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**On the Republic at Forty, Culture at
One-Forty**



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Prompted, if not perturbed by the constitution of the Republic, a pivotal moment in postcolonial Sri Lanka – but then, could one speak of Sri Lanka before the Republic – that, among other things, effectively instituted Buddhism as the state religion and, in so doing, reinforced Sinhala nationalist dominance, not to mention recharged Tamil nationalism, Martin Wickramasinghe, the infectious, inspiring iconoclast, in an essay titled *‘Impetus for the Growth of a Multiracial Culture,’* delicately opposed such dominance:

“The exploitation of language, race and religion by politicians is partly due to their inability to identify themselves with the common people or the greater nation. There is a cultural unity among the common people in spite of differences of religion, language, and race. They are not interested in a state religion, communal and religious rights because they instinctively feel that there is an underlying unity in religion and race. Agitation for a state religion and communal rights emanates from a minority of educated people who have lost the ethos of their common culture. Unity in diversity is possible with a people who consciously and unconsciously feel the unity of their common multiracial culture...”¹

One could, of course, quarrel with elements of this formulation. For instance, even as he invokes “the common people,” Wickramasinghe infantilises them: they feel, do not think; are creatures of affect, instinct, not intellect. Consequently, “they” can be manipulated by the political elite, the only group, albeit a minority, with agency in this staging of the Sri Lankan social. By referring to his object in the second person, Wickramasinghe distinguishes, disidentifies himself from it (which doesn’t preclude him from directing the same accusation at the political elite). He could have said we (the people); he doesn’t. But this essay invokes Wickramasinghe’s not to be churlish; rather, to work in its spirit, its opposition to domination, even as it violates the letter, its

¹ M. Wickramasinghe (1997) *Sinhala Language and Culture, Buddhism and Art* (Dehiwela: Tisara Press): p.36. Neither the new edition, nor the collection in which it first appears, *Sinhala Language and Culture* (1975) specifies the date of original publication of the essay. The text, which refers to both “Ceylon” and “the new Republican Constitution,” suggests it was written around May 22nd, 1972.

cathexis of culture (and race), concepts that will be put to question here from poststructuralism and postcoloniality. (These and other concepts get elaborated as we go along, sometimes in footnotes or parentheses. Poststructuralist prose likes to interrupt itself, not move seamlessly from the beginning, through middle, to the end of an argument; it does not hold the text to be discrete, have a beginning or end, but networked.² Rigorous writing, therefore, must stage interruption, not merely assert it. Such writing may irritate a certain reader – as may the bigbig words.³ Although, of course, anyone who’s ever used a footnote or parenthesis has interrupted herself. Indeed, anyone who’s enjoyed a Michael Ondaatje novel, or another with “flashbacks” (analepses) and frequent digressions, pauses to the plot, could not have a serious complaint about interruption. This essay demands a patient reader; someone prepared to pause frequently, be challenged, consult the dictionary, other books, articles, the web; to learn by working, thinking herself, struggling even, rather than by being

² For the now canonical conceptualisation of textuality, one turns to Roland Barthes, particularly the essays ‘*From Work to Text*,’ and ‘*Death of the Author*,’ both available online. Though written against canonisation, it couldn’t avoid this fate. An exercise of epistemic force, rather than a determination of quality (“great works”), canonisation – anointing, taxonomising some texts as more authoritative, significant than others – could be understood as one of the procedures by which disciplinary reason orders, regulates knowledge, a process that is not outside politics. To cite some instances from my discipline, English literature: until feminism emerged as a counter-force, Mary Shelley’s now canonised *Frankenstein* remained largely unread; without the “long” civil rights movement, including the founding of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in 1909, and the ethnic studies that accompanied it, Olaudah Equiano’s *Narrative* would probably have suffered the same fate in the United States. R. Barthes (1986) *The Rustle of Language* (Trans. R. Howard) (Los Angeles: University of California Press); O. Equiano (2001) *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself* (New York: W.W. Norton).

³ Do these words have to be used? Sometimes, what goes by the signifier theory serves as a convenient shorthand: it’s like saying “simultaneously” instead of “at the same time.” More often, though, as with interpellation or differance, an alternative word or phrase to a rigorously theorised concept cannot be found. “Interpellation” is deployed in this essay not merely in place of “the production of subjectivity,” but that process as conceptualised by Louis Althusser. There being, of course, many theorisations of subject constitution. L. Althusser, ‘*Contradiction and Overdetermination*’ in (1997) *For Marx* (New York: Verso); L. Althusser, ‘*Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses*’ in (1971) *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays* (Trans. B. Brewster) (New York: Monthly Review Press).

informed or, worse, instructed. But to save her some labour right away: cathexis, a psychoanalytic term, could be explained as an investment of libidinal energy.) For, undoubtedly compelling, troubling the canonical Sri Lankan novelist and essayist is a certain anxiety: that by constituting the Republic thus, institutionalising Buddhism as the state religion, though Wickramasinghe doesn't nominate it, Sinhala nationalism, which he doesn't name, either – delicate critique – desires dominance at the cost of unity; it cannot abide by diversity.⁴

Like race and culture, unity and its affine, diversity, are not concepts this essay could cathect. But let us stay with Wickramasinghe a while, he has much to teach us. If he must distance himself from the common people – the postcolonialist would prefer subaltern classes – Wickramasinghe, nevertheless, speaks for them, identifies their interest, desire (the two are not the same, as Gayatri Spivak reminds us). As in all such instances, one finds ventriloquism at play: Wickramasinghe, not the people, opposes the institutionalisation of Buddhism as the state religion – a desire he calls “communal,” and understands not as common but of an exclusive, tiny, if dominant group. Let us pause at this word (signifier), which in the Sri Lankan debate – dare one say text – has, to deploy a perhaps inappropriate metaphor, disappeared. Why do we no longer use the term, a question that could also be put to race? (Race, religion and language constitute social difference in Wickramasinghe's Ceylon. The editors of the door-opening *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* categorise it as ethnic/national.⁵) Or, since the poststructuralist does not hold causation to be determinable, how does one account for it?⁶ The

⁴ If he had to specify his target, Wickramasinghe would probably have said “Sinhala nationalists” rather than nationalism. At stake in the difference: not (the actions of) a group of people, or agency, but the work of ideology.

⁵ Though only published in 1985, the unnamed editors of the volume point out that the papers in the collection were originally presented at a seminar in 1979. Its very first essay, by Senaka Bandaranayake, finds it an “error...to use the term ‘race’...when what is meant is ‘an ethnic group’” (S. Bandaranayake, ‘*The Peopling of Sri Lanka: The National Question and Some Problems of History and Ethnicity*’ in Social Scientists Association (1985) *Ethnicity and Social Change in Sri Lanka* (Colombo: SSA): p.4). The editors endorse this claim, grounded on the empirical, veridic.

⁶ At stake here isn't the position that events have multiple, thus indeterminable causes or agents. To cite an instance from these United States, the U.S. invasion

short, polemical – that is to say, interested – answer, *Subaltern Studies*. Gyan Pandey’s *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* convincingly demonstrated the eurocentric charge of the term: “traditional,” backward native identity politics was taxonomised as communal by eurocentrism, which – in a symptomatic instance of epistemic violence – reserved, restricted “national” to nominate, categorise modern, “progressive” European identity politics. Schematically, and crudely, put: one thing, two words; good in Europe (nationalism), bad in India (communalism).⁷ After the postcolonialist critique of eurocentrism, which cannot be reduced to just one book, or to epistemology, and is still ongoing, unfinished, this particular word disappeared, more or less, from our vocabulary. (More or less; in so far as we still read Wickramasinghe, Pandey, et. al. the term has an afterlife.)

The disappearance suggests something not unfamiliar to the Sri Lankan text, though it hasn’t attended to the ramifications. To pose the question that most readily comes to mind, if from what now seems like a prior era: are the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam terrorists, militants or freedom fighters? One reposes this not out of a determination or compulsion to fix error, get at the

of Iraq – but the right would contest invasion, suggest liberation – has been explained as eventuated by: sincere belief in the dangerousness of Saddam Hussein; commitment to democracy; imperialism; greed for oil; George Bush the son’s unconscious desire to go farther than his father; conspiracy hatched by Israel, the Coca-Cola company, monarch butterfly and Board of Control for Cricket in India; and so on. Even if one holds that the truth lies in a combination of some of these factors, one still works with causation and truth. Rather, it is possible to read causation as an ultimately theological concept: to the Christian frame (“Age of Religion”), god is the only effective agent, or cause (of everything that happens on earth); despite breaking with this frame, modern secularism (“Age of Reason”) cannot help iterating it in substituting man for god. Crudely put, to believe in human agency is to hold, consciously or otherwise, that one is like (the Christian) god who, as the story goes, created man in his image.

⁷ Taxonomy stages itself as the disinterested classification of objects, replication of the real; but it cannot avoid hierarchisation. The 2001 Sri Lankan census, for instance, presents “ethnic groups” in the following order: Sinhalese, Sri Lankan Tamil, Indian Tamil, and so on. It is not self-evidently true, however, that the “majority” should come first. Indeed, if we stopped using the phrase “Sinhalese, Tamils and Muslims,” in that order, we would be striking a blow, however feeble, against the naturalisation of domination.

truth which must lie out there, somewhere, if only one works hard enough at it; not to find the final, coffin-nailing piece of evidence that would produce the perfect, irrefutable definition. (Definition is another epistemological imperative poststructuralism avoids: like coffin-nailing, it seeks to fix, limit, bind, close, box, circumvallate.⁸) Rather, to remind the reader, even one convinced that the LTTE are undoubtedly terrorists, and despicably so, that such conviction has been contested, opposed, the organisation nominated differently, as representing liberation. (For the record, and at the risk of sounding hyperbolic: I hold the LTTE a dogmatically nationalist, self-glorifying, monopolistic, militarist, capitalist, antidemocratic, patriarchal, mass murdering entity; and the same of the Rajapaksa government. Though a few other adjectives suggest themselves with regard to the latter: insatiably corrupt, anti-poor/subaltern, pathologically insecure.⁹) At stake

⁸ A term from archaeology, circumvallate means “to surround with a rampart,” thus enclose. I learnt the word in the same essay by Jagath Weerasinghe in which he criticises the use of “jargon.” One person’s jargon is another’s vernacular. J. Weerasinghe, ‘*Contemporary Art in Sri Lanka*’ in C. Turner (Ed.) (2005) *Art and Social Change: Contemporary Art in Asia and the Pacific* (Canberra: Pandanus Books): pp.180-193.

