

# Anthropology as an Emerging Global Discipline: A New Research Ethic

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**Abstract:** This article contributes toward the recalibration of the human science disciplines within an emerging historical conjuncture increasingly free of Western hegemony enabling an “epochal shift” with the re-emergence of Tricontinental nations of Africa, Asia and Latin America, thus necessitating the reconfiguration of the geopolitics of knowledge production. The article argues for the delinking of disciplinary practice from the prevailing Euro-American epistemological hegemony currently in the throes of an epistemic panic induced by the inextricable nexus between Western power’s post-imperial detumescence and the discipline’s institutional senescence. The discipline’s adoption of neo-liberalism as its default paradigm has consolidated its surrender to the philosophical purview of “racial liberalism” and its derivative “epistemology of ignorance.” The latter’s epistemic legacy is the hegemony of metropolitan travelling theories and their credo of interpretivism that generate knowledge claims as imported theory-mediated mystifications of cultural others. The article seeks to redeem disciplinary practice from the resulting cognitive dysfunctions and moral liabilities, by proposing an alternative conception of the practice of anthropology as a field science of the human condition based on mesography as a new research ethic. Mesography is an integrative research framework for the human/social sciences in quest of historically embedded and empirically-grounded explanations of human predicaments in an axial era heralding new vectors of societal transformation. As such, it represents a “paradigmatic leap” that offers a methodological alternative to the tyranny of an anachronistic ethnography and an epistemological exit from the hegemony of an exhausted West-stream anthropology.

**Keywords:** Epistemology of ignorance, Ethnography, Interpretivism, Mesography, Neo-liberalism, Post-exotic, Racial liberalism, Travelling theory, West-stream anthropology, World anthropology.

## INTRODUCTION: DAWN OF AN AXIAL ERA

The task of anthropology was entirely a function of a specific historical conjuncture: the moment when Western culture realized that it was going to dominate the whole world. There was thus an urgent need to collect all the human experiences that owed nothing to it, knowledge of which was indispensable to an idea of humanity.... A discipline will take shape dedicated to the study of.... new differences which are emerging all around [1].

The above epigraph captures the axial moment heralding the impending hegemony of the West over the Rest, which not only inaugurated the still dominant disciplinary practice that I call West-stream anthropology, but also defined its primary purpose which is best described as “salvage ethnography” (*i.e.*, “to collect all [non-western] human experiences”) and that persists in the form of a now anachronistic philanthropological mandate vis-à-vis the Rest [2]. Lévi-Strauss also acknowledges the emergence of a new axial moment in the form of “new differences” beyond the West-Rest dichotomy and calls for a new mode of disciplinary practice, or epistemic praxis, to elucidate

these differences. This new epistemic praxis would elucidate the global mosaic of lifeways within re-emergent Tricontinental regional civilizational formations that constitute the post-exotic historical conjuncture. Indeed, this conjuncture is the catalyst both to the emergence of “new differences” that are no longer markers of socio-cultural superiority or inferiority, and to the renewed contestation of the West’s global monopoly over the “idea of humanity.” Consequently, as the West’s half-millennium crusade “to dominate the world” is retreating into a penumbral phase, it is thus constrained to participate in the emerging multi-strands global civilizational formation in parity with, and not primacy over, the Tricontinental regions. This is an interregnum moment in world history that promises a new world order based on its geopolitical decentering through a reconfiguration of global geography into multiple regional centers of economic dynamism, cultural renewal, political relevance, and technological ascendancy [3].

This historical moment is heralding an intellectual ecosystem of competing alternative conceptions of the organization of society, the purpose of economy, the functions of politics, the role of culture, and their contribution to the social engineering of a diversity of futures. As such, it represents the impending completion of the century-old decolonization process through the re-culturalization of societies, the

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restoration of political sovereignty and economic self-determination, and the counter-hegemonic redistribution of power among regional social formations. Consequently, it calls for the obligatory reframing of social reality and the recalibration of knowledge production practices vis-à-vis such a reality. This reframing imperative is a necessary effect of the intensifying challenge to the established asymmetric spatial architecture of global power relations that is gradually, but inexorably, leading to a polycentric world order without a center or a periphery, and thus the banishment of the hierarchical ordering of the world's social formations. Indeed, it is a historical phase that is generating a structural heterogeneity that can no longer be accommodated within the established classification of the world into totalizing civilizational polarities (e.g., West vs. Rest), or into geopolitically ranked trichotomies (First, Second, Third Worlds), and their one-way knowledge and power flows that materially construct domains of peripherality and symbolically reproduce relations of dependency.

This structural heterogeneity calls for a "heliocentric conversion" through a Copernican-like reversal in the discipline's prevailing structural relationality: From its current Euro-centric axis characterized by the centripetal motion of non-Western societies around Western civilization as a constellation of peripheral dominions, to a world-centric pivot enabling the centrifugal emancipation of non-Western societies beyond Western civilization and its demise as the hegemonic frame of reference, interpretive center, as well as political-economic and socio-cultural anchor for the rest of the world [4]. This structural shift is inexorable given the planetary-wide consensus that humanity has crossed an existential Rubicon: From a world of discrete and exclusionary socio-cultural formations to a syncretic world composed of multiple imbrications of culturally centrifugal social formations within a politically centripetal world system, which is being called a "global civilization". This imbricated architecture heralds a global fusion of historical horizon that promises the inevitable demise of the subservient relations between the globe's different regions. The resulting social configuration of this post-exotic conjuncture is aptly described as follows:

A world where no one is outside... [and] where pre-existing traditions cannot avoid contact not only with others but also with many alternative ways of life... It is a world where the 'other' cannot any longer be treated as inert... Not only

that the other answers back, but that mutual interrogation is possible [5].

The overwhelming number of social formations around the world are fully engaged in this post-exotic conjuncture as their inhabitants are neither voluntary isolationists nor uncritical assimilationists, but discriminating participants in, as well as active contributors to, the local fashioning of globally circulating contemporary cultural ways. Ultimately, this should lead to the adoption of a global interactional ethic of macro interdependency among the world's regions.

This emerging conjuncture demands the anticipatory reconstitution of our geographic imagination, which is still tethered to empire as the prevailing political organization of the world. In contrast to Hardt and Negri's theory-determined, totalistic, and ultimately status quo affirming and expanding, notion that "Empire is not a weak echo of modern imperialisms but a fundamentally new form of rule" exercising a universally integrative, if not benevolent, force for global order achieved by way of the virtual colonization of peoples and spaces through the mystifying power of "biopolitical production" and thus encompassing the planet in a nurturing placenta-like political-economic ecosystem [6]; I insist that empire (small cap) in its current, but vanishing, form is a predatory regime that is still configured into essentialized geographies of colonially demarcated and partially integrated world regions inhabited by a hierarchically racialized global polity distributed into atomized territorial entities (*i.e.*, nation-states) that are asymmetrically ranked within a Northern center and Southern periphery matrix. To understand the emerging alternative political-economic system, the geographic re-imagining exercise is to be pursued, not through the theoretical imagining, but the empirical mapping, of the processes of enmeshment engendered by the circulation of peoples, ideas, practices, institutions, technologies, which are articulating these territories into spatially imbricated cross-regional civilizational matrices. The reconfiguration of the world's politico-economic balance of power has invalidated West-stream anthropology's conventional relational protocol, traditional research method, and expropriative interpretive practices, which were founded on the structural permanence of a geopolitical asymmetry that "made the larger part of mankind subservient to the other." The term "West-stream" is a substitute for the term "mainstream", to designate the initial provenance in Northern geo-institutional locations

of a specific kind of disciplinary practice dependent on imperialism-enabled travelling theories that are inherently prone to illiberal knowledge production effects [7]. Its professional practitioners, however, are no longer bound to northern locations as emulators have spawned in other regions, but are defined by a shared epistemic commitment to neo-liberalism as the discipline's default paradigm and interpretivism as its discursive ethos. Furthermore, West-stream anthropology is constituted by a quartet of formerly dominant Western national traditions, which represent the major imperialist powers over the last two centuries: American, British, French and German. Each tradition is insulated within its own set of national hermeneutical prejudices: such as its habits of thought, its preferred regional foci and mandatory problematics, its constraints in matters of publications of findings, its specific censorships, and its organizationally embedded biases [8, 9].

Collectively, these national traditions constitute "knowledge monopolies" that insist on the universal applicability of their theoretical repertoires, and thus endlessly reproduce a universalizing Occidentalism [10]. In effect, the use of the term "West-stream" suggests the need (a) to circumscribe the relevance of its knowledge claims to their regional moorings, (b) to deflate its hegemonic pretensions into mere provincial ruminations, and (c) to disable its travelling wings, or at least limit its destination to its regions of origin. The exhausted representation schemas of these West-stream national anthropological traditions cannot contribute to the decipherment of this emergent structurally heterogeneous historical conjuncture, and the agonistic transformation of its constitutive social formations. The latter are characterized by the cultural entrenchment of contestatory political attitudes, the radicalization of democratic politics, the reconfiguration of society, and the re-valorization of alternative economic models as the basis of endogenous development. Moreover, this is complemented by the emergent reformulation of a culturally pluralistic global regime of "pluriversal values" that is autonomous from the hegemonic political design of a coterie of "great powers." Deciphering these emergent processes demands a renewed empirical engagement through the reconceptualization of knowledge production practices that are de-linked from any universalizing Occidentalism. Henceforth, there is a need (a) to reinvent anthropology's methodological infrastructure still dependent on a geo-historical perspective that assumes an intrinsic relational hierarchy between the

participants in the fieldwork encounter, and (b) to reconstruct its theoretical scaffolding still in thrall to a few hegemonic metropolitan centers of knowledge production about, and dissemination throughout, the world.

