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Culture & Truth  
The Remaking of Social Analysis  
With a new Introduction

Renato Rosaldo



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*For my children, Sam, Manny, and Olivia*

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE 1993 EDITION

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

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tional change today's wisdom can quickly become yesterday's cliché.

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

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

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



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

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

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

The general goal is to achieve diversity in all rooms, decision-making rooms, classrooms, faculty rooms, rooms of all kinds, shapes, and sizes. In order to democratize higher edu-

cation, people need to work together to change the present situation where the higher the perceived social status of the room the less diverse its membership. When people leave a decision-making room and one hears that a consensus was reached, remember to ask: "Who was in the room when the decision was made?" Introducing diversity in such rooms will slow down the process. Decisions will be harder to reach and the process will be less comfortable than via the old method, but the decisions made will find broad support and prove more effective in the long run.

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

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

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

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

Diversity in classrooms does more than arouse predictable discomfort and resistance. The moment classrooms become diverse, change begins. There is no standing still. New students do not laugh at the old jokes. Even those teachers who do nothing to revise their yellowed sheets of lecture notes know that their words have taken on new meanings. New pedagogies begin. New pedagogies include new courses and new texts. One crucial ingredient involves affirmative action for course readings (and for works cited in publications). Teachers find new ways to seek out pertinent works of high quality by people of color, women, gays, and lesbians. Looking in the usual places and in the usual ways will not produce change. In a graduate seminar I offered a few years ago, students complained about the lack of diverse content.

"What," I asked, "do you mean? You have different cultures in the course—Nuer, Tikopias, Navahos."  
"No," the students replied, "we want books by and not just about members of different cultures." Since then I've often left part of

the syllabus blank so that students can suggest appropriate works previously unknown to me.

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

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

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

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have to be addressed. In my experience such classrooms, even at their most uncomfortable, have produced student work of exceptional quality.

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

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

anthropologists have done to promote institutional change, including achievements and obstacles, would help transform disciplinary consciousness.

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

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

Certain anthropologists claim as well that proponents of multiculturalism could stand to learn about the concept of culture advanced by Franz Boas, a key founder of modern anthropology. Boas argued for the integrity of separate cultures which were equal with respect to their values. Differences between cultures with respect to technological development conferred them with neither moral superiority nor

moral inferiority. The historical importance of Boasian cultural relativism and related efforts to combat racism cannot be denied.

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

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

Recent experimentation in ethnographic writing arguably derives from the remaking of social analysis rather than from experimentation for its own sake. Modes of composition have changed because the discipline's research agenda

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has shifted from the search for structures to theories of practice that explore the interplay of both structure *and* agency. In such endeavors, knowledge and power are intertwined because the observer's point of view always influences the observations she makes. Rather than stressing timeless universal and the sameness of human nature, this perspective emphasizes human diversity, historical change, and political struggle.

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

In my view, critical anthropology and interdisciplinary cultural studies attempt to valorize subordinate forms of knowledge. Attempts to blur the boundaries of ethnography create space for historically subordinated perspectives otherwise excluded or marginalized from official discourse. Such perspectives complicate and enrich social analysis, but they do not represent the one and only authentic truth. Human beings always act under conditions they do not fully know and with consequences they neither fully intend nor can fully foresee. Yet subordinate perspectives must be included in social analysis. Our objects of analysis are also analyzing subjects whose best perception not unlike the ethnographer's own, are shaped by distinctive cultures, histories,



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and relations of inequality. Neither ethnographers nor their subjects hold a monopoly on the truth.

Current conflicts over educational democracy implicate anthropology and interdisciplinary cultural studies. If people take initiatives, they may find themselves at the center of the present-day struggle for institutional enfranchisement. In this struggle, the treasured anthropological concept of culture has already been widely disseminated, used in diverse quarters, and thereby refashioned. Culture and power have become intertwined in a world and in institutional settings where diverse groups, themselves internally diverse, interact and seek full enfranchisement and social justice under conditions of inequality. Ongoing institutional conflicts over diversity and multiculturalism in higher education are localized symptoms of a broader renegotiation of full citizenship in the United States. And such struggles are the context for the explorations in *Culture and Truth*.

## PREFACE

*When someone with the authority of a teacher, say, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked into a mirror and saw nothing*

Adrienne Rich, *"Invisibility in Academe"*

These days questions of culture seem to touch a nerve because they quite quickly become anguished questions of identity. Academic debates about multicultural education similarly slip effortlessly into the animating ideological conflicts of this multicultural nation. How can the United States both respect diversity and find unity? Does this country need a "melting pot" to homogenize people into a "culturally invisible" mainstream? Or can it now develop

alternative doctrines more fully accountable to its cultural diversity? This book deliberately engages dominant national dogma about melting pots and core values by trying to articulate a pluralistic vision of culture and truth consonant with divergent North American identities.