⁹ To anticipate the question of a certain reader: what about the United States? Just two points in response (though a whole book could be written). One: arguably, over the past decade, the United States – not only in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, Pakistan and Guantanamo, but within the country, too – has violated the human rights of, not to mention murdered, more people than any other state on the face of this earth. Nevertheless, no doubt inspired by Gotabhaya Rajapaksa, John Brennan, the National Security Advisor to the constitutional lawyer turned U.S. president, said in 2011: “there hasn’t been a single collateral death because of the exceptional proficiency, precision of the capabilities we’ve been able to develop.” In a partly mischievous spirit, I cite Frederick Douglass in response, from an 1852 speech: “There is not a nation on earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than...these United States...[F]or revolting barbarity and shameless hypocrisy, America reigns without a rival.” F. Douglass (1852) ‘*What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?*’ <http://teachingamericanhistory.org/library/index.asp?document=162>. [Accessed 1st June 2012]. Two: it has also, arguably, perfected systemic, systematic, legalised political corruption. In most such acts, the bribe, or part of it, is given before the favour. (Thus, in Colombo, when one is stopped for a traffic violation, one hides a big note under the driver’s license and passes it to the cop. He returns the license. Lawyers, however, need only show their Bar Association membership card to drive away unscathed.) In the United States, favour first, bribe later. Many senators and representatives, not to mention high-ranking military and law enforcement officers, spend a career furthering the interests of

here isn't only politics, the difference between Tamil and Sinhala nationalism, or colonialism and anticolonialism in the instance of communal, but epistemology, the theory of language underwriting, grounding our arguments. Leaving aside the contentious question of the LTTE, if it is the case that words appear and disappear, then that must be accounted for. Empiricism would hold that, consequent to the critique of communalism as eurocentric, a more accurate term, nationalism, replaced it. The thing never changed. Rather, we now understand it better, correctly. Its theory of language: words transparently bear reality, are an instrument of thought. But then, despite their desire to erase error, even our most brilliant empiricists – the contributors to *Ethnicity and Social Change* – have never been certain what we are, how to categorise Sri Lankan social groups. Are the Tamils and Sinhalese a race, nation, ethnicity, community or something else entirely?¹⁰ What about the Muslims – once nominated, interpellated when the Sri Lankan text found race defined our difference, as Moor, another word that's disappeared?¹¹ (An older reader would remember a moment when there were Moors in Sri Lanka; they've become Muslim now.) Does the individual Sri Lankan, qua Sri Lankan, amount to anything more than a citizen – of a state that, let us not forget, virtually at the very moment of decolonisation denaturalised a significant portion of its (subaltern) population? One that, to this moment, a name hasn't settled upon: if Indian Tamil seems an inapt term to describe a group of Sri Lankans, Hill- or Up-country Tamil hasn't quite established itself, either.

business – then are rewarded with lucrative positions by the same businesses upon retirement.

¹⁰ In that volume, K. Sivathamby deploys “nationality” and “community” to describe the Tamils, Bandaranayake prefers “ethnic group,” K. Kailasapathy, “community” and “ethnic group.” The point is not that two of these three must be wrong, but that the contributors to this volume, all leftists, do not address, theorise their own disagreement – which suggests that social groups do not have incontrovertible, empirically verifiable nominations. If they did, there could be no disagreement. In such textual moments, empiricism deconstitutes itself.

¹¹ Surprisingly, if not astoundingly, since one hardly hears the word, it remains a category of the (2001) Sri Lankan census, not now as a “race,” but an “ethnic group.”

<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/PopHouSat/PDF/p5%20Population%20and%20Housing%20Schedule.pdf>. [Accessed 1st June 2012].

Perturbed by these questions, prompted by poststructuralism, postcoloniality and a politics opposed to domination – and no doubt by other, unconscious motivations – this essay offers a contrary position: that language, an extimate (inside and outside) accomplice of the episteme, constitutes objects. (Episteme could be understood, crudely, as the organisation of knowledge by power. Or, better, as the structure that orders, regulates the production of “knowledge” or, more precisely, the work of disciplinary reason. To this position, what we call knowledge is best understood not as truthful, verifiable claims produced by the subject, an agent, but statements, positions, arguments organised, authorised, even imposed by larger institutional forces. Language is not the episteme’s exclusive accomplice; ideology would be another. The disciplines, among the components, or elements of the episteme; an ordering themselves, they abet the compartmentalisation, segregation of knowledge.) The “same” thing appears differently, thus ceasing to be the same thing, when different words get used to capture, fix, bind it. To pose (yet) another example, take the many terms advanced by patriarchy to describe an adult female, some of which, that being the very effectivity of patriarchy – a structure of oppression, even exploitation – don’t have masculine equivalents: girl, woman, lady, dame, chick, bitch, slut, cunt. Calling an adult female, itself a patriarchal term, a girl slights, reduces her to immaturity, insignificance, by rendering object something that could be considered subject. (A certain, broadly deconstructive, feminism suggests that female, woman, are patriarchal terms. Judith Butler: “Feminist critique ought...to understand how the category of “women,” the subject of feminism, is produced and restrained by the very structures of power through which emancipation is sought.”¹²) If we prefer woman, a word the Sri Lankan text isn’t entirely comfortable with since the classed term, lady, still has currency – every woman isn’t a lady – it signifies we hear the call of feminism, refuse to conflate an adult female with a child, minor, lesser. Cunt, a more cutting insult, reduces woman to anatomy. Bitch and chick, to animality. As for slut, a word that seeks to regulate, interdict feminine sexuality: surely only the most politically incorrect would insist that such an object actually exists.

¹² J. Butler (1990) *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge): p.2.

Words don't disinterestedly describe; they violate. Feminism – not only a politics opposed to domination, oppression, but a reading, critique of patriarchy, the one necessarily accomplices the other – knows this; though every feminist may not.¹³ If one is persuaded, or just given pause, by these examples, then one should consider the possibility that language does not transparently convey empirical reality; that it might even constitute, produce what we understand as it.¹⁴ That it abets epistemic violence: enabling the nomination, if not interpellation, of a woman as a bitch, a Sri Lankan as an Indian (Tamil), Moor as Muslim. Empiricism responds to this by saying exceptions prove the rule; poststructuralism, that exceptions should make us question the rule, the system (episteme) that produces rules, regulates knowledge.

Following these examples, arguments, positions, let's turn to the term cortical to Wickramasinghe, culture, a concept, as will be argued here, concatenated – different, yet tightly bound – to race. Wickramasinghe holds the imperative of his moment the establishment of “the unity of the common multiracial [Sri Lankan] culture,” an object he insists could be identified despite the many races, languages and religions in the country. An object

¹³ This essay doesn't deploy terms like feminism, or poststructuralism, in the singular to suggest that there's just one, exclusive, correct conceptualisation of such terms. Rather, to emphasise that the agency of the writer is not at stake in, for want of a better phrase, the production of thought. To say “poststructuralism holds” is to suggest that poststructuralism is an epistemological position beyond the control of any individual, including a Derrida or Spivak, who can only think, write, in relation to what has come, been ordered, before. It should go without saying – though I've just said it – that any concept could be theorised multiply, just as much as any text could have an infinite number of readings. Some of them maybe more persuasive, or cathectable, than others, for both political and epistemological reasons, but none – including this one – would be authoritatively, irrefutably correct. Analogously, to say “feminism knows” is not to suggest uniformity, either; there are, for instance, feminisms that cathect agency and those that don't. Both these positions, and those in between, could be conceptualised as bearing a reading of, sharing an opposition to patriarchy.

¹⁴ The reader interested in pursuing these questions further might begin by reading Friedrich Nietzsche's delightful, provocative essay, ‘*On Truth and Lies in an Extra-Moral Sense*,’ available online. It doesn't, by the way, use too many bigbig words. I would not be upset if you put this essay aside and got to the Nietzsche. F. Nietzsche, ‘*On Truth and Lies in a Non-Moral Sense*’ in (1990) *In The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings* (Trans. R. Speirs) (New York: CUP).

that bears a great burden in his argument, for it alone unites Sri Lankans. Though he doesn't specify its elements here, another essay in the collection, '*Culture and Tradition*,' provides both a list and a definition of culture:

“...the sum total of beliefs, customs, habits and artistic norms which an individual acquires from his society...a changing social inheritance, which extends far back in time ...These beliefs, customs and habits, which are called cultural traits and complexes, are created by the use of cultural implements by that community. Therefore culture consists of two things: cultural implements, and traits...[C]ulture is the total material, mental, and spiritual life of a community and all the implements they use in creating their ways of life.”¹⁵

This definition echoes that of Edward Burnett Tylor, whom Wickramasinghe cites across these essays as an authority, and of Matthew Arnold, whom he does not.¹⁶ How does one account for such citation? One could, from a modern frame, understand Wickramasinghe, the individual author, agent, as “influenced” by other individual author(itie)s. (Frame: a structure that shapes,

¹⁵ Wickramasinghe (1997): p.14.