The epistemological challenges posed by this emergent Tricontinental era has yet to be reflected in West-stream anthropology's mode of methodologically engaging and theoretically representing cultural others, which is still burdened with the albatross of exoticism. This exoticism is characterized by the asymmetrical relation between anthropologists and research subjects based on geographical distance, cultural alterity, differentiated recognition of agency, and non-reciprocity in sharing cognitive resources. The discipline's imagination is still trapped within this chronic exoticist inflection due to its community of practitioners' affliction by a "sacrificial sentinel" syndrome given their "deliberate act of loyalty to its arbitrary limits" [11]. These limits are manifested in the following epistemic entrapments: a) the xenophilic yearning and nostalgic quest for a contemporary primordial substitute for the irremediable loss of the pre-modern native as its privileged subject of investigation; b) the willful oblivion to the untenable arrogance of its representation practices; and c) the persistence of a collective denial about the patently obvious anachronism of its research method (ethnography). More crucially, exotic anthropology is defined by the "knowledge" produced about researched communities, which betrays a chronic disjuncture between travelling theory-mediated interpretations and their explanatory relevance to the predicaments of existing polities in actual societies. The end result is the discipline's worldly abdication and its retrenchment to the insular universe of academia as a monastic retreat, where the world is interpreted beyond any familiarity to the rest of the planet's inhabitants. Such reality deficient knowledge, which betrays a discursive penchant for interpretive mendacity, is the product of what Mills [12] has called the "epistemology of ignorance." Paraphrasing him, I define the term as a knowledge practice that is historically embedded within a political economy of Western domination, which has bequeathed certain norms of cognition (e.g., reliance on metropolitan travelling theory) that have become epistemic resources for self-deception. Accordingly, such norms engender a chronic pattern of cognitive dysfunctions (e.g., ethno-centric interpretivism) that disable the capacity of the knowing agent (i.e., West-

stream anthropologist) to understand the subjects under investigation (e.g., cultural others).

In spite of anthropology's current relevance deficit, it can still be made useful given its inaugural purpose as a field science of the human condition. Therefore, it still harbors the potential of being the foundational cognitive tool for, first, elucidating through a historically-embedded understanding of alternative ways of being in the world, and second for imagining, if not practically contributing toward realizing, the inexhaustible "possibilities of human life in the world." In this way anthropology can reclaim its initial *raison d'être* as a mediator of the meaningful coexistence of a plurality of worldviews, value repertoires, institutional configurations, and cultural ways of being in the world. More importantly, it can renew its abandoned promise of fostering an egalitarian global cross-cultural conversation. This is a threshold moment when there is a passing of the torch of a new post-European enlightenment: From an exotic anthropology inconsolably lamenting the passing of the pre-European dominated world and still toiling with the anachronistic tools of its salvage ethnography and the obsession with the "recovery of the subaltern" (notice the preponderance of articles on peoples from the Global South written by scholars from the Global North in major West-stream anthropology journals), to a post-exotic anthropology as the disciplinary midwife of an emergent post-Western era through the deployment of the contemporary cognitive tools of a prospective mesography (see below). This is a propitious moment to abandon the credo of doxic submission and its "politics of despair" counseling critical capitulation to the "indispensability" of Western thought that sustains the reflexive mimicry of the colonized intellectual demeanor of too many scholars in the Global South still beholden to the "colonial matrix of power." This demeanor of epistemic sycophancy is epitomized in Chakrabarty's cringe-inducing and dubious affirmation: "The everyday paradox of third-world social science is that we find [Western] theories, in spite of their inherent ignorance of 'us', eminently useful in understanding our societies" [13]. Finally, the rejection of this capitulationist credo would enable the overdue completion of the "unfinished decolonization of a Euro-American centered science of man and culture" [14].

This quest for an alternative disciplinary praxis of inquiry is made all the more urgent by the endemic relevance deficit of the still hegemonic West-stream mode of anthropological practice, which, sadly, continues to serve as a fount of knowledge resources

for too many anthropologists around the world. After two decades of auto-critiques among West-stream practitioners from the late 70s to the 90s, which sought to reconfigure the discipline's epistemology and praxis, West-stream anthropology has lapsed into an intellectual cul-de-sac as I will show throughout this article. Indeed, the literature that emerged after the 1990s merely sought to accommodate the blurring of boundaries between disciplinary genres under the compulsion of a neo-liberalizing wave in the social sciences [15]. This was done without addressing the chronic aporia of relationality founded on two "enabling presumptions" inherited from the colonial milieu that inaugurated West-stream anthropology and that have persistently configured its status quo conforming, thus ethically duplicitous, practice: The first presumption is *structural hierarchy*, which was anchored to an imperial cartography of praxis in non-Western social formations; and the second is *relational asymmetry*, which was based on a supremacist socio-interactional protocol vis-à-vis culturally other research subjects [16]. Moreover, the adoption of the neoliberal conception of the world as implicit framework for the comparative analysis of the transformational dynamics of social formations led to the reification of this aporia of relationality as a fatality of disciplinary practice. This relationality was not addressed when the internal critiques of the discipline during the previous decades were abandoned in favor of an expansionist agenda that seemed to mimic the colonizing logic of neo-liberalism in an opportunistic quest for new "anthropology of...", and thus extended the discipline's "fieldwork terrain by annexing border areas and sometimes entire continents of enquiry" [17].

The discipline's expansionism, however, was accompanied by an insular anxiety, partly engendered by the need to re-affirm and sustain the distinctiveness of anthropology's ethnographic method, and thus the necessity of policing disciplinary boundaries in order "to preserve a unique scholarly patrimony from the encroachment of an ever more generic social science" [18]. West-stream anthropology's preservationist reflex and its neglect of the aporia of relationality have consolidated its two enabling presumptions into a default proclivity among its practitioners. The end result is the disabling of the discipline's adaptive capacity to the emergent post-exotic conjuncture.

### **Caveats: Purpose and Sensibility**

This article outlines the re-visioning of anthropology in a post-exotic guise as a non-ethnocentric disciplinary practice that has repudiated its historical heritage as

the “bastard child of imperialism”, and therefore seeks the demise of the dominant practice and identity of anthropology as the exclusive brainchild of Western enlightenment. This entails an epistemological rupture in the form of de-linking, if not dispossessing, the discipline from its original “owners” in metropolitan academies still wallowing in the “savage slot” and its us/them fiction. Accordingly, it proposes a new research ethic as the methodological foundation for a post-exotic anthropology. The latter is an insurgent post-Western epistemic practice dedicated to the re-imagining of the contemporary vocation of anthropology in terms of what is it and for whom. The adoption of such a research ethic would emancipate disciplinary practice from its northern regional anchor and its adoption of a global-centric (as opposed to its Eurocentric) mandate. In presenting this new research ethic, the article seeks to contribute towards the collective quest by scholars everywhere who are committed to the practice of an authentically human science from an epistemological standpoint that transcends the chronic provincialism and ethnocentrism engendered by the hegemony of West-stream anthropology. The latter deploys a coercive interpretive regime that virtually herds peoples and arbitrarily categorizes regions according to an externally imposed conceptual repertoire and theoretical grid. This interpretive regime authorizes the panoptic encompassment of a global swath of culturally diverse social formations as part of a theoretical experiment with others’ ways of life as instrumentalized objects of study.

In contrast, an alternative epistemic praxis that is not in thrall to West-stream anthropology would be animated by the question “how can a human science be relevant, if not useful, to the human communities it studies?” Indeed, the challenge that this article seeks to address is, in the words of Gibson-Graham [19], “What practices of thinking and feeling, what dispositions and attitudes, what capacities can we cultivate to displace the familiar mode of [doing anthropology]?” Answering this set of questions will ultimately enable the reconfiguration of the dominant mode of disciplinary practice into a post-exotic anthropology that could rehabilitate it as the fount of emancipatory social thought. The alternative epistemic praxis that is proposed in this article has a family resemblance to the history-embedded anthropology of Eric Wolf, which investigates the “totality of interconnected processes” in order “to search out the causes of the present in the past... [and] to

comprehend the forces that impel societies and cultures here and now” [20]. This comprehension, however, is pursued not grandiosely at the level of the globe, but more modestly within the circumscription of the social formation under investigation, while using the emergent global geopolitical architecture as framing matrix.

The discussion that follows is an invitation, or more aptly a provocation, to fellow human scientists, especially those who prefer to call themselves anthropologists, to consider an alternative mode of engaging in the production of anthropological knowledge about our contemporary world. For the current practice of anthropology has sedimented into an academic discipline that seems overly preoccupied with putting out institutional brushfires generated by a growing skepticism about its *raison d’être* both within the academy and society at large. Moreover, too many disciplinary practitioners have resigned themselves to the endemic inadequacy between their professional identity-endowing method (ethnography) and contemporary reality, which results in the production of knowledge that is circumscribed to an intramural soliloquy among its academic practitioners. The new ethos of anthropological inquiry is being offered as a “modest proposal” toward fulfilling the quest for an alternative disciplinary praxis that has eluded numerous anthropologists who felt the need to overthrow the “tyranny of ethnography”, but feared the loss of professional identity [21].

Readers who are aspiring disciplinary renegades and thus are willing to abandon West-stream anthropology’s morally compromising aporia of relationality are the preferred interlocutors. In contrast, status quo practitioners – in thrall to defection-prevention conformist anxieties and thus prey to an epistemic panic toward abandoning the conventional disciplinary bandwagon – will find the arguments below deeply grating to their sensibility. Predictably, and perhaps justifiably, they will defensively invoke the sanctimonious rebuke: “diatribe!” This rebuke betrays an endemic sentinel syndrome and its existential panic toward an imagined horde of invasive subalterns at the gates threatening to dispossess the discipline of its Western ownership. Finally, I refuse to partake in what Perry Anderson (quoted in Bidwai [22]) called the “culture of euphemism”: the prevailing protocol of a sanitized discourse in academia, “in which disagreeable realities are draped with decorous evasions or periphrases.... To any sensibility accustomed to this kind of verbal emulsion, calling a

spade a spade is bound to be jarring.” For in what follows I engage in a straight-talking critique informed by a non-ethnocentric epistemological standpoint that I call post-exotic, which asserts its autonomy from any partisan affiliation with the prevailing politics of cultural exceptionalism and the associated dogmatism – in both its Western (still aspiring to a universal imperium while tethered to a Graecophilia-inspired Enlightenment as the historical destiny of humankind) and Eastern (animated by Confucianism’s promise of global harmony) variants – that are contesting for symbolic hegemony within the global public sphere.

In the next three sections of this article I undertake the following tasks: In the first section, I define post-exotic anthropology in contrast to the still dominant exotic anthropology, and highlight some of conceptual, practical and ethical adjustments required of its practitioners. Subsequently, in the first of two subsections I offer a sustained critique of what I call West-stream anthropology (*i.e.*, exotic anthropology) in terms of the compromising ramifications of its adoption of neo-liberalism as default paradigm and its surrender to interpretivism. In the second subsection, I substantiate my critique with the testimonies of three West-stream anthropologists. In the second section, I introduce mesography as an alternative research ethic and illustrate some of the methodological steps that differentiate it from ethnography, and present a comprehensive tabular overview of its research practices. Finally, in the last section I conclude with what I call a mesographer’s credo, which identifies the strategic stakes and the epistemic imperatives that must be pursued in effectuating the transition from an exotic anthropology to a post-exotic human science.

