people who were prohibited from entering the room—in short, women. Sometimes their remarks were excessively flattering and astonishingly graphic. More often, they were downright crude, vulgar, and demeaning.

Then one day the old boys’ room was integrated. Both men and women began to hold their conversations there. The men had shockingly strong reactions. They felt uncomfortable; some said they were being silenced. One woman asked, “What exactly do you want to say about me? What have you become used to saying about me that you now feel inhibited about saying in my presence?”

My hypothetical case depicts the dynamics of political correctness. The story conveys the psychic reality that political correctness creates for people who report that they feel afraid to say the wrong thing. Have such people become accustomed to saying hateful things with impunity because the people spoken about are not in the room? Alternatively, has the lack of accountability in exclusionary environments led to insensitivity and ignorance about the impact of one’s words and deeds? In such cases a person’s intentions and the effects of their actions do not coincide, but institutional change requires attention both to intentions and to effects. Benevolent intentions do not erase damaging effects. Much as the former exclusive inhabitants of the old boys’ room can, in the long run, remake relations between men and women in fuller more egalitarian ways, so too can Anglos and people of color as well as straights and gays remake their relations. The remaking of social analysis called for in Culture and Truth was inspired at its heart by such struggles to remake institutions and the social relations of their members.

Diversity in classrooms does more than arouse predictable discomfort and resistance. The moment classrooms become diverse, change begins. There is no standing still. New students do not laugh at the old jokes. Even those teachers who do nothing to revise their yellowed sheets of lecture notes know that their words have taken on new meanings. New pedagogies begin. New pedagogies include new courses and new texts. One crucial ingredient involves affirmative action for course readings (and for works cited in publications). Teachers find new ways to seek out pertinent works of high quality by people of color, women, gays, and lesbians. Looking in the usual places and in the usual ways will not produce change. In a graduate seminar I offered a few years ago, students complained about the lack of diverse content. “What,” I asked, “do you mean? You have different cultures in the course—Nuers, Tikopias, Navahos.” “No,” the students replied, “we want books by and not just about members of different cultures.” Since then I’ve often left part of
the syllabus blank so that students can suggest appropriate works previously unknown to me.

A corollary to this general principle is that new texts read in old ways produce little change. Habits of reading must also change. In the graduate seminar we all discovered that a number of the new texts did not speak in the language of anthropological research. After a couple of false starts we began to read the new texts for their projects, for their fresh questions, perceptions, and definitions of problems. The class then assumed the burden of exploring how fresh ideas can be translated into anthropological research projects.

In teaching a new course that grew out of the Western Culture controversy at Stanford University, the instructors juxtaposed the unexpected. I, for example, juxtaposed Augustine’s Confessions and a Navaho life history, Left Handed’s Son of Old Man Hat. Next to a writer relatively uninfluenced by a major world religion, Augustine’s inner struggle with his own paganism became less abstract and more vivid. And next to Augustine, in a course where the assigned books were deemed great, Son of Old Man Hat became quite unlike the book I had taught in anthropology courses. It became a book of wisdom and, in addition to speaking about unioriocity and sheep, the class discussed ideas of knowledge, human judgment, and spiritual harmony.

Such accounts risk being celebrated in ways that do not prepare instructors for the intensity and pain they also will likely face. In part the pain derives from having to share authority more than before. Once diversity is valued as an intellectual and human resource, teachers cannot be equally versed in all texts and issues. Instructors will probably find themselves listening to their students with the care and intensity that they once reserved for their own speech. The pain also comes from how closely or distantly students feel connected with the readings. New course readings often tug at their hearts and involve their feelings more deeply and directly than earlier readings did. Classrooms then produce a range of feelings, from intimate to distant, and the feelings have to be addressed. In my experience such classrooms, even at their most uncomfortable, have produced student work of exceptional quality.

In the classroom multiculturalism involves both a civil rights agenda for institutional change and an intellectual agenda for testing ideas and projects against a more demanding and diverse range of perspectives. Sometimes people ask whether multiculturalism will change the reservation, the barrio, or the ghetto. If diversity were fully implemented it doubtless would bring, even as its implementation would require, wider societal changes. Yet institutional change revolves more immediately around self-interest than disinterested altruism. Colleges and universities stand to be the primary beneficiaries of democratizing movements, both in relation to their communitarian existence and in relation to their central agendas of education and critical thought. Can our major institutions continue to include only a narrow spectrum of the population? Can this nation remain a democracy and condone systemic apartheid in the composition of its classrooms and in the content of its curriculum?

Allow me now to turn to the role of anthropologists in the processes of institutional change just outlined. For anthropologists, the stakes are high in the struggles over multiculturalism. Like it or not, the discipline is present in conflicts over educational democracy. Certain humanists, for example, speak of the gulf separating high literary culture (the best of human thought) from culture in the anthropological sense (a phrase uttered with contempt). In fact, a significant number of anthropologists have been involved in and made significant contributions to multiculturalism. An anthropologist, for example, directs the American Cultures Program at the University of California, Berkeley, and the first new course offered after the Western Culture controversy at Stanford University included an anthropologist among its three teachers. I could offer many more such examples. Perhaps a series of straightforward reports on what
anthropologists have done to promote institutional change, including achievements and obstacles, would help transform disciplinary consciousness.