¹⁶ I could make reading somewhat easier – and this essay even longer – by including brief biographical notes on some of these figures, like Arnold and Tylor, whom most readers would probably be unfamiliar with. But then, where would I begin? Could I even assume familiarity with Wickremasinghe? Or, for that matter, *Ethnicity and Social Change* – the contributions of Bandaranayake and R. A. L. H. Gunawardena, at the very least, being essential reading for anybody who would consider herself literate on the Sri Lankan debate. Rather, let me urge the reader, where relevant, to consult Wikipedia. (Even if internet access is relatively easier, and cheaper in relation to income, in the U.S., it is probably not unfair to assume that readers of this particular volume enjoy such access.) To so urge is not to hold that Wikipedia should have the last word; quite the contrary, it should be the beginning of further inquiry. And, of course, its entries on contemporary figures are even more contestable than on other objects. For instance, that on Rajiva Wijesinha, almost certainly written by himself, finds him “distinguished by his political analysis, as well as creative and critical work.” [Accessed June 27th, 2012]. I would counter that Wijesinha's career, as a politico-intellectual, has been distinguished by three things: insatiable ambition, failure (he hasn't written or done anything memorable) and a sociopathic tendency to personal insult. Like his cousin Ranil Wickremasinghe, he should have retired long ago.

orders, regulates, fabricates; that demarcates, dissociates inside from outside and, simultaneously, associates them. The reader might want to pause here, consider what a picture frame does.) He read their work and was persuaded, influenced. But then, the questions arise: why does he almost exclusively cite canonical western writers as authorities (Clyde Kluckhohn, Bronislaw Malinowski, Franz Boas, Claude Levi-Strauss, amongst others)? Surely non-westerners have also addressed the question of culture? Are all writers equal? To the post-structuralist/colonialist, who reads Wickramasinghe as part of a network of texts, accounting for this does not turn on Wickramasinghe's agency as an individual reader/writer; whether, to put it crudely, he has an effectively white brain inside brown skin and so chose to read only westerners. Rather, around the relation between force and disciplinary reason: Wickramasinghe had no choice but to read, cite those writers canonised by the discipline (in this case, anthropology); they impose themselves upon him (and this essay).¹⁷ Put differently, the Sri Lankan text is not outside eurocentrism, but overdetermined by the latter.¹⁸ (Our very names signify this: not just in Don Stephen, Dudley Shelton, John Lionel, Solomon West Ridgeway Dias, Junius Richard and Mahendra Percy; before British colonialism our names wouldn't have had the structure, "Christian"/(patriarchal) "family," in that

¹⁷ The deconstructive term that addresses this relation is complicity: one cannot be outside the object of one's critique, however much one is opposed to it. To this position, the master's tools are the only weapons available to dismantle the master's house; in other hands, they cease being the master's tool, even as they bear her imprint. As difficult as it might be to admit, the postcolonialist is within eurocentrism even as she critiques it. Butler argues analogously about the relation between feminism and patriarchy.

¹⁸ A psychoanalytic term (that Althusser reframes), overdetermination is deployed here to suggest that an object, any object (whether it be a text, subjectivity, discipline, social group or force) does not constitute an integral unity, but is always already shaped by other objects. (Hybridity and intersectionality are other ways of conceptualising this; this essay finds them unpersuasive in part since they don't attend to power.) Sometimes, as in the relation between the Sri Lankan text and eurocentrism, one object is more authoritative, forceful, than the other. This is not necessarily always the case. Neloufer de Mel, though she doesn't use the concept, acknowledges as much: "feminism...is not an autonomous practice but deeply bound to the signifying network of the national contexts which produce it." N. de Mel (2002) *Women and the Nation's Narrative: Gender and Nationalism in Twentieth Century Sri Lanka* (Colombo: SSA): p.2.

order. If I was born, say, in 1848, I would probably have been called Mohamed Shakir Mohamed Qadri, Shakir being my father's "Christian" name.) Wickramasinghe finds culture a discrete totality, a whole, an inside that could be distinguished from an outside; it marks, binds a community, differentiates one "way of life" from another. Called a "changing social inheritance," a way of life is not the consequence of individual agency or creation but an acquisition, possession bequeathed by the past. An apt term, inheritance: not something within the control of its object, who must receive it (gratefully or otherwise). Culture emerges here as a script that binds; it may get rewritten but cannot be easily revoked, returned to sender. In a word, culture interpellates. (As we'll see, Wickramasinghe makes an analogous argument. His essay understands the subject as agent, as in the politicians who exploit the subaltern classes, but also bears a very different conceptualisation of subjectivity.)

The paragraph immediately following the one cited above specifies some of the elements of what, after the Republic, one cannot but call Sri Lankan culture:

"The palanquin, bullock cart, bullock caravan, pots and pans, ola books, temples, paintings and devil dances are the cultural implements of old Ceylon. The motor car, modern furniture, the fountain pen and pencil, plates, cups and saucers, spoons and forks, lipstick and perfumes, and printed books are some of the cultural implements of modern Ceylon. Men and women of the same or of different communities use these implements in different ways and so create different behaviour patterns or cultural traits."¹⁹

The postcolonialist is constrained to respond to "devil dance": these dances, rituals, exorcisms or treatments – I've no idea how to properly translate *tovil*, take your pick – do not – as Wickramasinghe, hailing from the south, must have known –

¹⁹ Wickramasinghe, 1997: 15.

invoke the devil, a category of Christian theology.²⁰ (Words do things to, impose themselves upon us; such is the force of the eurocentric episteme. However, eurocentrism and patriarchy aren't the only forces that shape language: take, for instance, something apparently "apolitical" like the "off break" in cricket – it could be so-called only from a right-hander's perspective, or frame. Words don't disinterestedly capture reality. Even in this seemingly harmless case, they violate.) Again as he couldn't but have been aware, the performers, if that's the best term, at these happenings hail from an oppressed caste.²¹ If the more usual word, "low," had been used in that sentence instead of oppressed, would it not signify beings of a lesser order, as opposed to a dominated group? And to return to Wickramasinghe: writing before the Republic, he refers to "Ceylon." Surely Sinhala nationalism produced a different object in renaming the country? Removing Ceylon for Sri Lanka was anticolonial, of course, but also Sinhala nationalist, an overdetermined move. In any case, this passage, too, demonstrates Wickramasinghe's distance from Sinhala nationalism: the objects he identifies as modern Ceylonese cultural implements emerged outside the country, extend back to another time and space; though classed, like the automobile and fork, or gendered, like lipstick, they pertain to the whole country, not the dominant race or community. The catalogue seeks to unite, not divide. (Though it divides, despite its author: mosque doesn't make the list; most Sri Lankans travel by bus, not car, even today; the car – or, at least, its driver – could be read as gendered and lipstick, classed. Overdetermination, again – see how productive such concepts could be!) These implements are also used, he tells us, by men *and women*; a statement that may not signify feminism but, in at least this instance, refuses to stage the Sri Lankan social in patriarchal terms. If Wickramasinghe inspires this essay, the reader may have begun to realise why.

Central to Wickramasinghe's argument is the claim, which sounds matter of fact, that culture "extends far back in time." We may have naturalised this belief, but that's precisely the point: it

²⁰ On this, see David Scott: D. Scott (1994) *Formations of Ritual: Colonial and Anthropological Discourses on the Sinhala Yaktovil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press).

²¹ My thanks to Pala Pothupitiya for teaching me the relation between tovil and caste.

appears natural, self-evident, incontestably true. (Ideology, says Althusser, “imposes obviousness.”) Ola leaf books, after all, have been around for centuries. Nevertheless, the claim could be contested, put to question. For culture, as a signifier of subjectivity – Wickramasinghe’s sum total of socially produced individual attributes – appeared, or emerged, in the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme only at some point in the late nineteenth century. (The post- structuralist/colonialist turns to the calendar – the eurocentric Gregorian calendar – with great reluctance, under erasure. Dates do not carry explanatory, or taxonomic, force.) While Raymond Williams finds isolated deployments of the term much earlier, this essay, partly prompted by his writing, locates its authoritative, lasting emergence in two texts that work together: Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), a canonical one of the discipline of English literature, and Tylor’s *Primitive Culture* (1871), a canonical one of English anthropology. We take it for granted – Wickramasinghe certainly does – that we “have” a culture, like we do a gender; and that we always did so. (But we once took it for granted that we had a race. We don’t any more, at least in Sri Lanka. Shouldn’t that give us pause, cause perturbation?) We may concede that what those things are, mean, how the terms are to be defined, maybe open to contest; but that the object actually exists, and has existed for eons, is not. However, given the concept’s relatively recent provenance, its appearance demands an accounting. It should make us hesitate: if Wickramasinghe was writing in 1850, or 1580 for that matter, he could not have classified the ola book as a cultural implement. (One wonders if those who wrote and read them understood them as books or something else.) Culture, then, cannot be taken as a given, but emerges as a (politico-epistemological) problem: does it signify a real, vital, veridic element of our subjectivity, as empiricism would claim, that which makes human groups gloriously different, something to be proud of, cathected, celebrated, even if discovered just recently – or should it be understood otherwise, as an imposition of ideology and disciplinary reason, of eurocentrism? Even if the latter, should it continue to ground community, as it does nation? One could, of course, argue that it should; nationalism does. But post- structuralism/coloniality, a politics opposed to domination, would want to ask, while articulating a critique of the concept: are there other ways of

conceptualising difference, community, ways that do not interdict, separate, dissociate us and them?

Faced with such a problem, the poststructuralist literary critic – not necessarily a reader of fiction, or literature in the narrow sense, but texts – will turn to, be guided by the texts themselves. (Be guided: the poststructuralist reader takes direction from the text, which makes her its object, not subject, constrains her agency.) She will read them closely, carefully, attending not only to their plot, overall arguments, positions, but narrative, deployment of examples, language, metaphors, concepts. To what the text emphasises and what it peripheralises. She will have to attend, also, to absences or silences (like Wickramasinghe’s reluctance to name Sinhala nationalism or not mentioning the bus and mosque); the text speaks volumes when keeping quiet. To demonstrate how the arguments and concepts – though you cannot make an argument without concepts, and concepts, unlike words, always bear arguments – move both in the text in question and are connected, networked, articulated with other texts, disciplines, ideology. How the texts of any particular discipline, rather than being autonomous, are inescapably shaped, contoured by, intimately related to others; not discrete, but inside and outside one another. Alas, space constraints preclude reading here in the strict, detailed, elaborate sense. What follows is not much more than plot summaries, short cuts where long takes are due (though some readers may find this essay itself interminable, apart from unreadable).²² With that on record, this text turns to the others that Wickramasinghe and the problem of culture, culture as problem, direct it. To read Wickramasinghe as a text requires addressing those authoritative texts that overdetermine, the disciplines that contour his. If in one sense, the literal, this essay opens with Wickramasinghe, in another it begins with Arnold and Tylor, the “first” theorists of culture in the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme; in yet another, Aristotle, the earliest writer cited. Or, perhaps, this essay doesn’t begin with writers but questions: regarding the work of the disciplines (of anthropology and literature), of the relation between language, episteme and interpellation, culture and colonialism, subjectivity and difference,

²² This essay is extracted from a longer manuscript in progress, on the itinerary of culture (and accomplished concepts) in the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme.

community. On the other hand, these questions have been prompted by politics, postcoloniality and poststructuralism; so, maybe, this essay begins there. Which came first, the peacock or the egg? (Or should that be peahen?) Writing has no origin, no end. And, as the sharper reader would realise, something without a beginning and end cannot have a middle, either.