Before turning to the next section, a final caveat about language is necessary: In an emerging post-literate and audio-visual intensive cognitive climate there is an increasing intolerance toward discursive complexity that merely seeks to be faithful to the natural complexity of social life. As a result, writing is judged solely by its reader-friendliness – that is, it must cater to a facile intelligibility without the inconvenience of conveying substantive understanding – and where a college level diction, and especially the use of a social science lexicon, is disparaged as “jargon.” This increasingly hegemonic norm is lowering expectation on the part of both the general reading public and university audience about the robust effort quotient required to understand the plurality of forms of social life around the planet. Given this state of affairs, one feels obligated to apologize for deploying a social

science discourse, even if it is devoid of scientific pretention. I shall resist the temptation and simply remind ourselves that the high effort quotient required by human scientists and readers alike is due to the lexically challenging and conceptually demanding fact that “Understanding social life entails... the restless making and remaking of facts and ideas” [23].

### **POST-EXOTIC ANTHROPOLOGY: ALTERNATIVE PARADIGM OF PRAXIS**

Post-exotic anthropology is most adequately defined as an authentically human science that promotes an ethos of inquiry that is always open to local appropriation and adaptation; and as such, it endeavors to remain free of the disabilities intrinsic to an exotic anthropology: geographically delimited domains of research; compromising historical association with past imperial incursions and its current coat-tailing of neo-liberal hegemony; ethnic ranking of its practitioners and research subjects; epistemic partisanship vis-à-vis a particular body of knowledge or theoretical repertoire; and intellectual subservience to metropolitan state’s geopolitical interests. In contrast, post-exotic anthropology’s mandate is the production of cognitive maps that offer a shared intellectual compass both to researchers and researched communities made up of a politically awakened humanity who no longer needs to be represented by unsolicited spokespersons, and inhabiting a world increasingly inauspicious to the global cultural hegemony of any regional social formation. To contribute toward the production of such knowledge resources a post-exotic anthropology entails the following cognitive remapping maneuvers: First, it conceptually relocates disciplinary practice within a reconfigured metageographic imagination in order to recalibrate disciplinary practice with the emerging state of the world, and thus relinquish the paternalist assumption of an obligatory discursive enfranchisement of voiceless others. Second, it endeavors toward the reconstitution as well as pluralization of research pathways adapted to the changing socio-political topologies of fieldwork’s sites of the post-exotic conjuncture by abandoning the conventional practice of ethnography and its dependence on idiosyncratic discovery procedures and self-centric interpretation of human communities. Third, it entails the adoption of a post-cosmopolitan perspective that rejects Western-centrism and its discursive enablers with their retrospective critical gaze on the world – namely, post-modernism and its alter ego post-colonialism, which have exhausted their potential in “critiquing and seeking liberation from the

past forms of rule and their legacies in the present” [6, 24] – in order to affirm a world-centric sensibility with a prospective purview that spurns the customary genuflection vis-à-vis metropolitan travelling theories whose border-crossing credentials as interpretive frameworks have lost cognitive legitimacy and explanatory efficacy. And fourth, a post-exotic anthropology affirms the founding principle of epistemic democracy: the choice of pursuing alternative intellectual paths and therefore of militating against the hegemony of national disciplinary traditions that are more affirmatory than critical of the status quo.

Accordingly, the practice of a post-exotic anthropology entails the following adjustments on the part of its practitioners: (a) the relinquishment of their attachment to intellectually provincializing and ethnocentrism-inducing ontological traits (*i.e.*, inherited bio-social and ethno-cultural constitution); (b) the adoption of a reflexivity that is self-aware as a practitioner of the transgressive act of fieldwork always situated within an interstitial and shifting geographical-spatial-temporal-locational spectrum, and is complemented by an earnest humility vis-à-vis knowledge claims and an ethical stance that is not founded on the condescending justification of redeeming others, but is driven by a genuine commitment to articulate a shared understanding; (c) the pursuit of an approach to research that is not epistemologically pre-configured within established paradigms, but is anchored in an alternative standpoint that is emancipated from the provincial vanity of the modern nation-state, and thus theoretically open-ended to accommodate a world always historically and culturally emergent; and (d) the quest for a methodology that integrates strategically the resources of a troika of disciplines (anthropology, history and sociology) emancipated from their nineteenth-century epistemological matrices and their residual socio-cultural Darwinism. The latter, after all, provided the intellectual justification for the economic despoliation, and thus the dissolution of the societal sovereignty and cultural self-determination, of a whole swath of humanity across the planet.

Furthermore, the practitioner of a post-exotic anthropology is animated by an *ethic of reciprocity* that demands the scrupulous ethicizing of research and analytical practices as a means of avoiding the endemic tendency towards interpretive misdemeanors (*i.e.*, the travelling theory-authorized cognitive mystifications of cultural others); and correspondingly, the rejection of the prevailing condescending ethic of

“giving voice” to others. Also, an ethic of reciprocity entails a commitment to a fieldwork-based, society-relevant, and policy-pertinent knowledge production practice that seeks to elucidate societal challenges and to address modern human predicaments. Accordingly, the practitioner of this mode of knowledge production must adopt the attitude of *constructive iconoclasm*, which entails the following set of combative epistemic practices: an insurgent revisionism vis-à-vis established disciplinary doxa; a critical engagement with the existing knowledge repertoire relevant to the social formation under study; a contestatory disposition toward the interpretations of fellow observers; and an intellectual activism against any hegemonic attempt at imposing interpretive closure through sophistic knowledge claims about social realities of a domain of study. In this way anthropology as a human science abandons its misanthropic theory-obsessed discourse with its coercive interpretive regime in order to reclaim its civic-mindedness and to renew its implicit contract with the wider human community (as is, or should be, the case with all social sciences) to provide it with problem-solving and aspiration-enabling cognitive resources.

### **Diagnostic of Disciplinary Conuncture: A Critique of West-Stream Anthropology**

The current conjuncture for the practice of the social sciences is described as being in a “post-paradigmatic turn” as if disciplinary practice is wallowing in a paradigm vacuum. This is especially so in the case of West-stream anthropology, which suffers from an acute case of theoretical drift, having been made homeless by the anachronism of its own theoretical and lexical repertoire. As a result, its practitioners had to scavenge for epistemic resources among cultural studies, science studies, literary studies and classical sociology. In the process, they seem to have succumbed, irremediably so, to the nefarious influence of the Gallic “mind virus” of post-structuralism. As Fardon [17] noted, “By the early 1980s, theory had become a commodity that social anthropology more consistently imported than exported.” Moreover, the dubious analytic utility of the discipline’s lexical inventory is acknowledged by two committed practitioners of West-stream anthropology as follows: “our ‘subjects’ no longer inhabit social contexts for which we have a persuasive lexicon” [18]. The discipline’s theoretical orphanage and lexical inadequacy has made its West-stream practitioners vulnerable to an opportunistic accommodation to the “globalization hype” and its ideological underpinning, neo-liberalism, as a universal hermeneutic, which

authorizes the “promiscuous consumption of all cultures in the world at the level of their surfaces” [25]. The totalizing encompassment of neoliberalism is aptly put by Harvey [26]: “Neoliberalism has... become hegemonic as a mode of discourse. It has pervasive effects on ways of thought to the point where it has become incorporated into the common-sense way many of us interpret, live in, and understand the world.” Consequently, West-stream anthropologists’ quest to fill their discipline’s void of a contemporary epistemic *raison d’être* has led to their ubiquitous invocation of “neo-liberalism” as an interpretive mantra, and thus has made it the discipline’s default paradigm. The resulting tragedy is the domestication of a generation of otherwise individualistic and interactionally competitive practitioners into a gregarious disciplinary herd bleating out in unison the West’s hegemonic mantra and converting their varied fieldwork domains into exclusively neo-liberal pastures seeded with imported thematic fodder.

This occurred through the discursive blurring not only of the distinction between an interpretive paradigm and a zero-sum political-economic regime, but also of the difference between pursuing a social scientific understanding of this regime and prematurely anticipating its universal encompassment of humanity. Moreover, this discursive blurring betrays an extension of the logic of neoclassical economics, which frames neo-liberalism, through the borrowing of its hypothetico-deductive analytical approach that leads to the mimicry of its theoretical fantasy about how the world works; hence West-stream anthropologists’ deductive theorizing and neo-functionalist interpretation. As a result, while West-stream anthropologists imagined themselves to be critics of this regime, they are in fact agents of diffusion of its symbolic domination within their research domains, as “capital” becomes interchangeable with, if not a substitute for, “theory.” In effect, the use of neo-liberalism as interpretive framework has a number of problematic ramifications: First, scholars’ pre-commitment to it leads to a “confirmation bias” where neo-liberalism effects are perceived everywhere; and thus the local groundedness of field data and the context-dependence of the interpretation are compromised. Second, its foundational assumption is that Western economic dominance inexorably, and in perpetuity, engenders sociocultural hegemony over the world’s cultural formations and their inhabitants’ life-ways through the uni-directional diffusion of Western symbolic capital. Third, the presumed indispensability

of neo-liberalism as the initial enabler and exclusive incarnation of contemporary global modernity has caused the sedimentation of a teleological reason that has authorized West-stream anthropologists to constitute themselves into an ethno-regionally circumscribed intellectual aristocracy of benevolent semiotic imperialists claiming a global mandate as the privileged interpreters of the West’s cultural effects and economic impacts on the rest as well as asserting the right to spread the scourge of interpretive misdemeanors vis-à-vis research subjects, especially in the Global South.

The adoption of neo-liberalism as the discipline’s surrogate paradigm entails the reductionist interpretation of the dynamics of sociocultural formations around the globe as mere appendages to the imperatives of capital accumulation, and thus the neglect of their autonomous social creativity and of the multiple internal determinations of their historical trajectory. This is based on the assumption that neo-liberalism is a globally hegemonic and economically monistic societal formation, when, in fact, it entails varying degrees of vertical integration of selective sectors of national economies with international capital with exclusionary effects on the rest of national social formations. In the latter, it generates a surplus of marginalized humanity relegated into the non-incorporated sectors that encompass a plethora of local economies with distinctive constellation of livelihoods animated by an ethic of “informal survivalism.” India is an archetype of this hybrid economy as it exemplifies, in spite of the “rising” rhetoric of its elite, the marginalizing effects of capitalism’ selective sectoral integration, as 9 out of 10 workers are employed in the informal economy [27]. Moreover, the adoption of neo-liberalism betrays an impoverishment of actionable social thought through its linkage to the vulgar economism of neo-liberalism and its crass reductionism of human motivation to its lowest common denominator: The portrayal of people everywhere as neutered conscripts of a tawdry consumerism through an inexorable synergy between commodity consumption and identity construction.