Yet, if one can believe a spate of letters in the *Anthropology Newsletter*, a number of cultural anthropologists feel excluded from the movements for educational reform that promote diversity and multiculturalism. The newsletter reactions seem heartfelt yet strangely off the mark. Are anthropologists awaiting a formal invitation, perhaps as paid expert consultants in multiculturalism? A counter-message could be: Do not ask what multiculturalism can do for you. Volunteer, get active, take initiative, and work to make anthropology an integral, indispensable part of multiculturalism. Learn about and follow the examples of anthropologists who already have contributed to institutional change.

It may help to keep in mind that the notion of culture has long been anthropology’s master concept and the discipline has an extended history of exploring its intricacies. Thus, some of the newsletter readers lament that interlopers from other fields have added the prefix multi- to the term cultural and, without a word of acknowledgment, stolen valuable disciplinary property from its rightful home. In the finger-pointing moments of the newsletter’s epistolary melodramas, humanists have played the villains who maliciously rob and exclude their social scientist colleagues from the multicultural action. Some readers argue that literary critics have gained a near monopoly on multiculturalism. Because of their failure to draw on anthropological expertise, other readers claim, humanists have condemned themselves to re-inventing a century of intellectual labor on the concept of culture.

Certain anthropologists claim as well that proponents of multiculturalism could stand to learn about the concept of culture advanced by Franz Boas, a key founder of modern anthropology. Boas argued for the integrity of separate cultures which were equal with respect to their values. Differences between cultures with respect to technological development conferred them with neither moral superiority nor moral inferiority. The historical importance of Boasian cultural relativism and related efforts to combat racism cannot be denied.

Yet the notions of Franz Boas seem oddly incomplete and at times beside the point. This is especially the case when one considers that educational democracy involves not only honoring other cultures in their unique integrity, but also working simultaneously with a diversity of human beings—women and men, gays and straights, people of color and Anglos. We are all equal partners in a shared project of renegotiating the sense of belonging, inclusion, and full enfranchisement in our major institutions. Such renegotiations require time, patience, and careful listening. For example, men participate in building diverse communities, not by issuing decrees, but by listening to women’s statements about their subordination, their forms of well-being, and their sense of full enfranchisement. How many men worry in middle-class neighborhoods about how they will walk to their cars at night? How many women do not have such concerns? Settings where diversity resides in a single room require a reworking of anthropology at its core, including serious reformulations of the historically significant Boasian doctrine of separate and equal cultures.

*Culture and Truth* argues that anthropology has undergone a sea change since the late 1960s. This shift has been stimulated by changes in the world, notably decolonization, the civil rights movement, the fuller emergence of a global economy, and the massive interventions of development. The emergent research program for ethnography has placed increased emphasis on history and politics in contexts of inequality and oppression based on such factors as Westernization, media imperialism, invasions of commodity culture, and differences of class, gender, race, ethnicity, and sexual orientation.

Recent experimentation in ethnographic writing arguably derives from the remaking of social analysis rather than from experimentation for its own sake. Modes of composition have changed because the discipline’s research agenda
has shifted from the search for structures to theories of practice that explore the interplay of both structure and agency. In such endeavors, knowledge and power are intertwined because the observer's point of view always influences the observations she makes. Rather than stressing timeless universals and the sameness of human nature, this perspective emphasizes human diversity, historical change, and political struggle.

In this context, classic modes of analysis, which in their pure type rely exclusively on a detached observer using a neutral language to study a unified world of brute facts, no longer hold a monopoly on truth. Instead they now share disciplinary authority with other analytical perspectives. The move from singular to plural forms of analysis implies a need to decenter and reread ethnographic classics, not to dismiss or discard them. In the humanities, social sciences, and legal studies, canonical lists of classics pose problems, not because of what they include (the books are good), but because of what they exclude (other good books). Critics of bad faith all too often conflate an insistence on greater diversity (whether in approaches to social analysis, modes of composition, or socially esteemed texts and authors) with demeaning or throwing out the classics. The vision for change strives for greater inclusion, not an inversion of previous forms of exclusion.

In my view, critical anthropology and interdisciplinary cultural studies attempt to valorize subordinate forms of knowledge. Attempts to blur the boundaries of ethnography create space for historically subordinated perspectives otherwise excluded or marginalized from official discourse. Such perspectives complicate and enrich social analysis, but they do not represent the one and only authentic truth. Human beings always act under conditions they do not fully know and with consequences they neither fully intend nor can fully foresee. Yet subordinate perspectives must be included in social analysis. Our objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects whose best perceptions, not unlike the ethnographer's own, are shaped by distinctive cultures, histories,
If you ask an older Ifugao man of northern Luzon, Philippines, why he cuts off human heads, his answer is brief, and one on which no anthropologist can readily elaborate: He says that rage, born of grief, impels him to kill his fellow human beings. He claims that he needs a place “to carry his anger.” The act of severing and tossing away the victim’s head enables him, he says, to vent and, he hopes, throw away the anger of his bereavement. Although the anthropologist’s job is to make other cultures intelligible, more questions fail to reveal any further explanation of this man’s pithy statement. To him, grief, rage, and headhunting go together in a self-evident manner. Either you understand
it or you don’t. And, in fact, for the longest time I simply did not.