Inspired and infected by Wickremasinghe, perturbed by the Republic at forty, overdetermined as it is by nationalism, a narcissism that only cares for the self, an organisation, ordering of community that emphasises distinctness, separation, a politics that seeks domination while proclaiming liberation, this essay now turns to an interested reading of a concept that grounds, is indispensable to nationalism, culture: to Arnold and Tylor, theorists of culture in the universal; then Althusser and an explanation of interpellation; a reading of the emergence of culture (and race) in the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme as a multidisciplinary response to a colonial, eurocentric solicitation; its subsequent mutation from the universalist sense to ours, the relativist; a theorisation of postcoloniality; and, finally, a return to Wickremasinghe and some concluding remarks. Inescapably, this text bears the mark of the United States, where I teach. It will keep interrupting this address to the Sri Lankan/ist reader. But then, if the text is networked, place not discrete, it could not be otherwise.

Matthew Arnold concludes the 'Introduction' to *Culture and Anarchy* with a set of disconcerting statements: "I am...a believer in culture. Therefore I propose...to...inquire... what culture really is, what good it can do, what is our own special need of it."²³ Like Wickramasinghe, Arnold desires to specify what culture "really is." In his case, he offers two contradictory yet imbricated definitions. One: a "way of life," a phrase that can be traced back to the late eighteenth century, to Johann Herder, signifying a

²³ M. Arnold (1993) *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: CUP): p.57.

discrete totality distinct from other such.²⁴ This resonates with Wickramasinghe, our (“relativist”) sense of the term; Arnold also calls it a “having.” Two: a “becoming,” consistently described as the “pursuit of perfection,” which doesn’t resonate with us.²⁵ In the passage cited above, Arnold holds culture a benefit: it can do good. We, of course, do not understand culture thus, as axiological, pertaining to value; as a bounded whole, it just is – neither good nor bad. (Put differently, the concept of culture mutated from Arnold’s moment to ours.) More startlingly, Arnold finds that the English need culture and do so especially, as a matter of urgency. Since you cannot need something you already have, this signifies the novelty of the object, the claim of its recent emergence. The English at Arnold’s moment lack culture, are not from this frame a whole. He writes his book to persuade them to get it, remedy the lack, become a unity. Crudely put, no one in England, or the English-speaking world for that matter, could have thought they had a culture before *Culture and Anarchy*. Think about this. It should blow your mind. As a signifier of subjectivity (“way of life”), the concept cannot be persuasively read as extending far back in time. (Empiricism would respond that, even if the word appeared recently, it identifies a real object that has, in fact, existed for centuries. Hopefully, by this stage of the essay, the reader is prepared to, if not question empiricism, pause before its claims.)

²⁴ Herder: “...the Arab and the Chinese, the Turk and the Persian, the Christian and the Jew, the Negro and the Malay, the Japanese and the Gentoo, are clearly distinguishable...everyone bears the characters of his country and way of life...” J.G. Herder (1968) [1784-91] *Reflections on the Philosophy of the History of Mankind* (Trans. T. O. Churchill) (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): p.10. Like text, this essay does not conceive episteme as discrete; the Anglo-U.S. episteme is networked with, gets shaped by the German.

²⁵ A passage describing middle class English culture brings the two senses together: “Consider these people...their way of life...habits...manners, the very tones of their voice...observe the literature they read, the things which give them pleasure, the[ir] words...thoughts...[W]ould any amount of wealth be worth having with the condition that one was to become just like these people by having it?” M. Arnold (1993) *Culture and Anarchy and Other Writings* (Cambridge: CUP): p.65. The middle class have a specific, unsatisfactory way of life – for instance, they read lowbrow books – which needs to be altered, perfected.

Arnold finds the English social fractured by class (not race, language and religion, as does Wickramasinghe Sri Lanka). He identifies, banally, three antagonistic English classes: aristocracy, middle and working, which have different, distinct ways of life. If divided from this frame, the socio-economic, they are unified from another, the racial: "Science has now made visible to everybody the great and pregnant elements of difference which lie in race."²⁶ Let us pause at this, if you'll pardon the gendered expression, iteration, most pregnant formulation; it says a lot in a very few words: the significance of racial difference has not been apparent to the naked English eye, as it were, all this time; it has only "now" – at Arnold's moment – been "made" – produced, ordered – "visible," comprehensible; and that too by "science," the disciplines that, unlike the humanities, provide demonstrable, verifiable truth, are grounded by the veridic. (Arnold could have said something like: we now know the significance of race; he doesn't. He authorises his claim through science.) The formulation suggests, even if Arnold never intended to (but then, reading doesn't constrain itself by deferring to the author's intention and, in any case, poststructuralism holds her intention may not be transparent even to the author) that the humanities cannot work without the (social) sciences; disciplines are always already dependent upon, shaped by each other, inside (and outside) one another. By making race comprehensible, science enables us to get what we see; science, not the object, frames, regulates, directs sight. Observation cannot and does not produce knowledge without being abetted, contoured by disciplinary reason. Which, as we'll find in Tylor, authorised the emergence of race, together with culture, into the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme only around Arnold's moment (now, not then).²⁷ Like culture, race is of recent provenance.

Elsewhere in the text, Arnold contrasts two organised British subaltern groups from different races, the English working class, demanding liberty, equality with the other classes, and the Irish Fenian, demanding an end to colonial oppression:

²⁶ Arnold (1993): p.135.

²⁷ Raymond Williams: while race "came into English in" the sixteenth century, our sense of it, "denot[ing] a group *within* a species," dates to the nineteenth. R. Williams (1983a) *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: OUP): p.249.

“...it was never any part of our creed that the great right and blessedness of an Irishman, or, indeed, of anybody on earth except an Englishman, is to do as he likes; and we can have no scruple at all about abridging...a non-Englishman’s assertion of personal liberty. The British Constitution...[is] for Englishmen...[T]he difference between an Irish Fenian and an English rough is so immense...[T]he Fenian...is...a man of a conquered race.”²⁸

Even though this passage criticises the English political treatment of the Irish, pointing out the irony in the British constitution (but has there ever been one?) not applying to all Britons, Arnold produces the two groups as racially distinct, asymmetrically. Associating Irish militants with their race, one staged as immensely inferior, radically other to the English, Arnold holds it without potential, capacity for development. In contrast, he finds the English working class “our own flesh and blood...Protestant...framed by nature to do as we do, hate what we hate, love what we love.”²⁹ This compares English and Irish militants politically, distinguishes them racially; articulates race/culture with politics, despite the claim that race is a purely scientific concept. Like the Irish, the English working class lacks culture; unlike them, its race – “flesh and blood” – signifies its potential, enables interpellation, the production of homogeneity, (cultural and national) subjectivity from (classed) difference, the conversion of the latter into the former. The Irish, being an inferior, colonised race, of different flesh if not blood, can never acquire culture; are, as Jacques Derrida might suggest, the differance of the English. Nature itself has formed, produced, contoured through race the working class with a predisposition towards “English” – not British – habits, to “hate what we hate, love what we love,” have similar prejudices and propensities. Culture must work to complete the process, transform, if not perfect, this undeveloped group. Interpellation others, works differentially: converts the English subaltern, cold-shoulders the colonised Irish. All races are not equal; only some could attain

²⁸Arnold (1993): p.87.

²⁹ Ibid.

culture. Working together, culture and race distinguish a superior self (us) from an inferior other (them).

In the passage above, Arnold calls the English working class “rough,” coarse, irregular, even boorish; a page later, “rather raw.”³⁰ Raw maybe a word we think we know, since we use it often, but let’s turn to the dictionary just in case; it may signify more than we’re aware of. A partial list of meanings: uncooked, unprocessed, unrefined, untreated, unfinished, uncut, undeveloped, unpolished, unripe, unskilled, harsh, in a natural state. (You can learn a lot just by checking the dictionary.) An overwhelming number of its senses suggest lack (un-); without culture, the working class gets effectively, though metaphorically, placed if not quite in a state of nature, not far from it. Arnold holds that all three English classes require refinement, by culture, into a unified nation, whole; their particular ways of life are inadequate: the aristocracy, for instance, is uninterested in ideas; the middle class relentlessly pursues wealth; but both of them are not othered, described in the kind of terms reserved, restricted to the working class (one passage in *Culture and Anarchy* compares them to savage brutes); they are not taxonomised as near the natural. To cut a long story short: Arnold tells us that, at his moment, the subaltern class was demanding liberty (to “do as it likes”), equality with the other classes. (It did not, for instance, have the right to vote.) Rather than concede the demand, recognise the right, Arnold characterises their actions as savage, anarchic, destructive of order, property; to which he responds by offering the working class interpellation by culture.³¹ Put differently, the Arnoldian definition of culture as the pursuit of perfection emerges as ideological, transactional: presented to the

³⁰ Ibid: p.88.

³¹ The particular passage is most instructive: “...men, all over the country, are beginning to assert and put in practice an Englishman’s right to do as he likes.” However, the working class man cannot be permitted to “march where he likes, meet where he likes, enter where he likes, hoot as he likes, threaten as he likes, smash as he likes. All this...tends to anarchy.” Arnold (1993): p.85. A working class march or demonstration will inevitably turn to the violation of private space (“enter where he likes”) and end in threats and smashing, the destruction of property. Culture works to defend property, interpellate the working class into protecting it.

subaltern in (unequal, geometric) exchange for, as a deferment of, her desire for liberty.³²

If Arnold addresses culture within a national frame, Edward Burnett Tylor treats it globally. His *Primitive Culture*, published just two years after *Culture and Anarchy*, turns to every continent for examples, emplots the human story through space and time. It doesn't see its object as lack but known, studied; and opens with a definition:

“Culture or Civilization...is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society. The condition of culture among the various societies of mankind...is a subject apt for the study of laws of human thought and action.”³³

The resonances with Wickramasinghe are immediately apparent. Tylor's definition, which the history of the discipline finds “borrowed” from Gustav Klemm, has been lasting; it informs our quotidian understanding of the concept.³⁴ However, there are significant differences. For a start, Tylor finds culture and civilisation homonymous, whereas we would distinguish the terms. Its development follows a law, a set of rules, regularities, that could be discovered, studied, even predicted (anthropology, after all, stages itself as a science); one that turns out to be

³² In *The Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between “arithmetic” and “geometric” justice: the former works with the homogeneous, objects reducible to each other (number); the latter with the heterogeneous or irreducible (shapes). Aristotle (2001) *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Trans. R. McKeon) (New York: Modern Library). “Asymmetric devolution,” which some have called for the northeast, would be an instance of the latter. From an arithmetical frame, this would give the (Tamil) minority special privileges that no numerically lesser group should be entitled to. But our politics, and ethics, need not be governed by arithmetic.