More alarming is that this borrowed paradigm is based on a rather megalomaniac Western liberalism driven by a diversity-averse assimilationist imperative that is still in thrall to the morally cretinous representation of Greek ethnocracy – where the notion of human equality was non-existent, at least as far as the two founding fathers of Western philosophy (Plato and Aristotle) were concerned – as the inaugural



exemplar of “democracy.” This inaugural democracy was founded upon the symbiosis between a minority of citizens composed exclusively of free non-immigrant adult males and an excluded majority of ethnicized slave laborers. Similarly, the liberalism that was to be subsequently appended to this democracy was equally perverted. Indeed, Losurdo [28] termed its initial condition of possibility, a “twin-birth”: The simultaneous defense of metropolitan individual liberty and of colonial racial slavery. This “twin-birth” was simultaneously the foundational moment for the “epistemology of ignorance” and its legacy of knowledge practices that are burdened with egregious moral liabilities: (a) a conditional recognition of difference animated by a reflexive disavowal of the intrinsic equality of the other; (b) an endemic sentiment of entitlement to civilizational supremacy with, as Tagore [29] put it, “its insolent consciousness of superiority”; and (c) a “neo-racialist” political culture that organizes its polity on the basis of an ethno-racial hierarchy as epitomized in the racially marked demographic dichotomy of majority over minority rule as an enduring organizational principle of democratic governance [30]. The result is a persistent liberal paradox that the philosopher Charles Mills [31] called “racial liberalism”: The recognition of personhood on a racially bounded basis within a social universe regulated by a racialized moral and political economy. Indeed, this is exemplified in John Stuart Mill’s manifesto *On Liberty*, in which he advocated an “enlightened despotism” for the “others” of empire: “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with Barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end.” As a result, liberalism has been saddled with a chronic implementation deficit of its ideals and thus its tolerance of domestic plutocratic rule and of its racially selective and class biased distributive justice, while impudently advocating overseas re-colonizing adventurism under the fig leaf of human rights through an empire-maintaining *mission démocratisatrice*.

In the case of West-stream anthropologists, this liberal paradox is manifested through the feigned indictment of Western capitalism’s misanthropic effects on the rest, as a self-legitimizing and self-perpetuating discursive strategy that sustains their intellectual primacy and positional hegemony since they can claim indigenous knowledge of the West’s dispossession of cultural others. Two such anthropologists have confessed as much: West-stream anthropology is an “endemically colonizing enterprise – a preemptive

seizure of authority, of voice, of the right to represent and, incidentally, to profit – or, worse yet, an activity founded, voyeuristically, on the violation of ‘the’ other” [18]. Ironically, this sentence aptly captures the nature of these two anthropologists’ misnamed text *Theory from the South* [32], a Trojan horse of West-stream anthropology which betrays an oracular doublespeak that is couched in rhetorical hyperbole and prophetic conceit (as illustrated in the sub-title: *How Euro-America is Evolving toward Africa*) in which Africa condescendingly incarnates the Global South as the perennial exemplar of an abject cartography that offers a “laboratory of futurity” and “spatial teleology” for the coming neo-liberal dystopia on a global scale (for details see the book forum, “Theorizing the Contemporary”, on *Cultural Anthropology* website February 2012). The practical effect is the constitution of West-stream anthropologists as cocky affirmers of Western privilege and as callow enablers of the fantasies of a civilizational supremacist discursive standpoint [33], which sanctions the hierarchization of cultures and the global primacy of a particular set of values.

This enabling role as “the first world guardians of global order” is confirmed by their despondent fealty to the neo-liberalism mantra, which is inextricably linked to the hegemon syndrome [34]. According to the latter, states in the international system that see themselves as “great powers” are inexorably driven by a predatory logic based on a power maximizing calculus (the political counterpart of the profit maximizing ethic of the capitalist corporation) on the pretext of ensuring their “homeland security” [35]. The latter provides a pretext for the pursuit of illegitimate hegemonic aspiration vis-à-vis other states at both the regional and global levels, and which betrays an incurable condition of politico-cultural megalomania. In effect, neo-liberalism takes this hegemon syndrome as the normal modus operandum of the world system as well as the inevitability of the imperial political configuration of global order: One hegemonic power or region (the West) and a constellation of vassal nation-states (the Rest) that are linked through an interactional ethic based on political subordination through externally vetted local elections, cultural assimilation through an imported value regime, and economic exploitation through the coerced adoption of a “free market” system. These venal practices and their perverted moral imperatives have sedimented into (a) a hegemonic set of universal first principles of societal organization, and (b) as the obligatory discursive

parameters of a globally shared epistemological space. This situation has led to an “insurgent cosmopolitanism” clamoring for the restoration of political sovereignty and cultural self-determination among the polities of the no-longer willing to be vassal nation-states [36]. This emergent process of valorizing alternative social ideals and exploring organic societal models constitutes the crucible of post-exotic anthropological fieldwork in which the agonistic transformation of these social formations within a new geopolitical matrix can be observed and explained.

Moreover, it can be reasonably asserted that this manic reference to neo-liberalism is to be understood as a form of epistemic panic engendered by the realization among West-stream practitioners that there is an inextricable nexus between Western power’s post-imperial detumescence and the discipline’s institutional senescence: that is, the decline of liberal imperialism inevitably entails the demise of West-stream anthropology. The result is the dawning of a collective sentiment among these practitioners of an impending “tragic homelessness” in a world that is no longer receptive to traditional disciplinary practice. Consequently, they are hankering after that elusive comfort of “primal belonging” through a kind of voluntary epistemic imprisonment within a disciplinary matrix that seems to be permanently shackled to an indelible umbilical cord linking the discipline’s continued existence to the persistence of the West’s politico-cultural hegemony over a world order still tethered to a racialized liberalism. Hence the persistent binary framing of the world as if disciplinary practice was ineluctably an ethno-sectarian vocation: a western us versus an eastern them, or a northern we versus a southern they. Consequently, this chronic disposition has induced the perception that West-stream anthropologists seem to be animated by a nostalgic yearning to preserve the West’s cultural preponderance achieved during the colonial era, and thus are defending the privilege to assert the continuation of its symbolic domination over its former colonial dominions. This yearning is unwittingly dissimulated through the ostensibly innocuous, but interpretively expropriating and culturally dominating, dissemination of travelling theories. The persistent recourse to such theories and their embarrassing contradiction of fieldwork ethos is implicitly acknowledged in Fardon’s incongruous title of the introductory essay in the canon-updating text *The Sage Handbook of Social Anthropology*: “flying theory, grounded method” [17]. The irreconcilable gap between such theories’ exclusive domain of formulation

(northern academies) and their privileged sphere of application (southern sites) betrays an indefensible epistemological arrogance, which produces knowledge as counterfactual interpretive narratives of people from elsewhere for the sake of validating imported theories that obfuscate an understanding of their local reality. This illustrates the operation of the epistemology of ignorance. The fact is that travelling or “flying” theory is an epistemic legacy of European domination, as it re-enacts epistemically the territorial appropriation of colonialism. As such it epitomizes West-stream anthropology’s indelible allegiance to its inaugural colonial epistémé, and betrays its practitioners’ morally craven bartering of their intellectual autonomy for an opportunistic coat-tailing of liberal imperialism’s hegemonic power.

Both the epistemic panic of West-stream anthropology and the self-appointment of its practitioners as the privileged interpreters of the dystopic effects of a hegemonic Western capitalism have bequeathed an arrogant relational epistemology and expropriating interpretive protocol that have sedimented into a carceral hermeneutical matrix, namely interpretivism. The latter is an egregious form of semiotic imperialism that has irremediably constituted West-stream anthropology into an extractive discursive formation that symbolically dispossesses others of their cultural resources – a betrayal of the ethical-moral covenant of fieldwork. More specifically, interpretivism is an intellectual ethos characterized by an assertion of epistemic autonomy from the historical process and contemporary context of research domains, and thus a declaration of interpretive autarky from local knowledge and communal reality, and whose main contribution to knowledge are “astonishing interpretations” free of empirical grounding and of “exquisite irrelevance” to human enlightenment (see below). This interpretive practice is authorized by the liberal notion of the “free market place of ideas” in which imaginative audacity and not explanatory plausibility is the sole criterion of eligibility. Interpretivism inevitably engenders illiberal discursive consequences, which are characterized by the absence of commitment to the accurate historical contextualization of the contemporary reality of the social formations being investigated, and thus interpretation is epistemically independent of the socio-historical context of inquiry, which leads to knowledge that is interpretively divorced from researched subjects’ self-understandings. This disabling interpretive

predisposition is an intrinsic product of the metropolitan travelling theory syndrome and its “flaneural sensibility”, which is animated by a chauvinistic globalism and the corollary quest to universalize its regional paradigms to the rest of the world.

Latour called this disposition “arrogant particular universalism” where “One society – and it is always a Western one – defines the general framework... with respect to which the others are situated” [37]. In effect, this obsessive penchant among scholars from the global North, assisted by their emulators from elsewhere, makes them unwitting enablers of the epistemic hegemony of dominant metropolitan centers of representation through (a) their abiding commitment to an ethnocentric social imagination inherited from their national discursive traditions; and (b) the prescribed intellectual sensibilities and the associated representational practices mediated by the theoretical repertoires of their Occidental disciplinary formations. Accordingly, they have arrogated the privilege of exercising a “totalizing interpretive imperium” over the planet that is tantamount to a form of discursive neo-imperialism. The end result is the chronic performance of interpretive misdemeanors vis-à-vis the practices of cultural others everywhere. Consequently, West-stream anthropologists have abandoned their inaugural vocation as “envoys of conscience” against the colonial depredations of the West’s “civilizing mission”, to assume, unwittingly perhaps, the mantle of unrepentant apologists for the mono-cultural universal civilization of the West’s “neo-liberalizing mission.” Alas, the once aspiring brokers of reciprocal accommodation between the West and the Rest have become resigned facilitators of the continued political subordination and cultural assimilation of the Rest into the West.