In what follows, I want to talk about how to talk about the cultural force of emotions. The emotional force of a death, for example, derives less from an abstract brute fact than from a particular intimate relation’s permanent rupture. It refers to the kinds of feelings one experiences on learning, for example, that the child just run over by a car is one’s own and not a stranger’s. Rather than speaking of death in general, one must consider the subject’s position within a field of social relations in order to grasp one’s emotional experience.

My effort to show the force of a simple statement taken literally goes against anthropology’s classic norms, which prefer to explicate culture through the gradual thickening of symbolic webs of meaning. By and large, cultural analysts use not force but such terms as thick description, multivocality, polysemny, richness, and texture. The notion of force, among other things, opens to question the common anthropological assumption that the greatest human import resides in the densest forest of symbols and that analytical detail, or “cultural depth,” equals enhanced explanation of a culture, or “cultural elaboration.” Do people always in fact describe most thickly what matters most to them?

*The Rage in Ilongot Grief*

Let me pause a moment to introduce the Ilongs, among whom my wife, Michelle Rosaldo, and I lived and conducted field research for thirty months (1967–69, 1974). They number about 3,500 and reside in an upland area some 90 miles northeast of Manila, Philippines. They subsist by hunting deer and wild pig and by cultivating rain-fed gardens (swiddens) with rice, sweet potatoes, manioc, and vegetables. Their (bilateral) kin relations are reckoned through men and women. After marriage, parents and their married daughters live in the same or adjacent households. The largest unit within the society, a largely territorial descent group called the bertan, becomes manifest primarily in the context of feuding. For themselves, their neighbors, and their ethnographers, head-hunting stands out as the Ilongot’s most salient cultural practice.

When Ilongs told me, as they often did, how the rage in bereavement could impel men to headhunt, I brushed aside their one-line accounts as too simple, thin, opaque, implausible, stereotypical, or otherwise unsatisfying. Probably I naïvely equated grief with sadness. Certainly no personal experience allowed me to imagine the powerful rage Ilongs claimed to find in bereavement. My own inability to conceive the force of anger in grief led me to seek out another level of analysis that could provide a deeper explanation for older men’s desire to headhunt.

Not until some fourteen years after first recording the terse Ilongot statement about grief and a headhunter’s rage did I begin to grasp its overwhelming force. For years I thought that more verbal elaboration (which was not forthcoming) or another analytical level (which remained elusive) could better explain older men’s motives for headhunting. Only after being repositioned through a devastating loss of my own could I better grasp that Ilongot older men mean precisely what they say when they describe the anger in bereavement as the source of their desire to cut off human heads. Taken at face value and granted its full weight, their statement reveals much about what compels these older men to headhunt.

In my efforts to find a “deeper” explanation for headhunting, I explored exchange theory, perhaps because it had informed so many classic ethnographies. One day in 1974, I explained the anthropologist’s exchange model to an older Ilongot man named Insan. What did he think, I asked, of the idea that headhunting resulted from the way that one death (the beheaded victim’s) canceled another (the next of kin). He looked puzzled, so I went on to say that the victim of a beheading was exchanged for the death of one’s own kin, thereby balancing the books, so to speak. Insan reflected a moment and replied that he imagined somebody could
think such a thing (a safe bet, since I just had), but that he
and other Ilongots did not think any such thing. Nor was
there any indirect evidence for my exchange theory in ritual,
boast, song, or casual conversation.  
In retrospect, then, these efforts to impose exchange theo-
ry on one aspect of Ilongot behavior appear feeble. Suppose
I had discovered what I sought? Although the notion of bal-
ancing the ledger does have a certain elegant coherence, one
wonders how such bookish dogma could inspire any man to
take another man’s life at the risk of his own.

My life experience had not as yet provided the means to
imagine the rage that can come with devastating loss. Nor
could I, therefore, fully appreciate the acute problem of
meaning that Ilongots faced in 1974. Shortly after Ferdinand
Marcos declared martial law in 1972, rumors that firing
squad had become the new punishment for headhunting
reached the Ilongot hills. The men therefore decided to call a
moratorium on taking heads. In past epochs, when head-
hunting had become impossible, Ilongots had allowed their
rage to dissipate, as best it could, in the course of everyday
life. In 1974, they had another option; they began to con-
sider conversion to evangelical Christianity as a means of
coping with their grief. Accepting the new religion, people
said, implied abandoning their old ways, including head-
hunting. It also made coping with bereavement less ago-
nizing because they could believe that the deceased had
departed for a better world. No longer did they have to con-
front the awful finality of death.

The force of the dilemma faced by the Ilongots eluded me
at the time. Even when I correctly recorded their statements
about grieving and the need to throw away their anger, I
simply did not grasp the weight of their words. In 1974, for
example, while Michelle Rosaldo and I were living among
the Ilongots, a six-month-old baby died, probably of pneu-
omia. That afternoon we visited the father and found him
terribly stricken. “He was sobbing and staring through
glazed and bloodshot eyes at the cotton blanket covering his
baby.”  

The man suffered intensely, for this was the seventh
child he had lost. Just a few years before, three of his chil-
dren had died, one after the other, in a matter of days. At the
time, the situation was murky as people present talked both
about evangelical Christianity (the possible renunciation
of taking heads) and their grudges against lowlanders (the
contemplation of headhunting forays into the surrounding
valleys).