³³ E.B. Tylor (1958) *The Origins of Culture: Part I of Primitive Culture* (New York: Harper and Row): p.1.

³⁴ See Alfred Kroeber and Clyde Kluckhohn. Once again, the German episteme shapes the Anglo-U.S. A. Kroeber & C. Kluckhohn (1952) *Culture: A Critical Review of Concepts and Definitions* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press).

developmental, evolutionary. Perhaps most importantly, he understands culture as an asymmetric state or condition (cf. “What’s the condition of the patient?”), which occurs in grades or stages; different societies, like Arnold’s different classes, would have more or less culture and could be evaluated, graded on that ground. (To iterate: we do not find culture axiological or measurable.) But look closer at the second sentence of that passage: it uses societies, plural; culture, singular (as in Arnold). The former signifies heterogeneity between discrete totalities; the latter, homogeneity: many societies could share the same cultural condition or grade – the understanding, in other words, of culture in the “universalist” sense. The relativist (our) sense: many societies, many cultures, plural. Put differently, culture in the universal sense understands the concept vertically, hierarchically, as occurring in grades; the relativist, horizontally. Thus the claim that the concept mutated, a happening the history of anthropology, not entirely persuasively as we’ll see, locates exclusively in the work of Boas; that science changed its mind, as it were – recast, redefined what it understood by culture. This, too, must be accounted for; though one could state here, preliminarily, that Boas et al. bring into play the U.S. element in Anglo-U.S. episteme.

In *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (1880), which he calls an “introduction to a new science,” signifying the novelty of the discipline at this moment, Tylor taxonomises all human societies into three evolutionary cultural conditions/stages, savage, barbaric and civilised; culture, here, bears a constitutive relation to time:

“[In] the lowest or *savage* state...man subsists on wild plants and animals, neither tilling the soil nor domesticating creatures for his food. In making their rude implements, the materials used by savages are what they find ready to hand...Men may be considered to have risen into the next or *barbaric* state when they take to agriculture. With the certain supply of food which can be stored till next harvest, settled village or town life is established, with immense results in the improvement of arts, knowledge, manners and government...Lastly, *civilized* life may be taken as beginning with the art of

writing, which, by recording history, law, knowledge, and religion for the service of ages to come, binds together the past and future in an unbroken chain of intellectual and moral progress.”³⁵

To this frame the savage, the lowest way of life, exists close to nature, in primitive time, isn't very different from the animal, lacks agriculture and technology; the barbaric, with agriculture, has mastered nature somewhat; the civilised is not dependent upon nature at all. (But, surely, a stone stops being a stone when it is used as an instrument; to a non-evolutionary frame, the savage doesn't lack technology. In any case, such a frame wouldn't taxonomise human beings into backward and advanced.) As in Arnold, Tylor effectively opposes nature and culture; he measures the progress of civilisation by distance from nature: the savage has very little culture; the barbaric, some; the civilised is close to perfection. The empiricist may dismiss this employment of the human story, categorisation of human beings, as erroneous, eurocentric “knowledge” that we've long corrected, surpassed. But it bears recollection that positions like this were once considered scientific truth. (As was Isaac Newton's theory of gravity, since replaced by Albert Einstein's. Not too long ago, margarine was thought better for one's health than butter; not any more. Many paragraphs could be devoted to instances of science changing its mind; in response, one could consider these exceptions that prove the rule, or put the rule of science to question.)

Tylor's taxonomy of culture is authoritatively underwritten by that scientific concept, race, which *Anthropology* attends to in great detail, defining race as a discrete totality, more or less, but one lacking the homogeneity of culture: “a body of people comprising a regular set of variations, which center round one representative type.”³⁶ Culture, a condition, consists of habits and acquisitions

³⁵ E.B. Tylor (1960) *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press): p.18. The first such disciplinary institution in England, the Anthropological Society of London, was established (only) in 1863.

³⁶ E.B. Tylor (1904) *Anthropology: An Introduction to the Study of Man and Civilization* (London: Macmillan): p.77. Two editions of this book are cited because the 1960 edition excludes – censors – the chapter on race.

conceived essentially, not staged as varying amongst its subjects. It operates inside and outside this subject, includes objects (Wickramasinghe's implements); race pertains to its subject alone, the inside, the natural. Characterised by heterogeneity, the category pivots upon a centre that represses difference: the "type," a social scientific abstraction, differs from, displaces every raced subject it represents, yet pictures her. Both his definition and the evidence Tylor assembles suggests that races lack homogeneity, are constituted by singularity not similarity, that the representative type cannot sustain what we term the critique of essentialism. (Essentialism is predicated on the possibility of identifying discrete social groups, distinguishing, demarcating their inside from outside; it holds that all members of such groups share certain attributes. In other words, it produces homogeneity, represses difference. The statement *Sinhalaya modaya* would be an instance. Neither Tamil nor Sinhala nationalism could deploy the concept traitor without an essentialist understanding of Tamil- and Sinhalaness, which some are said to betray – leading, often, to their murder. Since one should never forget, and since, also, Sri Lanka misses them, I'll restrict this list to just three friends: K. Padmanabha, Rajani Thiranagama, Lasantha Wickrematunge.) Nevertheless, Tylor holds the category not just necessary but valid, veridic, grounded at his moment by scientific method (for instance, the measurement of skull capacity). Indeterminacy, a maybe, effectively conditions race; *Anthropology* admits to finding all races, including the white, not "single, uniform...but a varied and mixed population."³⁷ In the final analysis, it cannot circumvallate, tell inside from outside. Nevertheless the text repeatedly asserts the existence of the "great races, black, brown, yellow, white."³⁸ Narrative iteration produces subjectivity from difference within race, even as it institutes difference between races. Makes race, like culture, an ideological, axiological term.

Concatenating cultural and racial development, *Anthropology* others, interpellates subjects differentially, by cultural stage and "skin colour": the savage races are black; the civilised, white; the brown and yellow races were civilised in the past, but have degenerated. The savage lives in backward tribes; the civilised constitute

³⁷ Tylor (1904): p.107.

³⁸ Ibid: p.85.

modern nations. The savage lacks morality; the civilised has a highly developed sense of it. Not surprisingly, Tylor also finds the civilised white race to have higher brain capacity than the savage black. (*Anthropology* doesn't grant much narrative attention to the barbaric.) In other words, this text, profoundly shaped by the theory of evolution – the disciplines of biology and anthropology are inside and outside each other – emplots human history as progressive movement determined by two human attributes, the extimate accomplices race and culture:

“At the dawn of history, the leaders of culture were the brown Egyptians, and the Babylonians...the yellow Chinese have been for four thousand years...a civilized and literary nation. The dark-whites...[including] Persians, Greeks, Romans...carried on the forward movement of culture, while since then the fair-whites...of France, Germany, and England, have taken their share not meanly though latest in the world's progress.”³⁹

The distinction between fair and dark whites (which includes, unexpectedly enough, Northern Indians and Arabs, quite apart from Portuguese and Italians) has since disappeared. The reader would also notice that the black (African) is outside this narrative, deemed to have bestowed nothing to history or civilisation, which increases in quality as it moves from the “Middle East” to East Asia, then back through Southwest Asia to Southeastern and, finally, Northwestern Europe, from the darker to the fairer races. Tylor's emplotment of the law of human cultural history: as pigmentation lightens, culture brightens. All races are not equal; some have more culture, contributed more to civilisation, than others. Like in Arnold, race and culture work together in Tylor to distinguish a superior us from an inferior them; unlike Arnold, Tylor places a special burden upon “us,” on their behalf: “The knowledge of man's course of life, from the remote past to the present...may guide us in our duty of leaving the world better than we found it.”⁴⁰ The us in that statement refers to the fair-white race, here charged with a duty, solemn obligation, to better, improve, if not perfect, the world; implicitly, through colonialism.

³⁹ Tylor (1904): p.75.

⁴⁰ Tylor (1960): p.275.

One imposed upon it by scientific knowledge, anthropology, the study of the laws, regularities of human development, which articulates race/culture with politics. In the conclusion to *Primitive Culture*, Tylor calls anthropology “the reformer’s science”; *Anthropology* identifies the agent of reform as the white race.

Given this essay’s concern with the relation between language, episteme and interpellation, the question of race, the signifier “skin colour” bears further consideration. Does science order sight in *Anthropology*, as it does in *Culture and Anarchy*? Does it disinterestedly record observation without the intervention of language? Could it? Once again, close reading helps divulge the ideological work of science. Tylor describes “the African negro” as having “skin so dark brown as to be popularly called black.”⁴¹ Despite finding the African visibly, “actually” dark brown, *Anthropology* refuses to challenge, correct popular perception, but follows, reinforces it; though a commitment to scientific rigour should require such rectification. After all, the discipline distinguishes between fair and dark white races; why not a further one between dark and light brown? Such discrepancies suggest that the work of science is not outside ideology. For, surely, before colonialism and slavery, Miriam Makeba’s “black” African ancestors, or Barack Obama’s for that matter, would not have been called, or nominated themselves, black – an interpellation, eurocentric imposition of subjectivity, like white, both recent and of lasting force: “blacks” in the United States, and elsewhere, still figure themselves black, among other things; as do “whites.” On that latter question, my dear reader: examine the colour of the page you are reading – not the print, the paper. You would, undoubtedly, call it white. (Assuming the editor of this volume doesn’t pull a fast one on me by printing this book, or just this chapter, in, say, a creamy shade of pink ☺). Now ask yourself if you have ever seen a single “white” human being of the same or even similar shade, leave alone the millions necessary to constitute a race. Of course not. In which case you must surely wonder how quite strikingly different colours came to have a single signifier. (One could complicate this discussion further by raising the question of “white” wine.) If, indeed, race isn’t better read as a script that binds, an ideological concept concatenated with culture

⁴¹ Ibid: p.1.

that language and the episteme, the extimately accomplished disciplines of anthropology and literature, help put in place. Which would suggest that race and culture are better read as problems requiring accounting, not veridic signifiers of subjectivity we should take for granted, celebrate.