The discipline’ self-incarceration into this interpretivism credo has circumscribed its practice to the fashioning of the singularity of the anthropologist’s professional persona and vocational self-fulfillment through the performance of theory-mediated interpretations without regard to whether or not they provide an empirically validated understanding of the communal way of life of research subjects. The practical effect of this cognitive practice is the abandonment of the quest for knowledge relevant to the elucidation of humanity’s existential predicaments, in favor of achieving individual intellectual recognition within a socially insulated and institutionally gated academic community. The latter constitutes the

discipline’s leviathan, which enforces uniformity in its inmates’ national identity, professional subjectivity, ethical disposition, theoretical predilection, and interpretive commitment that are in thrall to neo-liberalism as disciplinary paradigm. Relatedly, the still dominant conception of fieldwork is as an “aesthetic happening”, or a form of exotica hunting: It “is knitted with secrets, serendipities, chance encounters, treasure hunts, coincidences, mistakes, and mysteries – all the stuff of contemporary fiction” [38]. This description of fieldwork is evocative of an exploratory intellectual excursion through a global flea market of cultural formations in search of that epiphanic moment of self-discovery. The essence of this approach to fieldwork is captured in Marvin Harris rather fierce but pertinent terms: “experimental, personalistic, and idiosyncratic field studies carried out by... would-be novelists and ego-tripping narcissists afflicted with congenital logo-diarrhea” [39]. This fieldwork ethic perpetuates a regime of “geographic adventure” based upon a “notion of travel [as] being more about confirming prior assumptions than about discovering new realms” [25], which authorizes the practice of “vulgar spectatorship” that leads to “astonishing interpretations” that are, in relations to the local research context, theory-driven misrepresentations of the social reality of research subjects. This cognitive disposition was abetted by a culturally sanctioned liberal ethos of amoral individualism that is predicated on an instrumentalized relationship to others, and thus encourages a single-minded pursuit of one’s self-interest at others’ expense. As a result, West-stream practitioners betray a chronic “appropriating narcissism” through a discursive economy characterized by ethical solipsism and intellectual ingratitude, given the ultimate exclusion of research subjects from the targeted audience of, and subsequent conversation about, research results. Moreover, this discursive narcissism generates bad-faith interpretations of researched communities due to its practitioners’ epistemic hegemony-obliged self-managing to the hermeneutical cocoon of West-stream travelling theories, which sanctions a discursive culture of convenient ignorance that perpetuates an interpretive regime of gratuitous symbolic violence toward cultural others.

This regime of interpretation has crystallized into a carceral matrix constituted by: (a) a disciplinary practice dominated by a metropolitan soliloquy about cultural others located elsewhere among a gated

discursive community within northern institutions; (b) a shared hegemonic interpretive disposition as a Western gaze upon the rest of the world that serves as echo chamber of the geo-political concerns and intellectual agendas of northern national-cultural formations whose culture-bound values and region-specific conceptual tools are promoted as universally valid ideational resources; and (c) the foregrounding of an ethno-racial “biographical situatedness” that a priori ascribes the anthropologist to a racialized and/or nationalized interpretive community as an ontological fatality. The latter is insulated within an intrinsic nativist anxiety that Stagl describes as follows: The West-stream anthropologist/traveler “while entering into the other ways of life... cannot escape remaining a representative of his own: he carries its prejudgments everywhere with him” [40]. This “voyageur philosophe” syndrome nullifies the de-provincializing effect of fieldwork, which is supposed to emancipate anthropologists from their ethno-provincial loyalties to their native milieus. Hence fieldwork becomes an extractive form of intellectual vagabondage in foreign peripheral milieus, and the subsequent knowledge claims are akin to the literary escapade of a novelist manqué, instead of the empirically grounded analyses of a social scientist.

In light of the above, this interpretivist anthropology – which is the latest incarnation of the intrinsic exoticism of West-stream anthropology as a distance-mediated relationality and absence-enabled representation of others located elsewhere – has reified knowledge production into an ego-ethno-centric intellectual performance that constructs cultural others on the basis of the observer’s subjective experience mediated by the theoretical repertoire available from her metropolitan anthropological field. Indeed, this ego-ethno-centric interpretivism and its discursive narcissism are exacerbated by its mimicry of post-modernism’s ethic of interpretation which is umbilicated to the “prison house of language” and its problematization of referentiality: Is there an “extra-textual reality”? The institutional consecration of anthropological knowledge production as a solipsistic hermeneutical practice within Euro-American anthropology was ordained by the American Anthropological Association (AAA) in 2010, when its board approved not only the replacement of the perceived positivist phrase “science of anthropology” with the preferred populist one “public understanding of humankind” in its “Statement of Purpose.” More

significantly is the insertion for the first time, and thus elevation, of “interpretation” as anthropology’s distinctive contribution, which replaced “its use to solve human problems.” This lexical substitution is a patent confirmation that the discipline is the repository par excellence of the epistemology of ignorance, because “interpretation” in West-stream anthropology is too often a convenient discursive tactic deployed either as a substitute for local knowledge deficit (*i.e.*, a kind of local knowledge gap-filling theorizing), or as an opportunity for intellectual self-validation at the expense of research subjects.

Consequently, the foregrounding of “interpretation” renders the AAA complicit in the structural production of ignorance about cultural others, and thus of the institutional enabling of an epistemic injustice toward research subjects [41]. Indeed, AAA’s promotion of the new tyranny of interpretation (besides that of ethnography) provided a convenient fig leaf for the abandonment of the quest for empirically robust scientific knowledge in favor of interpretively whimsical aesthetic knowledge. In effect, the AAA’s lexical substitution was an institutional accommodation to the epistemic consequences of the endemic careerism among its practitioners engendered by the discipline’s successful professionalization. Accordingly, it sought (a) to confirm West-stream anthropology’s abandonment of the moral legacy of its founding father, Franz Boas, namely the pursuit of knowledge “to solve human problems”; and (b) to exonerate these practitioners’ en masse critical capitulation to the neo-liberal status quo and their recourse to a self-centered interpretative practice cloaked under the expedient invocation of “theory” as an exit strategy from being accountable to society at large for their claims to knowledge. The AAA’s decision legitimized and consolidated the institutionalization of the following: (a) the disassociation of socio-cultural anthropology from its classificatory matrix within the social sciences by privileging its articulation with literary criticism; (b) the affirmation that anthropological knowledge is only partially, if not optionally, mediated by empirical evidence and historical context, but is primarily, if not solely, determined by the anthropologist’s reflexive flair and theoretical muse who thus becomes a practitioner of the “semiotics of virtuality” and its inventive representation of research subjects; and (c) the retrenchment of the discipline into the virtual space of the academy by restricting its social utility to the classroom as a mere instruction tool, as well as

sundering its already tenuous connection with, and purported relevance to, the real world beyond.

The resulting absolutization of the interpretive approach as a knowledge production ethos has engendered a plethora of disabilities in West-stream anthropology, which have delegitimized its employability in the post-exotic context. One such disability is its indelible umbilical cord to a perverted form of epistemological individualism associated with the fantasist reflexivity of 15<sup>th</sup> century tradition of travel writing as an act of personal symbolic conquest over others [40]. Accordingly, the interpretive approach remains the repository of an "ontological imperialism" predicated on an egocentric "philosophy of power... in which the relation with the other is accomplished through its assimilation into the self" by interpretive fiat [42]. This endemic predisposition betrays a sociocultural heterophobia (fear of difference) that sustains Western normativity as the dominant frame of reference. Consequently, it sanctions a research and interpretive practice that is sedimented in a Western-centric cognitive hegemony as the indelible legacy of the colonial epistemological matrix. The persistence of the latter is evident in the still current mode of knowledge construction through the "politics of arrogation" that is circumscribed to the subject-object antinomy, which obligatory entails a power-laden relationality that is indelibly inscribed in a binary logic of domination-submission. This arrogating penchant, in turn, is exacerbated by the discipline's methodological foundation, which is inextricably anchored to a Manichean world fashioned by colonialism and its social regulatory ethos of binary opposition between a racialized self-other dialectic that is hierarchically differentiated in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, class, and nationality. This hierarchization reflex is reified in West-stream anthropology's commitment to alterity that has not only perdurably racialized anthropology as the study of the other, but also sustains a benign ethnic chauvinism, which ranks the identity of disciplinary practitioners according to ethno-racial markers.

The above set of practices reproduces a neocolonial reflexivity evocative of the clientelist relational ethos of the colonial era, which is exemplified in its fetishism of the face-to-face encounter. This is accompanied by an anachronistic preference for domains of research within primordial human organizational structures (e.g., the clan, the tribe, the village) even when these structures are mere vestiges

of the past or internal peripheries that no longer explain the contemporary dynamics of the society being studied. These practices perpetuate not only the discipline's epistemic symbiosis with the exotic and the primordial, but also have merely substituted the egregious racism of the colonial era vis-à-vis its exotic chattels with a paternalist ethnocentrism vis-à-vis contemporary research subjects through their condescending inclusion as belated conscripts of Western modernity. Finally, interpretivism engenders a distorted epistemic perspective on local reality as manifested in the manic quest for pseudo sophistication through an opportunistic theoretical eclecticism, which leads to an intrinsic disjuncture between empirical data, interpretive description and theory formation; and thus undermines the factual accuracy and theoretical credibility of West-stream anthropology's knowledge claims. The resulting cognitive dysfunction of this discursive practice is aptly labeled by Hann [43] as the "theft of anthropology": It is characterized by heavy theoretical ballast, a thin novelty and depth of the empirical materials, and consequently a sophistic interpretation that attempts to veil its local knowledge deficit. One further consequence of this pilfering syndrome is that the anthropological text becomes a discursive contrivance of fact and fiction, which primarily aims at justifying a theoretical position that produces a kind of "knowledgeable ignorance" of local realities based on self-serving, and analytically policed, representations of basic facts on the ground (see Goody [44] for a discussion of the endemic nature of this pilfering syndrome in West-stream social sciences). The end result is that West-stream anthropology remains a northern epistemic hegemony-driven discipline, which is discursively complicit with the Western-centric political, economic and cultural status quo. Accordingly, its practice is the near exclusive prerogative of a metropolitan, or a metropolitan-based postcolonial, aspirational bourgeoisie employing the discipline as a means of individual social mobility while expunging the guilt of their fieldwork sponsors (universities, states, and philanthropic foundations) for past and present misanthropic deeds. The ultimate consequence of this opportunistic professional life is a cynical intellectual disposition that is manifested in "the proliferation of work (research projects, publications, etc.) that has no justification in anything but the artificial demands of an empty and self-serving careerism" [45].