Through subsequent days and weeks, the man’s grief
moved him in a way I had not anticipated. Shortly after the
baby’s death, the father converted to evangelical Christian-
ity. Altogether too quick on the inference, I immediately con-
cluded that the man believed that the new religion could
somehow prevent further deaths in his family. When I spoke
my mind to an Ilongot friend, he snapped at me, saying that
“I had missed the point: what the man in fact sought in the
new religion was not the denial of our inevitable deaths but
a means of coping with his grief. With the advent of martial
law, headhunting was out of the question as a means of vent-
ing his wrath and thereby lessening his grief. Were he to re-
main in his Ilongot way of life, the pain of his sorrow would
simply be too much to bear.”  

My description from 1980 now seems so apt that I wonder how I could have written the
words and nonetheless failed to appreciate the force of the
grieving man’s desire to vent his rage.

Another representative anecdote makes my failure to
imagine the rage possible in Ilongot bereavement all the
more remarkable. On this occasion, Michelle Rosaldo and I
were urged by Ilongot friends to play the tape of a headhun-
ting celebration we had witnessed some five years before. No
sooner had we turned on the tape and heard the boast of a
man who had died in the intervening years than did people
abruptly tell us to shut off the recorder. Michelle Rosaldo
reported on the tense conversation that ensued:
As Insan braced himself to speak, the room again became
almost uncannily electric. Backs straightened and my anger
turned to nervousness and something more like fear as I saw
that Insan’s eyes were red. Tukbaw, Renato’s Ilongot “brother,”
then broke into what was a brittle silence, saying he could
make things clear. He told us that it hurt to listen to a headhunting celebration when people knew that there would never be another. As he put it: "The song pulls at us, drags our hearts, it makes us think of our dead uncle." And again: "It would be better if I had accepted God, but I still am an Ilongat at heart: and when I hear the song, my heart aches as it does when I must look upon unfinished bachelors whom I know that I will never lead to take a head." Then Wagat, Tukbaw's wife, said with her eyes that all my questions gave her pain, and told me: "Leave off now, isn't that enough? Even I, a woman, cannot stand the way it feels inside my heart."

From my present position, it is evident that the tape recording of the dead man’s boast evoked powerful feelings of bereavement, particularly rage and the impulse to headhunt. At the time I could only feel apprehensive and diffusely sense the force of the emotions experienced by Insan, Tukbaw, Wagat, and the others present.

The dilemma for the Ilongots grew out of a set of cultural practices that, when blocked, were agonizing to live with. The cessation of headhunting called for painful adjustments to other modes of coping with the rage they found in bereavement. One could compare their dilemma with the notion that the failure to perform rituals can create anxiety. In the Ilongot case, the cultural notion that throwing away a human head also casts away the anger creates a problem of meaning when the headhunting ritual cannot be performed. Indeed, Max Weber's classic problem of meaning in The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism is precisely of this kind. On a logical plane, the Calvinist doctrine of predestination seems flawless: God has chosen the elect, but his decision can never be known by mortals. Among those whose ultimate concern is salvation, the doctrine of predestination is as easy to grasp conceptually as it is impossible to endure in everyday life (unless one happens to be a "religious virtuoso"). For Calvinists and Ilongots alike, the problem of meaning resides in practice, not theory. The dilemma for both groups involves the practical matter of how to live with one’s beliefs, rather than the logical puzzlement produced by abstruse doctrine.

How I Found the Rage in Grief

One burden of this introduction concerns the claim that it took some fourteen years for me to grasp what Ilongots had told me about grief, rage, and headhunting. During all those years I was not yet in a position to comprehend the force of anger possible in bereavement, and now I am. Introducing myself into this account requires a certain hesitation both because of the discipline's taboo and because of its increasingly frequent violation by essays laced with trendy amalgams of continental philosophy and autobiographical snippets. If classic ethnography's vice was the slippage from the ideal of detachment to actual indifference, that of present-day reflexivity is the tendency for the self-absorbed Self to lose sight altogether of the culturally different Other. Despite the risks involved, as the ethnographer I must enter the discussion at this point to elucidate certain issues of method.

The key concept in what follows is that of the positioned (and repositioned) subject. In routine interpretive procedure, according to the methodology of hermeneutics, one can say that ethnographers reposition themselves as they go about understanding other cultures. Ethnographers begin research with a set of questions, revise them throughout the course of inquiry, and in the end emerge with different questions than they started with. One's surprise at the answer to a question, in other words, requires one to revise the question until lessening surprises or diminishing returns indicate a stopping point. This interpretive approach has been most influentially articulated within anthropology by Clifford Geertz.

Interpretive method usually rests on the axiom that gifted ethnographers learn their trade by preparing themselves as broadly as possible. To follow the meandering course of eth-
nographic inquiry, field-workers require wide-ranging theoretical capacities and finely tuned sensibilities. After all, one cannot predict beforehand what one will encounter in the field. One influential anthropologist, Clyde Kluckhohn, even went so far as to recommend a double initiation: first, the ordeal of psychoanalysis, and then that of fieldwork. All too often, however, this view is extended until certain prerequisites of field research appear to guarantee an authoritative ethnography. Eclectic book knowledge and a range of life experiences, along with edifying reading and self-awareness, supposedly vanquish the twin vices of ignorance and insensitivity.