Louis Althusser's theory of ideology addresses the question of the transformation of working class subjectivity by capitalism; in his terms, the reproduction of the relations of production. A Marxist, though of the structuralist persuasion, Althusser finds the working class – the producer of commodities, value – an exploited, repressed group, a condition, relation that needs to be maintained, reproduced for capitalism to replicate itself successfully. However, this class does not understand its subjectivity as such – as exploited producer – but through the forceful, overdetermining terms of capitalism. If they didn't, they would (unless they find repression tolerable) organise, resist, revolt – or at least prepare to do so; their acceptance of capitalism's account of their subjectivity, therefore, becomes a problem for Marxism: how could it account for the working, the producing class not seeing itself as such, as exploited? Capitalism, though Althusser doesn't put it thus, produces them as deserving of their condition given their indolence, lack of industry; ultimately, their refusal to assert individual agency.⁴² Crudely put, capitalism holds that, in a free

⁴² One finds this in the earliest texts of capitalism. John Locke's *Second Treatise* (1689), conventionally read as a founding document of liberal democracy, begins by defining "political power...[as the] right of making laws...for the regulating and preserving of property, and of employing the force of the community in the execution of such laws, and in the defence of the commonwealth from foreign injury." J. Locke (2002) *The Second Treatise of Government* (Mineola: Dover): p. 2. The prime reason for the institution of civil society – a term Locke deploys homonymously with commonwealth and political society – is the preservation of private property, insecure in its difference, the anarchic state of nature. (Civil society was not conceived in opposition to the state at Locke's moment, as it is in ours.) As example of the natural condition/state, Locke cites America, the colony, and produces its savage inhabitant, the (Native) American, as inhabiting a country "rich in land and poor in all the comforts of life...for want of improving it by labour." Locke (2002): p.19. Several observations follow: the native is (always already) indolent and so does not have private property, cannot achieve the transformation from the state of nature to civil society; staged as savage, in nature, the American is opposed to

economy, any person who works hard has the opportunity to advance; if you don't make it, you've only got yourself to blame, not the system. Holding capitalism as a system – not particular capitalists or companies – responsible for the condition of the class, Althusser, following Marx, reframes the problem, situates it away from the level of the individual worker and her agency or lack thereof, to that of the social group, class oppression; seeks to account for how an instance of exploitation gets produced as one of indolence, how one relation gets transformed into another, how one social group is forced, though not by means or the threat of physical violence – the police, military – to submit to the terms of another. (Of course, the threat always lurks; and the system doesn't hesitate to use such force when it finds its dominance sufficiently pressured.) In a word, through ideology, which Althusser does not understand colloquially, as a set of ideas, political and other beliefs, but as a process that constitutes subjects, produces subjectivity. Interpellation (usually translated as hailing, but those familiar with the French prefer summons – an authoritative juridical command its object has no choice but to comply with) is the term that enables him to conceptualise its work, its transformation of an exploited subject into a lazy one.

You don't have to be a Marxist to appreciate the force of this concept (in fact, most orthodox Marxists don't); though you will find it difficult to cathect if you believe in individual agency. (But then, as this essay keeps pointing out, agency, and its affine, causation, are theological terms poststructuralism has put to question on a variety of grounds.) Interpellation enables us to think subject constitution in general – as an imposition, an instance of force, not free will. What, after all, does it mean to transform something, anything, change its form? To take something and make it different, whether as in woman/girl or Moor/Muslim. Ultimately, to violate (though some violations could, of course, be enabling). Althusser's essay – which anyone interested in this question should read, rather than accept my

the "civilised" English. That is to say, the savage/civilised, nature/ "culture," object/subject oppositions (differance) can be traced back to the earliest texts of the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme. Put differently, the modern subject constitutes herself in opposition to the (colonised) savage. To cathect such a subject is to embrace eurocentrism. (The longer manuscript this essay draws from addresses Locke, and Thomas Hobbes, at greater depth.)

word for it – carries two discrepant accounts, examples of the process. The first locates its happening instantly (on the street, in the well known example). The second, over much time, involving many networked institutions: the education system, dominantly, but also religion, law, the family, media, culture. Once again, it should be stressed, the process is systemic; Althusser identifies the agency of interpellation as the institution, not the individual (he uses the phrase “Ideological State Apparatus”). He does not understand ideology as the consequence of a conspiracy or, as he puts it, the product of a “clique”; it works unconsciously. When, for instance, one gets summoned before a census form, which both Sri Lankan and U.S. citizens have no choice (agency) but to complete, it being a legal requirement, one does not make a cup of tea – or, increasingly in upper class parts of Colombo, coffee, such is the force of eurocentrism, it makes us change our habits; but then, tea was introduced to (or is imposed upon a better phrase?) us by Europe, too – and then contemplate whether one is Burgher, Tamil, Muslim, Sinhala, in the Sri Lankan case. One just ticks off the relevant box. The point being that, even if one does indulge in such contemplation, something else, a larger social, institutional force produces these categories, circumvallates us, constitutes our subjectivity; asks us to acknowledge what we are, but in terms that are produced for, not by, us. For, not by: the subject, here, is taken as object (of/by ideology); she does not assert agency but, rather, is subjected, subjugated, subordinated. (Produced and restrained, as Butler puts it.) Words do things to us; ideology interdicts.

Which is not to suggest that the imposition of subjectivity cannot be successfully contested, the script that binds, be rewritten. In the U.S., African-American has more or less displaced Negro (which, in turn, displaced savage). But only after much struggle, political and epistemological, that lasted over a century. (On the other hand, despite more than two centuries of feminism, woman is yet to replace girl, leave alone produce equality, end oppression.) In Sri Lanka, the Tamil provides an intriguing instance. Tamil nationalism, of course, has long insisted that its subject is not a minority, as Sinhala nationalism characterises it, but a nation. Of the many one could cite in this case, K. Sivathamby, in his contribution to *Ethnicity and Social Change*, categorises the Tamils as a “nationality,” not minority or ethnic group, which Senaka

Bandaranayake insists, in the same volume, to be the correct term. What's in a name? Quite simply, that a nation is generally understood to enjoy the right to self-determination. (Thus Anton Balasingham, in one of the LTTE's first English publications, sought to demonstrate irrefutably that the Tamils were in fact a nation.⁴³) Sivathamby also holds the Tamils and Sinhalese the "two major [Sri Lankan] communities." Apart from the fact that this consigns Muslims to insignificance, in a move symptomatic of Tamil nationalism, such a position failed to shift the Sri Lankan text; a failure, of course, that cannot be accounted for on exclusively epistemological grounds. What the argument signifies is not mere disagreement between Sivathamby and Bandaranayake, both leftists, but the imbrication of language, the episteme and politics. Like girl as opposed to woman, minor/ity means lesser, insignificant. In staking his claim, Sivathamby effectively argues against subordinate status – something the Sri Lankan text, to this moment, consigns the Tamil to. For it is not self-evidently true that Tamils, or Muslims for that matter, are a minority. Such categorisation is the product of empiricism; more precisely, an arithmetical frame, which naturalises the contested, contestable.

This essay argues that the episteme, disciplinary reason abets interpellation, interdiction. The institutions Althusser identifies as interpellative cannot perform their function without the assistance of the disciplines, which not only produce the categories that box, define us, but authorise them as indisputably true, beyond question. If you can do simple arithmetic, empiricism tells us, just count, you'll know for a fact that Tamils are a minority; but then, our politics need not be shaped, constrained by an arithmetical frame. In the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme, race is, as we've seen, the exemplary instance. Even if anthropology itself has critiqued, disavowed race, the U.S. census has not.⁴⁴ It still functions as a

⁴³ A. Balasingham (1983) *Liberation Tigers and the Tamil Eelam Freedom Struggle* (Political Committee of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam).

⁴⁴ Or, rather, not quite: "The racial categories included in the census questionnaire generally reflect a social definition of race recognized in this country and not an attempt to define race biologically, anthropologically, or genetically. In addition, it is recognized that the categories of the race item include racial and national origin or sociocultural groups" U.S. Census Bureau: <http://www.census.gov/population/race/> [Accessed 1st June 2012]. Race, here, is

powerful signifier of U.S. subjectivity, and not just amongst blacks and whites – a Mexican gets transformed into a Hispanic upon crossing the border. (How, one wonders, would empiricism respond to that. For, surely, this suggests some relation between “knowledge” as ordering, regulation and the production of subjectivity, subjection, a script that binds. The Mexican, or Brazilian for that matter, does not choose to “become” Hispanic. Of course this could be yet another exception. But they are beginning to pile up, no? How many exceptions would it take to screw empiricism? You tell me.) In Tylor and Arnold, the concept gains its force from science; particularly, the disciplines of anthropology and biology. However, in both those texts, that address the question of culture, not race, we found that the concepts work together, are dependent upon, inside and outside each other, concatenated. Culture cannot be understood, in the texts of its emergence, without reference to race; the concepts buttress, reinforce, recite each other. Together, they constitute a frame, framing that doesn’t disinterestedly produce knowledge, but organises it – and puts it to work, differentially. Race, which signifies stasis, shapes (interpellates) its subject, naturally; culture, dynamic, develops (interpellates) her socio-politically – within the limit imposed by the particular racial/natural bequest. (Thus the savage and barbarian cannot improve their condition beyond a point without outside intervention, colonialism.) Race binds culture to nature, deconstituting the opposition and (through socio-political evolution) unbinds, distances, bounds it toward civilisation. To put the argument in a soundbite: at the moment, or intersection, of Tylor/Arnold, race forms, culture transforms.