This is the background to my quest for an alternative praxis to the dominant West-stream

disciplinary practice, which insists on the exclusive valorization of its Western roots and on perpetuating the hegemony of its knowledge production protocol and its regime of interpretive misdemeanors. However, prior to turning to the discussion of an alternative paradigm of anthropological inquiry, I insert an evidentiary interlude that illustrates as well as justifies the above critique of West-stream anthropology. This is done through a summary discussion of an intramural debate between three representative practitioners of West-stream anthropology.

### **Interlude: Debating the Future of West-Stream Anthropology**

The above critique is well illustrated in an intramural debate, or more aptly a provincial soliloquy, among three representatives of West-stream anthropology – John Comaroff, Ulf Hannerz and André Gingrich – in the December 2010 issue of the *American Anthropologist* about “the ends and means of anthropology as it breaches the 21<sup>st</sup> century.” As expected they failed to show a viable exit path out of what Marcus [46] called anthropology’s state of “suspension”, which is characterized by the lack of any “indication that its traditional stock of knowledge shows any signs of revitalization.” All three scholars are animated by guild-like preoccupations: institutional stability and disciplinary perpetuity.

In the case of Comaroff [47], he adopts an agent provocateur standpoint that betrays not only a deliberate imperviousness to the major challenges to the discipline’s legitimacy, but also an exuberant academic provincialism. His concern is circumscribed to the departmental turf wars of the academy. For him, the issue is not the discipline’s irrelevance to the world beyond the gates of the academy, but the threat to “disciplinary perpetuity” posed by its “indistinction” from the other social sciences. He scorns the “three major panaceas to disciplinary perpetuity” that merely produce “literary nonfiction”, which incidentally confirms my point about the discipline’s exotica hunting, explanatory deficit and history aversion: (1) a retreat into a “brute localism” in an anachronistic quest for the “exotic local”; (2) a resort to a “neoempiricism” characterized by a “fractal empiricism” of thick description and thin, if any, explanation; and (3) a return to a “cryptoculturalism” in which culture is conceived immaterially and ahistorically. In proffering his alternative panacea he aims to counter the social scientification of anthropology with the

anthropologization of the social sciences. He admonishes his disciplinary colleagues that anthropology “ought to be understood as a praxis: a mode of producing knowledge” through the performance of a series of “epistemic operations” that seek to reveal, through a semiotic exegesis, the “interiors of the phenomenal world.” These “epistemic operations” approximates the tenets of magical realism, which betrays an intellectual sensibility honed in well over a generation of studying the “economies of the occult” and their theological imbrications. This is exemplified in his arcane thematic entry points and their esoteric nomenclature: the “critical estrangement of the lived world”; the mapping of the processes of “being-and-becoming”; the “methodological revelation” through the counter-intuitive juxtaposition of a series of binaries, etc. In the end, his anthropological praxis seems to commit the same sins he castigated in the other panaceas, as it reifies disciplinary practice into an intellectual performance whose sole purpose is to exhibit the anthropologist’s semiotic virtuosity through a form of “literary nonfiction” that displays empirical gravity-defying “astonishing interpretations” that not only mystify the social reality of research subjects, but also are of “exquisite irrelevance” to human emancipatory aspirations.

In contrast, Hannerz [48] offers an apathetic defense of West-stream anthropology with justifications that merely rehashed the discipline’s “congenial orthodoxies” in a vain attempt to refurbish its “public image” given its susceptibility to derisive “anthropology bashing.” His primary concern is with protecting the discipline’s institutional base from the public’s ignorance about what the discipline stands for, and whose support is needed to ensure that the funding spigot remains open. His solution, which takes its inspiration from neoliberalism’s logic of commodification, is to call for a “strong brand” that is evocative of an advertising slogan, as it is expressed in a “few words... simple ones, understood by everybody”: “Diversity is our business.” This impoverished vision of anthropology’s future is so intellectually mediocre as to be unworthy of further comment.

Finally, Gingrich [49] provides a welcome relief, as he eschews the ostrich syndrome of his colleagues to perform an act of contrition by declaring that the “ignorant provincialism” that defines metropolitan disciplinary practice segmented into “national compartmentalization of knowledge that simply ignores

what is going on in the world” is no longer legitimate in the emerging “transnational phase” of knowledge production. Accordingly, metropolitan anthropologists need to emancipate themselves from these “national container paradigms.” The emancipatory path he proposes is through reforming two aspects of disciplinary organization: The first is to rethink the “relations of production” of anthropological knowledge through, unfortunately, status quo maintaining reformist gestures: (a) the need to adopt “transnational quality standards” for Ph.D. candidates that must include familiarity with “basic texts by classic authors” such as Boas, Malinowski and Mauss, without any mention of other intellectual traditions; and (b) to redirect funding flows to “our partners and hosts in the postcolonies”, through a kind of condescending philanthropy vis-à-vis underprivileged subalterns. In contrast, Gingrich’s second area of reform, namely the discipline’s “epistemological foundations”, confronts the major inadequacies that challenge the epistemic credibility and methodological viability of West-stream disciplinary practice: (i) the need to break up and leave behind “the enduring Euro-American epistemological monopoly in our field”; and (ii) the persistent and untenable situation of a “field that cannot clearly answer questions about the status of its knowledge.” Gingrich does not offer a way out of these dilemmas but merely calls for a “continuous and self-reflexive discourse on methodology and epistemology”, which, however, does not include reconsideration of “ethnographic fieldwork... as our central research and training methodology in the next transnational era.” Alas, in spite of Gingrich’s good intention, he has merely reaffirmed the prevailing norms of disciplinary socialization, and has thereby permanently sealed the escape hatch from West-stream anthropology’s carceral hermeneutical matrix.

*Postscript:* Nearly four years after the above debate was published, the editors of *American Anthropologist* seemed to have finally recognized that “ignorant provincialism” of metropolitan disciplinary practice is no longer tenable. Accordingly, in the journal’s first issue for 2014 they created a new section entitled “World Anthropology”<sup>1</sup> to serve as a peripheral forum for

disciplinary practitioners from other national traditions to showcase “the varied configurations of the discipline around the world.” However, two of the contributors noted the merely philanthropic nature of this initiative, which leaves untouched what Gingrich called the “Euro-American epistemological hegemony.” As they put it, “The well-intentioned gestures behind such categorical innovations as ‘world anthropology’ notwithstanding, it is rare to find any acknowledgement, let alone a serious discussion, of the theoretical inputs from these other places” [55].<sup>2</sup> What they are suggesting is that if such a “serious discussion” of the “inputs” of non-dominant natives from non-Western places had taken place within West-stream anthropology there would have been no need for this compensatory segregated space. More revealing is that the creation of this discursive ghetto confirms that

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*American Anthropologist.* These scholars imagined themselves as transnationalist practitioners who straddle the post-modernist and post-colonial epistemic spectrum, and have constituted themselves into a “World Anthropologies Network” (WAN). Its members advocate for “a critical anthropology of anthropology” that “calls for a reconceptualization of the relationships among anthropological communities.” They seek to effectuate a transition from a “monologic anthropology” to a “heteroglossic anthropology” (whatever that means). Together they hope to engineer “another moment of reinvention of anthropology” based on the “changes in the relationships among anthropologists located in different loci of the world system.” This is to be achieved by eliciting the recognition of “the increased importance of non-hegemonic anthropologists in the production and dissemination of knowledge.” Their ultimate aim is “to make anthropology a richer academic cosmopolitics of otherness”, which is informed by a peculiar conception of the discipline as “a cosmopolitan political discourse about the importance of diversity for human kind” [50]. In their publications [51, 52] the focus is on brokering a cosmopolitan dialogue between academic practitioners through a macro critique of metropolitan hegemony over the discipline and its exclusionary pedagogic practices. However, this dialogue is entirely an intramural affair between fellow anthropologists as “ontological tribes speaking only to themselves”, and does not address the challenges noted throughout this article: e.g., the interpretive misdemeanors vis-à-vis researched communities resulting from dependence on metropolitan travelling theory, and the social accountability deficit of anthropological knowledge given the exclusion of researched subjects as audience of research results. In effect, these “non-hegemonic” anthropologists have merely substituted themselves for the local audience excluded from the dialogue among academic practitioners. It remains unclear if these protagonists of “World anthropologies” are offering alternative pathways to knowledge production in a post-Western-centric world that is relevant to research subjects as well as constitutes an epistemological challenge to the North’s hegemony, or merely advocating a political challenge to their metropolitan institutional marginalization through a regional identity-based credo about anthropological practice that betrays a form of special pleading for intellectual recognition by metropolitan institutions [53]. Finally, the aims of these transnationalist scholars are noble; however they cannot be achieved with borrowed means given, as one scholar wisely put it, that “the master’s tool will never dismantle the master’s house. They may allow us temporarily to beat him at his own game, but they will never enable us to bring about genuine change” [54].

<sup>1</sup> This notion of “world anthropology” is the brainchild of a group of mostly US based diasporic scholars from the Global South who are practitioners of a derivative version of West-stream anthropology. They initially sought “to provincialize Europe” but have acculturated themselves into it, by way of their uncritical embrace of the Gallic epistemic fetish of post-structuralism and its mystifying lexicon. This explains world anthropology’s opportunistic sponsorship by the first among the rest of West-stream anthropology journals:

<sup>2</sup> This observation can be easily confirmed with a random perusal of any, indeed all, West-stream texts on the history and theory of anthropology [56, 57]. They reveal a tedious hagiography of an unchanging pantheon of the same male, pale and stale forefathers of the discipline, and whose theoretical emanations or oracular ruminations about humanity are claimed to be foundational insights about the whole of humankind.

West-stream anthropology was never a cosmopolitan undertaking, but a provincial activity insulated within “national container paradigms”, and permanently tethered to state subservient national disciplinary traditions. Alas, “we have never been cosmopolitan”, to paraphrase Monsieur Latour [37], just parodying the role; preferring instead the epistemic comfort of being flagpole carriers of our national traditions. This endemic reflexive withdrawal into national epistemic containers raises the unsettling question as to whether or not this melding of the anthropologists’ ethnic endowment or epidermic marker and epistemic orientation into a partisan ethno-racial subjectivity is a fatal social ontology.