Although the doctrine of preparation, knowledge, and sensibility contains much to admire, one should work to undermine the false comfort that it can convey. At what point can people say that they have completed their learning or their life experience? The problem with taking this mode of preparing the ethnographer too much to heart is that it can lend a false air of security, an authoritative claim to certitude and finality that our analyses cannot have. All interpretations are provisional; they are made by positioned subjects who are prepared to know certain things and not others. Even when knowledgeable, sensitive, fluent in the language, and able to move easily in an alien cultural world, good ethnographers still have their limits, and their analyses always are incomplete. Thus, I began to fathom the force of what Ilongots had been telling me about their losses through my own loss, and not through any systematic preparation for field research.

My preparation for understanding serious loss began in 1970 with the death of my brother, shortly after his twenty-seventh birthday. By experiencing this ordeal with my mother and father, I gained a measure of insight into the trauma of a parent’s losing a child. This insight informed my account, partially described earlier, of an Ilongot man’s reactions to the death of his seventh child. At the same time, my bereavement was so much less than that of my parents that I could not then imagine the overwhelming force of rage possible in such grief. My former position is probably similar to that of many in the discipline. One should recognize that ethnographic knowledge tends to have the strengths and limitations given by the relative youth of field-workers who, for the most part, have not suffered serious losses and could have, for example, no personal knowledge of how devastating the loss of a long-term partner can be for the survivor.

In 1981 Michelle Rosaldo and I began field research among the Ifugao of northern Luzon, Philippines. On October 11 of that year, she was walking along a trail with two Ifugao companions when she lost her footing and fell to her death some 65 feet down a sheer precipice into a swollen river below. Immediately on finding her body I became enraged. How could she abandon me? How could she have been so stupid as to fall? I tried to cry. I sobbed, but rage blocked the tears. Less than a month later I described this moment in my journal: “I felt like in a nightmare, the whole world around me expanding and contracting, visually and viscerally heaving. Going down I find a group of men, maybe seven or eight, standing still, silent, and I heave and sob, but no tears.” An earlier experience, on the fourth anniversary of my brother’s death, had taught me to recognize heaving sobs without tears as a form of anger. This anger, in a number of forms, has swept over me on many occasions since then, lasting hours and even days at a time. Such feelings can be aroused by rituals, but more often they emerge from unexpected reminders (not unlike the Ilongots’ unnerving encounter with their dead uncle’s voice on the tape recorder).

Lest there be any misunderstanding, bereavement should not be reduced to anger, neither for myself nor for anyone else. Powerful visceral emotional states swept over me, at times separately and at other times together. I experienced the deep cutting pain of sorrow almost beyond endurance, the cadaverous cold of realizing the finality of death, the trembling beginning in my abdomen and spreading through my body, the mournful keening that started without my willing, and frequent tearful sobbing. My present purpose of
revising earlier understandings of Ilongot headhunting, and not a general view of bereavement, thus focuses on anger rather than on other emotions in grief.

Writings in English especially need to emphasize the rage in grief. Although grief therapists routinely encourage awareness of anger among the bereaved, upper-middle-class Anglo-American culture tends to ignore the rage devastating losses can bring. Paradoxically, this culture’s conventional wisdom usually denies the anger in grief at the same time that therapists encourage members of the invisible community of the bereaved to talk in detail about how angry their losses make them feel. My brother’s death in combination with what I learned about anger from Ilongots (for them, an emotional state more publicly celebrated than denied) allowed me immediately to recognize the experience of rage.13

Ilongot anger and my own overlap, rather like two circles, partially overlaid and partially separate. They are not identical. Alongside striking similarities, significant differences in tone, cultural form, and human consequences distinguish the “anger” animating our respective ways of grieving. My vivid fantasies, for example, about a life insurance agent who refused to recognize Michelle’s death as job-related did not lead me to kill him, cut off his head, and celebrate afterward. In so speaking, I am illustrating the discipline’s methodological caution against the reckless attribution of one’s own categories and experiences to members of another culture. Such warnings against facile notions of universal human nature can, however, be carried too far and harden into the equally pernicious doctrine that, my own group aside, everything human is alien to me. One hopes to achieve a balance between recognizing wide-ranging human differences and the modest truism that any two human groups must have certain things in common.

Only a week before completing the initial draft of an earlier version of this introduction, I rediscovered my journal entry, written some six weeks after Michelle’s death, in which I made a vow to myself about how I would return to writing anthropology, if I ever did so, “by writing Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage...” My journal went on to reflect more broadly on death, rage, and headhunting by speaking of my “wish for the Ilongot solution; they are much more in touch with reality than Christians. So, I need a place to carry my anger—and can we say a solution of the imagination is better than theirs? And can we condemn them when we napalm villages? Is our rationale so much sounder than theirs?” All this was written in despair and rage.

Not until some fifteen months after Michelle’s death was I again able to begin writing anthropology. Writing the initial version of “Grief and a Headhunter’s Rage” was in fact cathartic, though perhaps not in the way one would imagine. Rather than following after the completed composition, the catharsis occurred beforehand. When the initial version of this introduction was most acutely on my mind, during the month before actually beginning to write, I felt diffusely depressed and ill with a fever. Then one day an almost literal fog lifted and words began to flow. It seemed less as if I were doing the writing than that the words were writing themselves through me.