My present understanding of the remaking of social analysis was catalyzed by the "Western Culture Controversy" at Stanford University during 1986-88. Without this academic battle my book would have been finished more quickly, but less well. Required of first-year undergraduates, Stanford's year-long Western Culture course obliged students to read a "core list" of "great books" from the traditional European canon. More often treated as sacred monuments to be worshiped than as fellow humans to be engaged in dialogue, the great authors supposedly represented a grand tradition that stretched in a straight line from Homer through Shakespeare to Voltaire. Students were told that they must learn "our heritage" before going on to study "other" cultural traditions.

Conflict erupted, however, when a significant number of students and faculty questioned the "we" who was defining "our heritage" as a shelf of books written in another time (before World War I) and in another place (ancient Athens and Western Europe). How could a self-appointed academic aristocracy in the United States wrap itself in a cultural heritage that included no authors from the Americas, not to mention any women or persons of non-European origin? Although all citizens of the United States could feel marginalized by the great books list, certain faculty members because of their field of study, gender, or cultural heritage felt particularly affronted by the Western Culture course. We suffered the annihilation poet Adrienne Rich depicts so incisively in the epigraph above.

Cultural anthropology in recent years has been reshaping itself in part because of what it has learned from such conflicts about multicultural social reality. At the same time the discipline has discovered that it can make significant contributions to issues that culturally diversifying nations now

face. This book has emerged from the double process of being reshaped by wider conflicts and finding new positions from which to voice thoughts and feelings about cultural diversity. For me as a Chicana questions of culture emerge not only from my discipline, but also from a more personal politics of identity and community.

The shifts in social thought described and reformulated in this book have grown out of a broad movement; they are not the property of any single individual, discipline, or school. I have learned from the writings of numerous predecessors, contemporaries, and successors who have contributed to the remaking of social analysis. This book crystallized during a year at the Stanford Humanities Center (198687) when I drafted much of the manuscript. I read widely on issues pertinent to this project during a year at the Center for Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences (198081) which was financed by the National Science Foundation ( #BNS 76 22943) and a postdoctoral fellowship for minorities administered by the National Research Council. Earlier versions of certain chapters in this book were published elsewhere, and I remain thankful for comments by individuals whose names I previously acknowledged but do not repeat here. My earliest formulations of this project benefited from the editorial advice and encouragement of Grant Barnes, Bill Carver, Vikram Seth, and Helen Tartar.

This book has been significantly shaped by interdisciplinary faculty reading groups at Stanford University, particularly the cultural studies research group and the faculty seminar at the Stanford center for Chicano Research, where I am currently director. I am grateful to two Stanford University graduate student reading groups, one in social theory from the history department and the other in the theory of practice from the anthropology department, both of which gave critical comments on a draft of this book. I benefited from similar discussions by members of the cultural studies working group of the Inter-University Program on Latino Issues and by the Latino summer seminar held at Stanford in 1988. I also wish to thank the following individuals who

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## INTRODUCTION GRIEF AND A HEADHUNTER'S RAGE

If you ask an older Ilongot man of northern Luzon, Philippines, why he cuts off human heads, his answer is brief, and one on which no anthropologist can readily elaborate: He says that rage, born of grief, impels him to kill his fellow human beings. He claims that he needs a place "to carry his anger. The act of severing and tossing away the victim's head enables him, he says, to vent and, he hopes, throw away the anger of his bereavement. Although the anthropologist's job is to make other cultures intelligible, more questions fail to reveal any further explanation of this man's pithy statement. To him, grief, rage, and headhunting go together in a self-evident manner. Either you understand

it or you don't. And, in fact, for the longest time I simply did not.

In what follows, I want to talk about how to talk about the cultural force of emotions. <sup>1</sup> The *emotional force* of a death, for example, derives less from an abstract brute fact than from a particular intimate relation's permanent rupture. It refers to the kinds of feelings one experiences on learning, for example, that the child just run over by a car is one's own and not a stranger's. Rather than speaking of death in general, one must consider the subject's position within a field of social relations in order to grasp one's emotional experience.<sup>2</sup>

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

### The Rage in Ilongot Grief

Let me pause a moment to introduce the Ilongots, among whom my wife, Michelle Rosaldo, and I lived and conducted field research for thirty months (1967-69, 1974). They number about 3,500 and reside in an upland area some 90 miles northeast of Manila, Philippines.<sup>3</sup> They subsist by hunting deer and wild pig and by cultivating rain-fed gardens (swiddens) with rice, sweet potatoes, manioc, and vegetables. Their (bilateral) kin relations are reckoned through men and women. After marriage, parents and their married daughters live in the same or adjacent households. The largest unit within the society, a largely territorial descent

group called the *bertan*, becomes manifest primarily in the context of feuding. For themselves, their neighbors, and their ethnographers, head-hunting stands out as the Ilongots' most salient cultural practice.

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

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

In my efforts to find a "deeper" explanation for headhunting, I explored exchange theory, perhaps because it had informed so many classic ethnographies. One day in 1974, I explained the anthropologist's exchange model to an older Ilongot man named Insan. What did he think, I asked, of the idea that headhunting resulted from the way that one death (the beheaded victim's) canceled another (the next of kin). He looked puzzled, so I went on to say that the victim of a beheading was exchanged for the death of one's own kin, thereby balancing the books, so to speak. Insan reflected a moment and replied that he imagined somebody could



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