### **MESOGRAPHY AS RESEARCH ETHIC: BEYOND ETHNOGRAPHY**

My recourse to the term mesography entails, first and foremost, an avoidance of West-stream anthropology’s methodological insolvency and a rejection of its primitivizing assumption about its research domains and subjects, which are integral to ethnography as anthropology’s methodological foundation. This method was conceived as a research tool that was exclusively appropriate to communities that were beyond the pale of modernity and dwelled outside the state and resisted its encompassment. Indeed, anthropology was envisioned, and still is by some, as the “natural science” of non-Western societies dedicated to the study of their modernizing hordes on the periphery of civilization and who constituted, as Comaroff and Comaroff [58] euphemistically put it, the “underside of modernity.” The use of the term mesography effectuates the necessary recalibration of the discipline’s knowledge production practices with the emerging historical conjuncture through an alternative pairing of method and epistemic orientation. It is a new research and analytical practice as well as an expository strategy in quest of a strategically inclusive contextualization of the fieldwork domain. Accordingly, there are two implications of a mesography-based practice of anthropology: The first, as aptly formulated by Thomas [59], is to “Refuse the bounds of conveniently sized localities through venturing to speak about regional relations and histories... [and] that move into the space between the theoretical, the universal, and local..., and that [is] energized by forms of difference not contained within the us/them fiction.” The second is to repudiate the blinkered professional ethic of “committed disciplinarian” and its narrow configuration of professional identity, and to disavow the

epistemological attitude of “committed localism” to bounded micro social formations in the form of the traditional one-village ethnography and its production of knowledge as a pastiche of vignettes and “astonishing interpretations.” This “knowledge” is consigned to publications that serve either as infotainment without enlightenment for a metropolitan audience or as the reproductive means of, or more aptly the cloning mechanism for, a new generation of conventional disciplinary practitioners. In this light, the mantra about the “unique suitability of ethnography” as an effective means of exploring the human condition seems rather hollow; given its extractive research practices and ethno-ego-centric interpretive tradition. The latter are driven by metropolitan travelling theories with their imported thematic predilections that neglect locally relevant themes, and their extrinsic value orientations that prioritize research agendas linked to the geopolitical interests of metropolitan states.

In contrast to ethnography and its intrinsic deficiencies, mesography can be described as a synthetic social scientific practice, which provides an integrative research framework for the human sciences that enables the elucidation of the historically-embedded processes of societal transformation. The prefix “meso” emphasizes the linking function between multiple loci of investigation, spectrum of thematic foci, and varying scales of analysis. Furthermore, meso substitutes for ethno, as the latter term no longer refers to the people being researched. Alas, since the emergence and subsequent hegemony of interpretivism the term “ethno” (in ethno/graphy) has mutated into a euphemism for the ethno-nationally circumscribed epistemic community outside the research context to which anthropologists belong and communicate their findings. The ultimate aim of a mesography is to offer a panoramic analytical continuum encompassing history, policy, theory, based on empirical engagement with local realities embedded within trans-local processes [60]. To achieve this panoramic analysis a mesography employs the following analytical foci:

1. It privileges evolving processes that generate the vectors of change over bounded spaces and places of “a physically and symbolically enclosed world”, and thus abandons the “romance of spatial confinement” of traditional ethnography.
2. It focuses on social collectivities in quest of a historically contextualized and institutionally



- mediated communal biography; instead of ethnography's haphazardly selected individual actors within an isolated micro community in search of an interpretive understanding of their cultural matrix.
3. It synthesizes the diachronic (historical span) and the synchronic (contemporary depth) into an analytical continuum that not only straddles the field and the text, but also articulates the past and present as well as anticipates the future. Consequently, it abandons the temporal myopia of anthropology's analytical convention of the "ethnographic present", and encompasses a full temporal spectrum.
  4. It employs a kind of "methodological collectivism" (as opposed to the methodological individualism of ethnography) by triangulating the micro local ways of life, the meso societal structures, and the macro structural trans-local processes in an explanatory narrative about the social formation under study, which leads to the transgression of the traditional polarity of scales (*i.e.*, micro vs. macro). In this way, mesography articulates the intrinsic analytical relationality between the micro level (*i.e.*, the practices of individual actors in their local/communal settings), and the macro level (*i.e.*, the encompassing national societal structures, and regional civilizational matrices) in the investigation of a social formation.
  5. It relies on an endogenously generated explanatory framework, and thus renounces the a priori application of imported explanatory or interpretive frameworks. Accordingly, theory formation is grounded in the analytical articulation and comprehensive explanation of the emergent reality of the social transformation process under study. Indeed, theory is pursued through what I call *immanent theorization*, as an embedded theory formation process, which relies on the investigative recovery, the analytical valorization and theoretical elaboration of local meanings generated within their own social spaces. This mode of theory formation articulates the endogenous potentialities of the emergent social formation, and thus affirms the indissociability between the history of, and theory about, the research context. The salutary end result is the delegitimization of dependence on metropolitan travelling theories and the emancipation of practitioners from the alienating sensibility that they impart.
  6. It abandons the conventional expository strategy which features a "literature review" section that foregrounds an imported theoretical template that subsumes endogenous field data within exogenous analytical frameworks. In contrast, the ideal expository format of a mesographic approach starts with an ethno-historical contextualization of the community being investigated, and/or a "contrapuntal" (against the grain) reading of the existing literature to suggest how the fieldwork material does not fit, or will not be made to fit, the West-stream theoretical templates.
  7. It presents its findings through a transversal analytical perspective that strategically alternates between the micro, meso and macro levels in elucidating, through an explanatory narrative, the impacts of trans-local forces on the multiple dimensions of local reality and the transformation of the local order.
  8. It validates its knowledge claims on the basis of: historically-informed experiential immersion; empirically validated description; local knowledge-grounded explanation; contextually-embedded theory formation; and an ethic of sharing of cognitive resources between researcher and research subjects.
- The end result of the above research, analytical and expository choices is to produce a study about a communal formation, or more generally a research domain, which provides the following:
- A *historical biography* through a multi-temporal chronological reconstruction;
  - A *structural anatomy* through a multi-scalar analytical deconstruction;
  - A *strategic inventory* of the network of factors that generate the vectors of change;
  - A *processual analysis* that situates the above within a relational matrix encompassing variously situated actors, trans/local institutions and catalyzing events in a miscellany of sites within the social formation being investigated.
- In sum, mesography is the methodological articulation of a post-exotic anthropology as a human

science for an axial era, which provides a model for the anthropological study of social formations anywhere.

Table 1 below provides a comprehensive overview of mesography’s research practices.

**Table 1: Mesography’s Research Practices**

<p>Epistemological Standpoint</p>	<p>The knowledge-making practices of mesography are grounded in a <i>post-exotic standpoint</i> that has six dimensions: (1) it transgresses the narrow temporal span associated with the study of social formations in the Global South that circumscribes the ideational resources of research (i.e., themes, topics, problems) to the effects of colonialism, by inquiring into the relevance of their civilizational antecedents; (2) it rejects the confining spatial matrix that delimits a geography of unidirectional knowledge transfer from West to Rest, in favor of interregional knowledge exchanges between North, South, East and West; (3) it emancipates itself from Eurocentrism’s vulgar ontology, which reduces the existence of the cultural Other to the xenophilic fantasies and hegemonic obsessions of the “totalizing interpretive imperium” of the Western self, by adopting a social ontology constituted through relations with an imagined community made up of the entire gamut of humanity; (4) it adopts a pluralistic philosophical sensibility that spurns any claim to universal exemplarity by any philosophical tradition (e.g., Western liberalism and its megalomaniac penchant as manifested in the unrelenting global campaign of indoctrination aimed at three-quarters of humanity about the magnanimity and indubitability of its political and ethical edicts); (5) it expunges the use of the epithet “relativism” and its ethnocentric social imagination, which has sedimented into the default ideology of civilizational supremacists and their politics of non-recognition that entails the rejection of any ethical obligation toward the reciprocal recognition of the cultural claims of “others”, while insisting that they recognize “ours”, as a means of disallowing moral equity, and sustaining cultural hierarchy, among the world’s social formations; and (6) it is rooted in a historical purview that encompasses the pre-European past and a post-Western future, and thus repudiates the provincial narrative that confines the historical trajectory of humankind from the purported “autonomous” emergence of Greek civilization to the neo-liberal order as the societal endpoints of humanity.</p>
<p>Fieldworker’s Disposition</p>	<p>The fieldworker is an <i>ontologically contingent</i> subject, as her intellectual persona or field identity does not precede the research process. Instead her cognitive orientation is fashioned, first, through a prior familiarization with the history of the selected domain of study, and then through field contingencies engendered by the research context and process. The self-other dialectic is abandoned in favor of a community-world relationality in which the researcher spurns the pantomimic performance of the “participant-observer” role in favor of the genuinely empathic role of a “practical mediator” in quest of a shared understanding of our worldly predicaments.</p>
<p>Praxis of Inquiry</p>	<p>The praxis of inquiry is <i>processual mesography</i>, which seeks to excavate the imbricated socio-spatial and politico-institutional structures mediated by trans-local forces, in order to elucidate the multiple processes of community formation, and how they re-configure communal ways of life.</p>
<p>Data Collection and Analysis</p>	<p>The approach to collecting and analyzing data is based on the <i>articulation framework</i>. Data are collected through a <i>recursive movement</i> between places, spaces and texts, which entail a fieldwork modality as <i>sites-hopping</i> throughout the multiple domains relevant to the research process. And the analysis employs a <i>transversal perspective</i> that integrates the micro, meso and macro levels in an explanatory narrative about historical trajectory, vectors of change, and policy levers for transformation.</p>
<p>Narrative Strategy</p>	<p>The narrative strategy of a mesography avoids the empirically tenuous interpretivist paradigm that dominates anthropological discourse, in favor of an <i>explanatory narrative</i> that hews closely to the social facts of the research context(s). This explanatory narrative is informed by a commitment to elucidating local “truths” according to the criteria of evaluation listed below, in addition to the following parameters: (1) an obligatory history-embedded approach that situates the domain of inquiry within a retrospective and prospective analytical spectrum, and (2) the integrated articulation of the relevant conceptual and theoretical resources of the social sciences. The end result is a mesography of social formations based on <i>descriptive explanations</i> that integrate the multiple geo-spatial scales and temporal horizons encompassing their processes of transformation.</p>
<p>Theory Formation</p>	<p>Theory formation foregrounds the principle that social theory must depend on the social world being investigated, and not on the institutional and social milieu of the researcher; hence the notion of <i>embedded theory</i> formation. Therefore, a mesographic approach abjures the standard practice of imposing on fieldwork data imported interpretive templates, in favor of embedding theory formation within the research context and the data generated therein. And to the extent that an imported theory is used, it must be customized to fit, and not be foisted on, the local context. Moreover, the knowledge generated through embedded theory must be historically-grounded, prospectively-oriented, contextually-emergent, geo-spatially situated, and multi-scales structured.</p>
<p>Criteria of Evaluation</p>	<p>The evaluation of research data, explanatory narrative, theory formation, and the subsequent claims to knowledge must meet the following criteria: local plausibility, context-dependent, process-focus, history-embedded, policy-relevant, community-validated, and counter-hegemonic.</p>
<p>Ethical Orientation</p>	<p>The communication of research results is inspired by the <i>ethic of reciprocity</i>: that is, the mutual sharing of self-realization-enabling knowledge resources. Moreover, such an ethic considers the researched community an integral part of a cross-cultural conversation and as members of the audience of research results. From this ethical standpoint knowledge production engenders <i>relational goods</i> that establish a bond between researchers and researched through the exchange of cognitive resources for their respective emancipatory or self-enlightenment quest.</p>