My use of personal experience serves as a vehicle for making the quality and intensity of the rage in Ilongot grief more readily accessible to readers than certain more detached modes of composition. At the same time, by invoking personal experience as an analytical category one risks easy dismissal. Unsympathetic readers could reduce this introduction to an act of mourning or a mere report on my discovery of the anger possible in bereavement. Frankly, this introduction is both and more. An act of mourning, a personal report, and a critical analysis of anthropological method, it simultaneously encompasses a number of distinguishable processes, no one of which cancels out the others. Similarly, I argue in what follows that ritual in general and Ilongot headhunting in particular form the intersection of multiple coexisting social processes. Aside from revising the ethnographic record, the paramount claim made here concerns how my own mourning and consequent reflection on Ilongot bereavement, rage, and headhunting raise method-
ological issues of general concern in anthropology and the human sciences.

_Death in Anthropology_

Anthropology favors interpretations that equate analytical "depth" with cultural "elaboration." Many studies focus on visibly bounded arenas where one can observe formal and repetitive events, such as ceremonies, rituals, and games. Similarly, studies of word play are more likely to focus on jokes as programmed monologues than on the less scripted, more free-wheeling improvised interchanges of witty banter. Most ethnographers prefer to study events that have definite locations in space with marked centers and outer edges. Temporally, they have middles and endings. Historically, they appear to repeat identical structures by seemingly doing things today as they were done yesterday. Their qualities of fixed definition liberate such events from the untidiness of everyday life so that they can be "read" like articles, books, or, as we now say, texts.

Guided by their emphasis on self-contained entities, ethnographies written in accord with classic norms consider death under the rubric of ritual rather than bereavement. Indeed, the subtitles of even recent ethnographies on death make the emphasis on ritual explicit. William Douglas's _Death in Murelaga_ is subtitled _Funerary Ritual in a Spanish Basque Village_; Richard Huntington and Peter Metcalf's _Celebrations of Death_ is subtitled _The Anthropology of Mortuary Ritual_; Peter Metcalf's _A Borneo Journey into Death_ is subtitled _Berawan Eschatology from Its Rituals_. Ritual itself is defined by its formality and routine; under such descriptions, it more nearly resembles a recipe, a fixed program, or a book of etiquette than an open-ended human process.

Ethnographies that in this manner eliminate intense emotions not only distort their descriptions but also remove potentially key variables from their explanations. When anthropologist William Douglas, for example, announces his project in _Death in Murelaga_, he explains that his objective is to use death and funerary ritual "as a heuristic device with which to approach the study of rural Basque society."15 In other words, the primary object of study is social structure, not death, and certainly not bereavement. The author begins his analysis by saying, "Death is not always fortuitous or unpredictable."16 He goes on to describe how an old woman, ailing with the infirmities of her age, welcomed her death. The description largely ignores the perspective of the most bereaved survivors, and instead vacillates between those of the old woman and a detached observer.

Undeniably, certain people do live a full life and suffer so greatly in their decrepitude that they embrace the relief death can bring. Yet the problem with making an ethnography's major case study focus on "a very easy death"17 (I use Simone de Beauvoir's title with irony, as she did) is not only its lack of representativeness but also that it makes death in general appear as routine for the survivors as this particular one apparently was for the deceased. Were the old woman's sons and daughters untouched by her death? The case study shows less about how people cope with death than about how death can be made to appear routine, thereby fitting neatly into the author's view of funerary ritual as a mechanical programmed unfolding of prescribed acts. "To the Basque," says Douglas, "ritual is order and order is ritual."18

Douglas captures only one extreme in the range of possible deaths. Putting the accent on the routine aspects of ritual conveniently conceals the agony of such unexpected early deaths as parents losing a grown child or a mother dying in childbirth. Concealed in such descriptions are the agonies of the survivors who muddle through shifting, powerful emotional states. Although Douglas acknowledges the distinction between the bereaved members of the deceased's domestic group and the more public ritualistic group, he writes his account primarily from the viewpoint of the latter. He masks the emotional force of bereavement by reducing funerary ritual to orderly routine.

Surely, human beings mourn both in ritual settings and in
the informal settings of everyday life. Consider the evidence that willy-nilly spills over the edges in Godfrey Wilson's classic anthropological account of "conventions of burial" among the Nyakyusa of South Africa:

That some at least of those who attend a Nyakyusa burial are moved by grief it is easy to establish. I have heard people talking regretfully in ordinary conversation of a man's death; I have seen a man whose sister had just died walk over alone towards her grave and weep quietly by himself without any parade of grief; and I have heard of a man killing himself because of his grief for a dead son.19

Note that all the instances Wilson witnesses or hears about happen outside the circumscribed sphere of formal ritual. People converse among themselves, walk alone and silently weep, or more impulsively commit suicide. The work of grieving, probably universally, occurs both within obligatory ritual acts and in more everyday settings where people find themselves alone or with close kin.

In Nyakyusa burial ceremonies, powerful emotional states also become present in the ritual itself, which is more than a series of obligatory acts. Men say they dance the passions of their bereavement, which includes a complex mix of anger, fear, and grief:

"This war dance (ukukina)," said an old man, "is mourning, we are mourning the dead man. We dance because there is war in our hearts. A passion of grief and fear exasperates us (ilyojo likutsila). . . . Elyojo means a passion or grief, anger or fear; ukusila means to annoy or exasperate beyond endurance. In explaining ukusila one man put it like this: "If a man continually insults me then he exasperates me (ukusila) so that I want to fight him." Death is a fearful and grievous event that exasperates those men nearly concerned and makes them want to fight.20

Descriptions of the dance and subsequent quarrels, even killings, provide ample evidence of the emotional intensity involved. The articulate testimony by Wilson's informants makes it obvious that even the most intense sentiments can be studied by ethnographers.