But this essay claims that interpellation others, works differentially. That is to say, the process is better read as not just summoning one group, constituting one subjectivity at a time, discretely, as Althusser argues, but many, simultaneously, asymmetrically. You can’t have majority without minority. The (overdetermined) production of the savage as black and backward coincides with that of the barbaric and the civilised, as white, modern, progressive; with the former (them), as noted before, produced as

no longer race in the disciplinary sense. In fact, as an umbrella for “sociocultural” difference in general, it is incoherent. In a more generous reading, one could hold that the concept has mutated.

inferior to the latter (us).⁴⁵ The interpellation of the white coincides with the othering of the rest. Put differently, the categories are opposed to one another or, better, in deconstructive terms, the différance (with an a) of each other. Explained crudely, Derrida's neologism enables us to think of words (signifiers) not as discrete, but hierarchically structured relations: every word doesn't merely differ from every other, but also defers them; and carries the trace of that relation (black is also not white; woman, not man; chair, not table – or couch, bench, etc; as noted before, the concept middle makes no sense without beginning and end). To defer is to delay, postpone, push aside, relegate for later; in sum, to make lesser, insignificant. (One doesn't postpone important things, does one?) To put this in what may sound like a formula by now (and with apologies to the overcited, over-reworked George Orwell): all words are not equal; some are more powerful, forceful, than others. In the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme, culture is the superior term to nature (the location,

⁴⁵ The reader familiar with Althusser might interject here that interpellation requires acknowledgement for its success. She may ask: do the savage and barbarian recognise themselves as such, accept the categories scripted for, not by them? Yes and no. Ram Mohan Roy, for instance, famously wrote to the Governor-General of India, in 1823, finding British colonial intentions "benevolent," and calling upon it "to improve the natives of India by education." The letter adds: "The Sanscrit language...is well known to have been for ages a lamentable check on the diffusion of knowledge." R. Roy (1982) 'A Letter on English Education' in *The English Works of Raja Rammohun Roy*, Volume II (New Delhi: Cosmo Publications): p.273. Roy may not call himself a barbarian, but to request improvement is to accept lack, inferiority, the claims of eurocentrism. To cite another instance, from a different continent, Olaudah Equiano, writing in 1789, to: "...remove the prejudice that some conceive against the natives of Africa on account of their colour...Are there not causes enough to which the apparent inferiority of an African maybe ascribed... Might it not naturally be ascribed to their situation?...[A]bove all, what advantages do not a refined people possess over those who are rude and uncultivated. Let the polished and haughty European recollect that his ancestors were once, like the Africans, uncivilized, and even barbarous." Equiano (2002): p.31. Sounding remarkably like a cultural relativist almost a century before Boas, who makes virtually the same argument, this accepts African inferiority, if not barbarism, even as it seeks to account for it differently. Significantly enough, Equiano uses the term colour, not race or culture, to capture African difference. Boas: "...historical events appear to have been much more potent in leading races to civilisation than their faculty." G.W. Stocking, Jr.(Ed.) (1974) *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press): p.227.

differentially, of the savage, working class and woman); and, of course, white to black.⁴⁶ The OED informs us that white also means honourable, spotless, innocent, free from malign intent, pure, truthful; and black, dark, sombre, gloomy, dirty, wicked, iniquitous, foul, disgraceful, sinister. It is no accident that, authorised by the Anglo-U.S. episteme, angels wear white and the devil black. (Unless she is Elizabeth Hurley in *Bedazzled*.) Or that the Sri Lankan text nominates what could be called the Sinhala nationalist pogrom against Tamils in 1983 “Black July.” If a “dark brown” people came to be scientifically defined as black, the full force of the language, all the meanings (signifieds) of the word, attach themselves to such interpellation. As they do to white. Indeed, one could read white as the most insidious, ingenious interpellation: it makes spotless a group with genocide, slavery, colonialism on its resume.

It was hinted above that the emergence of culture bears some relation to colonialism. In Arnold, the Irish, an inferior, colonised race, the difference of the English, are unable to attain culture. In Tylor, the dark/er colonised races inhabit a lesser grade of civilisation; the cultured colonisers, the most advanced group, are white. This, however, only suggests that culture is marked by colonialism, not that its emergence could be read as a response to a colonial solicitation, pressure. One must turn to an exemplary, in many respects the exemplary, colonial text in order to offer the stronger reading – that a politico-epistemological problem faced by colonialism prompted the Anglo-U.S. episteme to “borrow” the concept from the German episteme, almost a century after Herder, binding it with race. But, first, Williams’s accounting of the emergence of the concept. He cites John Henry Newman,

⁴⁶ Feminism, of course, has addressed this question extensively; the canonical essay, perhaps, being Sherry Ortner. She argues that culture produces the nature/culture distinction which, in turn, produces “women...as being *closer* to nature than men.” S.B. Ortner (1974) *‘Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?’* in M. Zimbalist et al. (Eds.) (1974) *Woman, Culture and Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press): p.73. This suggests a reading of culture itself as a patriarchal concept that feminism might want to put to question. Ortner, however, desires to take woman out of nature and place her within culture.

who complained (in 1852) that “...the English...language...[lacks] some definite word to express, simply and generally, intellectual proficiency or perfection...[M]any words are necessary, in order...to bring out and convey...that of the cultivation of the intellect as an end.”⁴⁷ To Williams, Arnold, an individual author, effectively responds to Newman, another author, agent, cause, if more than twenty years later, with that single word, concept, culture. But Williams’s reading could only hold if Arnold offered just one definition of culture, “the pursuit of perfection,” whereas *Culture and Anarchy* bears two (having and becoming); and it doesn’t account for the resonance between Arnold and Tylor, the disciplines of literature and anthropology, or the concatenation of race with culture – something Williams, not the closest of readers, and writing before postcoloniality, doesn’t notice. If the two concepts emerged and worked together in response to a colonial imperative, the episteme should demonstrate that. To the serendipitous delight of the postcolonialist – and yes I’m aware of the etymology of serendipity – it does.

In that submission to the British East India Company, *Minute on Indian Education* (1835), Thomas Babington Macaulay argues that colonialism has a duty to encourage “the intellectual improvement of the people of” India, whom he identifies as occupying a barbarous condition.⁴⁸ That is to say, it was not always already the case that colonialism, even within the terms of its autobiography, sought from the intersection of its emergence to better, improve or reform the native condition. The Company was instituted, if this needs iteration, by royal charter in 1600, to advance the interest of (mercantile) capital. Even at his moment, when the question of improvement arose, Macaulay could not take its necessity for granted but had to stake out the position, counter, defeat a powerful opposition, which held that the (male) Indian (elite) should be trained in the Arabic and Sanskrit canon.⁴⁹ In contrast, the good Lord argued that such education would not lead to improvement, for “a single shelf of a good

⁴⁷ R. Williams (1983b) *Culture and Society* (New York: Columbia UP): p.110.

⁴⁸ T.B. Macaulay, ‘*Minute on Indian Education*’ in (1972) *Selected Writings* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): p.240.

⁴⁹ For a postcolonial account of this debate, see Gauri Viswanathan. G. Viswanathan (1989) *Masks of Conquest: Literary Study and British Rule in India* (New York: Columbia UP).

European library was worth [more than] the whole native literature of India and Arabia.”⁵⁰ Consequently, Indians should be taught “the best worth knowing” – a formulation that Arnold iterates – produced not by Europe but the English, in order to improve them, enable their interpellation into Englishness, metonymic with “civilisation,” the universal. In so holding, Macaulay finds an ally in history, cites “two memorable instances” of such transformation, “of prejudices overthrown...knowledge diffused...taste purified...arts and sciences planted in countries which had recently been ignorant and barbarous.”⁵¹ (Macaulay effectively understands the savage as beyond reform.) The first was Europe itself, before the renaissance; the second, Russia, “previously...in a state as barbarous as that in which our ancestors were before the Crusades, [which] has gradually emerged from...ignorance...and...taken its place among civilized communities.”⁵² In both these instances, barbarousness was transformed completely, its impurities and superstitions eradicated, from outside, not just by its difference, civilisation, but specifically by literature, texts plucked from a superior condition: the Greek and Roman, and western European, respectively. Such an argument is possible only with a global, universalist understanding of civilisation: as a (graded) condition that traverses many countries, that could be gifted by an advanced people, who possess it, to another that doesn’t, for their own good. By emplotting its story thus, Macaulay produces it as necessity and benefit, developmental and transactional, in the geometric sense: civilisation compels its object not to exchange but surrender a possession.

⁵⁰ Macaulay (1972): p.241. His description of Indian literature bears recollection: Indian “...medical doctrines...would disgrace an English farrier – Astronomy...would move laughter in girls at an English boarding school – History, abounding with kings thirty feet high and reigns thirty thousand years long – and Geography, made up of seas of treacle and seas of butter.” The othering here isn’t just raced, but classed and gendered: Indian medicine would shame not an English doctor, but a subject of lesser professional, disciplinary aptitude, a tender of horses; upper class English girls – not men, women or even boys – would find Indian astronomy comical. Indian history and geography are so self-evidently ridiculous, they deconstitute themselves.

⁵¹ Ibid: p.243.

⁵² Ibid.

The institution, agent of civilisation in India is “English literature,” broadly conceived: the natural sciences, which supply “correct information”; history, understood not as accounts of the particular but as stories serving an ethico-political function; and, cardinally, “works of imagination.” The *Minute* is an exemplary instance of the alliance between disciplinary reason and interpellation. If it summons many disciplines as accomplices, it nevertheless privileges, overdetermines literature, the product of imagination, in the narrower, disciplinary sense. Without the latter, without “just and lively representations of human life and human nature,” the Indian would not be able to grasp the peculiarities of the English. One sees in this passage the particular passing itself as universal. Macaulay’s object is to introduce the Indian native to the best representations of “human” life and nature; he does so by turning, not to the best “human” literature, but only the English. Understood here as theorised by Percy Bysshe Shelley as an agent of moral good, English literature enables the Indian to imagine what she could not experience, the English at their ethical and political best, and thus transcend her barbaric condition, her civilisational limitations.⁵³ Just as the Greek and Roman classics transformed the English after the crusades, English literature could interpellate Indians – and, by extension, everyone else in a barbarous condition – into civilised subjects. (English literature was first taught, as English literature, not in England but India, another instance, like reformist Tylorian anthropology, of the alliance between ideology, colonialism and disciplinary reason. This makes English literature not some innocent, harmless