### CODA: A MESOGRAPHER'S CREDO

In conclusion, the quest for an alternative methodological underpinning for the praxis of a post-exotic anthropology through the adoption of mesography, and the rejection of ethnography, entails the adoption of what might be called the mesographer's oath, as formulated in a phrase borrowed from Rorty [61] without assuming his philosophical standpoint: "I want to demote the quest for knowledge from the status of end-in-itself to that of one more means toward greater human happiness" and capabilities. This oath is underpinned by a series of strategic stakes and epistemic imperatives as operational principles, which repudiate West-stream anthropology's predilection for symbolic domination of the other as performed by its archetypal practitioner – the ethnographer. Indeed, the latter should perform the act of self-denunciation for having failed to heed Kant's – who is after all the founding philosopher of West-stream anthropology [62], and setting aside his contribution to philosophical racism [63] – injunction towards self-enlightenment as a "departure from self-imposed immaturity" due to an anachronistic commitment to a disciplinary practice that is obsessed with an emphasis on a tradition-sustaining *mode* of producing knowledge, instead of focusing on the production of contextually-relevant *kinds* of knowledge. The practice of the following tenets of the mesographer's credo could serve as the West-stream anthropologist's rite of passage into becoming a practitioner of a post-exotic anthropology. In this way, West-stream anthropological practice would finally emancipate itself from its chronic re-enactment of colonialism's territorial expropriation in the more symbolic guise of an interpretive dispossession of others' socio-cultural patrimony.

First, the strategic stakes refer to the pre-requisites steps in the reverse-engineering of West-stream anthropology into a world-centric anthropology as an authentic post-exotic human science:

- The recuperation of the discipline from its current status as the academic repository of the colonial epistémé through the persistence of a series of taken for granted facts-on-the-ground: (a) its dominant institutional configuration as a "Western only and white mostly space" with its corollary exclusion of internal ethno-racial minorities and subordination of external "natives"; (b) its normative epistemological orientation as the symbolic domination of others through an endemic intellectual ethos of

interpretive expropriation based on metropolitan travelling theories; and (c) its segregationist relational protocol embodied in the professional phobia of "going native" – a self-serving deployment of a strategic xenophobia and its aversion of reciprocal cultural influence that masquerades as a guarantor of scientific objectivity [64]. These have led to the discipline's institutionalization of an ethno-sectarian sensibility reified in the seemingly inescapable analytical standpoint: the West over the Rest.

- The emancipation of the practice of anthropology from its normative enthrallment to the geopolitics of Western states, and from the arbitrary interpretation mediated by the fashionable theories of the Western academy. This emancipation obligatorily entails the conceptual laundering, definitional divestiture, lexical renewal and semantic substitution of the discipline's conventional taxonomic repertoire. Furthermore, this calls for the reverse-engineering of the discipline's legacy as the handmaiden of colonialism with its exclusive purpose as the "science of others" located in the non-Western segment of humanity, and its reconstruction into a world-centric science of all of us as the legitimate disciplinary handmaiden of a post-exotic sociocultural pluriverse.
- The deterritorialization of the practitioner's epistemic and ontological groundings from her provincial native grounds in quest of a non-egocentric and non-ethnocentric means for achieving a context-dependent (not self-centered) understanding of the dynamics of the sociocultural formation under study, and thus the formulation of locally plausible interpretations of research subjects' communal lifeways. This would entail the jettisoning of national identity and its associated epistemic tradition as cognitive crutches for disciplinary practitioners engaged in cross-border research. Moreover, this would restore the promise of fieldwork – namely to unshackle practitioners from their provincial allegiances – from its current debasement into an opportunistic excursion into others' lifeworld to encapsulate them with travelling theories from "home."
- The reconfiguration of disciplinary practitioners' "network of commitments" (e.g., methodological, conceptual, and theoretical loyalties) that is

embedded within their respective national anthropological traditions through the cultivation of a set of combined critical competencies that are cross-disciplinary. For example: (a) the historian's comprehensive diachronic contextualization of the research domain; (b) the sociologist's elucidation of the nexus between human actions and institutional contexts; (c) the political-economist's meticulous dissection of the configuration of the state-power-polity continuum; and (d) the methodological pluralist's pragmatic selection of research tools adapted to the research context.

Second, the epistemic imperatives identified below are, in effect, the operational principles that should guide the knowledge production practices of a practitioner of a post-exotic anthropology:

- The rejection of an a priori submission to the discipline's established doxology. For example: (a) its exclusive mandate to study the "other" as a hierarchically racialized or ethnicized subject, and (b) its epistemological monopoly over the production of "cultural" knowledge about the non-Western regions of the world that is chronically burdened with a legacy of bestowing cultural recognition as alienated representations.
- The refusal to occupy exotic anthropology's "savage slot" with its salvage ethnography as ethos of inquiry characterized by (a) its compulsive indulgence in a xenophilia for the primordial other, and its corollary emphasis on the remote, and the marginal remnants of societies as privileged domains of study; and (b) its wallowing in the West and the Rest dichotomy and its agonies of conscience that reduces disciplinary practice into a kind of philanthropy, which seeks condescendingly to give voice to research subjects invariably ascribed the status of subalterns.
- The avoidance of an extractive research practice that is devoid of mutual benefit between fieldworker and research subjects, and collaterally the abandonment of the epistemology of idle curiosity animated by an exoticizing reflex. The latter continues to drive the anthropological enterprise, and the resulting epistemic contribution is interpretively "astonishing", but utterly irrelevant to a meaningful understanding of the ways of life on our shared planet.
- The repudiation of the discipline's nostalgic fondness, and thus delirious advocacy, of methodological purity based on the false symbiosis between a specific method and the substance of a discipline through the tyranny of ethnography, which circumscribes the definition of objects and subjects of investigation to its existing research techniques (*i.e.*, micro-scale face-to-face encounter), and authorizes the exclusive use of the kinds of data that such techniques can collect. Henceforth, the abandonment of the neo-empiricist equation of object of observation = object of study, which has perdurably constrained anthropology's domains of intervention.
- The shunning of the endemic perception among conventional disciplinary practitioners of their being an inherent dichotomy, if not a mutual exclusion, between *explanation*, as being exclusive to the social sciences and the use of which is supposed to lead unavoidably to generalizing abstractions and arbitrary reifications, and *interpretation* as the privileged discursive means of anthropology due to its amenability to the mystifying notion of "inter-subjective understanding" between fieldworker and field consultants. The common-sense status of this conception of "interpretation" among ethnographers explains its privileging by the AAA as discussed on page 12. In contrast, while mesography privileges the use of explanation, it nevertheless recurses strategically to interpretation, which is seen as a last resort analytical strategy to address the residual data deficit that inevitably plagues any research process, and not the central means of knowledge production as in the case of ethnography.
- The adoption of a "politics of abolition" vis-à-vis West-stream anthropology's inexcusable allegiance to the political philosophy of "racial liberalism" that permanently ascribes a race/ethnicity-mediated social ontology to both practitioners and research subjects, which is the primary vector of a racialized discipline and its ethnic hierarchies.
- The rehabilitation of the notion of "tolerance" from its current lexical perversion into an Orwellian invocation as a slogan promoting the global acceptance of a Eurocentric "geopolitics

of ethics” with its provincial values and its duplicitous sanctioning of human practices. For example: the approval of the dressed-up transvestite as a sign of freedom of sexual orientation – a human rights asserted; and the rejection of the Muslim women’s veil as exemplifying male domination and an oppressive religion – a human rights denied. This ethical duplicity should be substituted by a genuine attitude of openness vis-à-vis the clash of emergent cosmopolitanisms engendered by newly empowered regional social formations with their non-convergent cultural scripts, incommensurable value premises, and divergent societal projects.

The performance of the above set of strategic principles and epistemic imperatives will hasten the demise of West-stream anthropology’s race-mediated social ontology according to which disciplinary practice is predicated on practitioners’ bio-ethno-national characteristics. This ascriptive ontology has resulted into epistemic hierarchies based on practitioners’ geographical and institutional locations: The hegemonic reflexivity of northern scholars driven by an ethos of epistemic conquest, and the mimetic reflexivity of southern ones animated by a credo of doxic submission. Ultimately, the challenge for the practitioner of a post-exotic anthropology is the development of knowledge production practices that (a) enhance and perpetuate the planet’s cultural diversity and the corollary modes of thought; (b) promote and sustain alternative ways of life; and (c) exemplify possible futures that exempt the rest of humanity from conforming to the machine-mediated post-human culture and its virtualization of human existence envisioned through the techno-fantasies and misanthropic aspirations of the advocates of the neo-liberal dystopia. The latter entails the relentless instrumentalization of human beings and the ruthless quantification of human values. Indeed, a post-exotic anthropology reclaims the infinite spectrum of human potentialities from their premature incarceration within neo-liberalism’s impoverished vision of the “good life” as a tournament of consumption. Finally, the new epistemic praxis proposed in this article is not about proving that “we have our traditions too” through a merely recuperative practice. Instead, it is first and foremost a prospective intellectual-practical endeavor toward expanding the planet’s cornucopia of experimentation in ways of living that not only defies neo-liberalism’s venal globalist vision and its predatory

practices as the privileged means of pursuing its hegemonic ideal of generalizing a “market ethic” in all spheres of life, but also ruptures the prevailing dependency of theory formation on the effects of capital’s global dissemination. Consequently, anthropology becomes a form of “practical engagement” that seeks to articulate epistemic pursuits and human problems, while occupying an interstitial location between the ivory tower detachment of the academy and the hand-maiden service to sponsoring agencies. In this way, the primacy of the truism that “all social scientific inquiry is undertaken to serve human interests” is reasserted.

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