Despite such exceptions as Wilson, the general rule seems to be that one should tidy things up as much as possible by wiping away the tears and ignoring the tantrums. Most anthropological studies of death eliminate emotions by assuming the position of the most detached observer.21 Such studies usually confute the ritual process with the process of mourning, equate ritual with the obligatory, and ignore the relation between ritual and everyday life. The bias that favors formal ritual risks assuming the answers to questions that most need to be asked. Do rituals, for example, always reveal cultural depth?

Most analysts who equate death with funerary ritual assume that rituals store encapsulated wisdom as if it were a microcosm of its encompassing cultural macrocosm. One recent study of death and mourning, for example, confidently begins by affirming that rituals embody "the collective wisdom of many cultures."22 Yet this generalization surely requires case-by-case investigation against a broader range of alternative hypotheses.

At the polar extremes, rituals either display cultural depth or brim over with platitudes. In the former case, rituals indeed encapsulate a culture's wisdom; in the latter instance, they act as catalysts that precipitate processes whose unfolding occurs over subsequent months or even years. Many rituals, of course, do both by combining a measure of wisdom with a comparable dose of platitudes.

My own experience of bereavement and ritual fits the platitudes and catalyst model better than that of microcosmic deep culture. Even a careful analysis of the language and symbolic action during the two funerals for which I was a chief mourner would reveal precious little about the experience of bereavement.23 This statement, of course, should not lead anyone to derive a universal from somebody else's personal knowledge. Instead, it should encourage ethnographers to ask whether a ritual's wisdom is deep or conventional, and
whether its process is immediately transformative or but a single step in a lengthy series of ritual and everyday events.

In attempting to grasp the cultural force of rage and other powerful emotional states, both formal ritual and the informal practices of everyday life provide crucial insight. Thus, cultural descriptions should seek out force as well as thickness, and they should extend from well-defined rituals to myriad less circumscribed practices.

_Grief, Rage, and Ilongot Headhunting_

When applied to Ilongot headhunting, the view of ritual as a storehouse of collective wisdom aligns headhunting with expiatory sacrifice. The raiders call the spirits of the potential victims, bid their ritual farewells, and seek favorable omens along the trail. Ilongot men vividly recall the hunger and deprivation they endure over the days and even weeks it takes to move cautiously toward the place where they set up an ambush and await the first person who happens along. Once the raiders kill their victim, they toss away the head rather than keep it as a trophy. In tossing away the head, they claim by analogy to cast away their life burdens, including the rage in their grief.

Before a raid, men describe their state of being by saying that the burdens of life have made them heavy and entangled, like a tree with vines clinging to it. They say that a successfully completed raid makes them feel light of step and ruddy in complexion. The collective energy of the celebration with its song, music, and dance reportedly gives the participants a sense of well-being. The expiatory ritual process involves cleansing and catharsis.

The analysis just sketched regards ritual as a timeless, self-contained process. Without denying the insight in this approach, its limits must also be considered. Imagine, for example, exorcism rituals described as if they were complete in themselves, rather than being linked with larger processes unfolding before and after the ritual period. Through what processes does the afflicted person recover or continue to be afflicted after the ritual? What are the social consequences of recovery or its absence? Failure to consider such questions diminishes the force of such afflictions and therapies for which the formal ritual is but a phase. Still other questions apply to differently positioned subjects, including the person afflicted, the healer, and the audience. In all cases, the problem involves the delineation of processes that occur before and after, as well as during, the ritual moment.

Let us call the notion of a self-contained sphere of deep cultural activity the microcosmic view, and an alternative view ritual as a busy intersection. In the latter case, ritual appears as a place where a number of distinct social processes intersect. The crossroads simply provides a space for distinct trajectories to traverse, rather than containing them in complete encapsulated form. From this perspective, Ilongot headhunting stands at the confluence of three analytically separable processes.

The first process concerns whether or not it is an opportune time to raid. Historical conditions determine the possibilities of raiding, which range from frequent to likely to unlikely to impossible. These conditions include American colonial efforts at pacification, the Great Depression, World War II, revolutionary movements in the surrounding lowlands, feuding among Ilongot groups, and the declaration of martial law in 1972. Ilongots use the analogy of hunting to speak of such historical vicissitudes. Much as Ilongot huntsmen say they cannot know when game will cross their path or whether their arrows will strike the target, so certain historical forces that condition their existence remain beyond their control. My book _Ilongot Headhunting, 1883–1974_ explores the impact of historical factors on Ilongot headhunting.

Second, young men coming of age undergo a protracted period of personal turmoil during which they desire nothing so much as to take a head. During this troubled period, they seek a life partner and contemplate the traumatic dislocation of leaving their families of origin and entering their new
wife's household as a stranger. Young men weep, sing, and burst out in anger because of their fierce desire to take a head and wear the coveted red hornbill earrings that adorn the ears of men who already have, as Ilongots say, arrived (tabi). Volatile, envious, passionate (at least according to their own cultural stereotype of the young unmarried man [buintaw]), they constantly lust to take a head. Michelle and I began fieldwork among the Ilongots only a year after abandoning our unmarried youths; hence our ready empathy with youthful turbulence. Her book on Ilongot notions of self explores the passionate anger of young men as they come of age.

Third, older men are differently positioned than their younger counterparts. Because they have already been beheaded somebody, they can wear the red hornbill earrings so coveted by youths. Their desire to headhunt grows less from chronic adolescent turmoil than from more intermittent acute agonies of loss. After the death of somebody to whom they are closely attached, older men often inflict on themselves vows of abstinence, not to be lifted until the day they participate in a successful headhunting raid. These deaths can cover a range of instances from literal death, whether through natural causes or beheading, to social death where, for example, a man's wife runs off with another man. In all cases, the rage born of devastating loss animates the older men's desire to raid. This anger at abandonment is irreducible in that nothing at a deeper level explains it. Although certain analyses argue against the dreaded last analysis, the linkage of grief, rage, and headhunting has no other known explanation.

My earlier understandings of Ilongot headhunting missed the fuller significance of how older men experience loss and rage. Older men prove critical in this context because they, not the youths, set the processes of headhunting in motion. Their rage is intermittent, whereas that of youths is continuous. In the equation of headhunting, older men are the variable and younger men are the constant. Culturally speaking, older men are endowed with knowledge and stamina that their juniors have not yet attained, hence they care for (saysay) and lead (bakur) the younger men when they raid.

In a preliminary survey of the literature on headhunting, I found that the lifting of mourning prohibitions frequently occurs after taking a head. The notion that youthful anger and older men's rage lead them to take heads is more plausible than such commonly reported "explanations" of headhunting as the need to acquire mystical "soul stuff" or personal names.24 Because the discipline correctly rejects stereotypes of the "bloodthirsty savage," it must investigate how headhunters create an intense desire to decapitate their fellow humans. The human sciences must explore the cultural force of emotions with a view to delineating the passions that animate certain forms of human conduct.

**Summary**

The ethnographer, as a positioned subject, grasps certain human phenomena better than others. He or she occupies a position or structural location and observes with a particular angle of vision. Consider, for example, how age, gender, being an outsider, and association with a neo-colonial regime influence what the ethnographer learns. The notion of position also refers to how life experiences both enable and inhibit particular kinds of insight. In the case at hand, nothing in my own experience equipped me even to imagine the anger possible in bereavement until after Michelle Rosaldo's death in 1981. Only then was I in a position to grasp the force of what Ilongots had repeatedly told me about grief, rage, and headhunting. By the same token, so-called natives are also positioned subjects who have a distinctive mix of insight and blindness. Consider the structural positions of older versus younger Ilongot men, or the differing positions of chief mourners versus those less involved during a funeral. My discussion of anthropological writings on death often achieved its effects simply by shifting from the position of those least involved to that of the chief mourners.
Cultural depth does not always equal cultural elaboration. Think simply of the speaker who is filibustering. The language used can sound elaborate as it heaps word on word, but surely it is not deep. Depth should be separated from the presence or absence of elaboration. By the same token, one-line explanations can be vacuous or pithy. The concept of force calls attention to an enduring intensity in human conduct that can occur with or without the dense elaboration conventionally associated with cultural depth. Although relatively without elaboration in speech, song, or ritual, the rage of older Ilongots who have suffered devastating losses proves enormously consequential in that, foremost among other things, it leads them to behead their fellow humans. Thus, the notion of force involves both affective intensity and significant consequences that unfold over a long period of time.

Similarly, rituals do not always encapsulate deep cultural wisdom. At times they instead contain the wisdom of Polonius. Although certain rituals both reflect and create ultimate values, others simply bring people together and deliver a set of platitudes that enable them to go on with their lives. Rituals serve as vehicles for processes that occur both before and after the period of their performance. Funeral rituals, for example, do not “contain” all the complex processes of bereavement. Ritual and bereavement should not be collapsed into one another because they neither fully encapsulate nor fully explain one another. Instead, rituals are often but points along a number of longer processual trajectories; hence, my image of ritual as a crossroads where distinct life processes intersect.25

The notion of ritual as a busy intersection anticipates the critical assessment of the concept of culture developed in the following chapters. In contrast with the classic view, which posits culture as a self-contained whole made up of coherent patterns, culture can arguably be conceived as a more porous array of intersections where distinct processes crisscross from within and beyond its borders. Such heterogeneous processes often derive from differences of age, gender, class, race, and sexual orientation.

This book argues that a sea change in cultural studies has eroded once-dominant conceptions of truth and objectivity. The truth of objectivism—absolute, universal, and timeless—has lost its monopoly status. It now competes, on more nearly equal terms, with the truths of case studies that are embedded in local contexts, shaped by local interests, and colored by local perceptions. The agenda for social analysis has shifted to include not only eternal verities and lawlike generalizations but also political processes, social changes, and human differences. Such terms as objectivity, neutrality, and impartiality refer to subject positions once endowed with great institutional authority, but they are arguably neither more nor less valid than those of more engaged, yet equally perceptive, knowledgeable social actors. Social analysis must now grapple with the realization that its objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects who critically interrogate ethnographers—their writings, their ethics, and their politics.