⁵³ Briefly, Shelley argues that literature, the product of imagination, allows the subject to put herself in the place of the other, thus enabling morality. In Macaulay, literature enables the Indian to imagine herself English (in the place of another) and, consequently, attain upward civilisational mobility, transformation. Not incidentally, Tylor argues – working with the Shelleyan concept of imagination – that the savage, lacking it, lacks morality. To Shelley, the savage can only imitate, not imagine – and, consequently, is effectively immoral. In other words, imagination maybe another attribute we think we have, like culture; but it emerges as ideological, axiological, differentiates us and them, subject and object, superior and inferior. Shelley goes so far as to assert that, without imagination, the capacity to conceive a better future, there could not have been civil society – thus consigning the savage to be eternally in a state of nature. Like culture, postcoloniality must put imagination, too, to question. P.B. Shelley, ‘*A Defence of Poetry*’ in (2002) *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* (New York: W.W. Norton).

discipline that one could turn to for pleasure and/or diversion. It was conceived to abet colonialism, epistemic violence.) But only if she were prepared to surrender something, an object for which Macaulay, like the Anglo-U.S. episteme at this moment, did not have a signifier. The (in)famous injunction, demand for epistemic violence, imposition of a different script upon the Indian, is "...to form a class who may be interpreters between us and the millions whom we govern...Indian in blood and color, but English in taste...opinions...morals and...intellect."⁵⁴ That is to say, the (upper class) Indian (male) is not asked to be an interpreter in the usual sense, to work within and maintain knowledge of, two languages, objects, but to be transformed, converted, to surrender one – her “own” taste, opinions, morals and intellect – in order to be modern, civilised. (And, in turn, to transform the tastes etc of the rest of the colonised “millions.”) While such taste etc is understood universally, as typical of the barbarous condition, it also bears the trace of the relative, particular, the peculiarly Indian. Macaulay stages human subjectivity as comprising two enmeshed strands: one natural, static, signifying absolute, hierarchical difference between social groups; the other “artificial,” dynamic, also signifying hierarchical difference, but that which colonialism promises to erase, the episteme understands as transformable. To this reading, Arnold/Tylor conceptualise, nominate the distinction between the extimate accomplices that Macaulay was unable to, between blood and colour, on the one hand, and taste etc, on the other, as race and culture, respectively.

In other words, the concatenated terms race and culture emerged within the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme in response to a solicitation of colonialism at its moment of interpellation. (This is not to argue that exploitation ended after Macaulay’s moment; of course not.) In so doing, the concepts resolved, as it were, both a political and an epistemological problem faced by colonialism. At one level, it needed to produce the colonised other as different, inferior to the colonising self, and immutably so; to explain how one group, the white European, came to rule, dominate all the others, be the “director or controller of the world’s force,” as Tylor phrases it. The concept race accounted for that: nature itself endowed human beings with different attributes, potential,

⁵⁴ Macaulay (1972): p.249.

limitations; it may have taken science a while to discover the significance of race, but that didn't diminish its truth. At a second, equally necessary, more or less inextricable level, colonialism needed an alibi: it ruled these others not in order to dominate and/or exploit, but to benefit, improve, transform them. Culture in the singular, universal, homonymous with civilisation, accounted for this. One can, therefore, see why the two concepts are extimate, (had to) work together: they produce an overdetermined other that would always be different, inferior, but could simultaneously, while remaining different, also be changed, converted, made equal. In Homi Bhabha's formulation, colonialism required a "reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite...*Almost the same, but not white.*"⁵⁵ The point being not just that the black, yellow and brown had to be produced and restrained, othered, inferiorised, as the white was superiorised; but that colonialism as ideology – and it cannot, of course, be reduced to just that – required concepts, disciplines, including literature, to abet its performance, its interdiction of subjectivity. Edward Said, though not in these terms, makes an analogous argument in *Orientalism*. (A book published more than forty years ago that, one assumes, anybody considering herself a postcolonial intellectual must have read.)⁵⁶

But then, you may wonder, if the concept culture mutated since the intersection of Tylor/Arnold from the universalist to the relativist sense, if we now understand the term not hierarchically, vertically, but horizontally, not in the singular but the plural, if we hold every culture to be equal, every social group to have one, isn't all this irrelevant (except, perhaps, to intellectual history)? Anthropology would certainly assert so; and point to Franz Boas and those in his wake as proof of the democratisation of culture (and its dissociation from race, a concept the discipline disavowed following Boas's critique).⁵⁷ According to this narrative, the

⁵⁵ H. Bhabha (1994) *The Location of Culture* (New York: Routledge): pp.86, 89.

⁵⁶ E.W. Said (1979) *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage)

⁵⁷ Even in his early writings, Boas holds unequivocally that, while vast differences exist between "primitive" and "civilised" groups, environment, social and historical circumstance, not to mention chance, better account for this

discipline has transcended its racist history, broken sharply with its colonial past.⁵⁸ However, as Kamala Visweswaran argues – persuasively, brilliantly – this emplotment is patriarchal; the emergence of cultural relativism may need a different, less heroic accounting. Some of Boas’s feminist contemporaries – most significantly, perhaps, Alice Fletcher and Elsie Clews Parsons – also pluralised culture at the same moment. Beginning their investigations as universalists (like Tylor), Fletcher, Parsons and others studied Native Americans, expecting – Parsons, most particularly – to find that, in such primitive societies, the condition of women had to be inferior to that of women in civilised white societies. They discovered, instead, that Native American “women were not degraded objects of pity, as commonly supposed,” but had “rights to property, a say in ritual practice, and considerable social freedom,” unlike white western women.⁵⁹ If this was the case, then civilisation could not be emplotted as a story of progress, for the condition of women did not improve from stage to stage, grade to grade of culture; astoundingly to these feminists, it appeared to have degraded from savagery to civilisation. If this was the case, universalism could no longer hold, culture either had to be disappeared or reframed by anthropology; it did the latter, making the concept relative, having a constitutive relation to space, not time: every culture was now understood to be non-axiologically different, varying from place to place, society to society, rather than a stage along an evolutionary continuum. Consequently, each culture would (be expected to) treat/empower/oppress women differently. Politics and epistemology accomplice each other again. In Visweswaran’s account, though she doesn’t phrase it thus, cultural difference or relativism is not the discovery by science that culture is actually, truly, verifiably plural, an admission that it had got it wrong originally and had now corrected itself, but the response of

than race. Under the right circumstances, any race could advance civilisationally. In later work, he argues that race, as a concept, has no scientific, biological basis. G.W. Stocking, Jr. (Ed.) (1974) *A Franz Boas Reader: The Shaping of American Anthropology, 1883-1911* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press).

⁵⁸ On this, see the work of that indefatigable historian of the discipline, George Stocking.

⁵⁹ K. Visweswaran (2010) *Un/common Cultures: Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference* (Raleigh: Duke University Press): p.46.

disciplinary reason to “the need to understand sexual difference,” a feminist imperative.⁶⁰

As for Boas himself, while much could and must be written about him, just one point requires stress here: even if he never offered a definition of culture, he explicitly relativised, retheorised, reframed the concept but, contra the claim of the discipline, did not, could not, transcend eurocentrism (which, let’s not forget, is a form of racism). As early as 1887 – that is to say, while the ink had barely dried on Tylor’s universalism – in a letter to the journal *Science*, Boas argued that “civilization is not something absolute, but...relative.”⁶¹ In this connection, one must also note an 1888 statement of Fletcher: “the causes that held the people of the Americas from achieving a civilization approaching that of the eastern continents are perhaps not yet fully accounted for.”⁶² Her deployment of the concept with an indefinite article, “a civilization,” suggests, of course, the existence of others – an understanding of her object in the plural that, nevertheless, finds the Native American instance inferior to the European; though she refuses to account for such inferiority, like Boas, through the disciplinarily dominant category of race.⁶³ Strikingly, both Fletcher and Boas nominate their object not as culture, but

⁶⁰ Visweswaran (2010): p.51. Stocking’s *Victorian Anthropology* does not mention Parsons or Fletcher. G.W. Stocking, Jr. (1987) *Victorian Anthropology* (New York: The Free Press).

⁶¹ F.Boas, ‘*Museums of Ethnology and Their Classification*’ (1887) *Science*, 43: 587-589 at p. 589.

⁶² A. Fletcher (1888) *Indian Education and Civilization; A Report Prepared in Answer to Senate Resolution of February 23, 1885*. (Washington: Government Printing Office): p.13.

⁶³ Fletcher’s relativism is perhaps most poignantly expressed in an 1894 article, testimonial, ‘*Indian Songs*,’ where she recounts a transformative experience of listening to Native American music. A universalist, she begins by hearing just noise; then realises, after a while, that such sound was, indeed, music (too): “They sang softly because I was weak, and there was no drum, and then it was that the last vestige of the distraction of noise and the confusion of theory was dispelled, and the sweetness, the beauty, and the meaning of these songs were revealed to me.” A. Fletcher, ‘*Indian Songs: Personal Studies of Indian Life*’ (1894) *Century Magazine* Vol. 47 (January 1894): p.422. As in Arnold on the relation between science and our “knowledge” of race, “theory,” that is to say anthropology, orders understanding, distinguishes between music and noise. The transformation of noise into music requires a transformation, reframing of theory, the mutation of culture from singular to plural.

civilisation. (Kroeber and Kluckhohn hold that culture, as a signifier of subjectivity, “seems not to have penetrated to any general or complete British or American dictionary until more than fifty years” after *Primitive Culture*.⁶⁴) In his early essays, Boas, like Tylor, uses culture and civilisation homonymously. One of them, ‘*The Aims of Ethnology*’ (1888), contains a straightforward articulation of cultural relativism: “If we desire to understand the development of human culture we must...[be] willing to adapt...[ourselves] to the strange ways of thinking and feeling of primitive people.”⁶⁵ Implicitly critiquing Tylor, Boas holds that “there are no people without religion...art...social organization”; nevertheless, he others his object even as he relativises it: some social groups are primitive, backward (as opposed, of course, to the civilised), think and feel in strange, bizarre, perplexing ways.⁶⁶ Epistemic violence once more: Boas may call for an account of the other on her own terms, as the phrase goes; his text produces them through a eurocentric frame, as inferior to us. As Johannes Fabian argues, cultural relativism may emphasise, privilege space, but it nevertheless places its object in a time different from its subject. It was stated above that deconstruction holds words to bear the trace of their prior significations; in this instance, it would suggest that, even relativised, culture could not escape its emergence in colonialism, its work of othering, writing/speaking for: “we” – whether Tylor or Boas – are the only writers, seekers of understanding, subjects, in this schema; they cannot represent themselves, will remain objects, forever ventriloquised. Anthropology may desire to heroise Boas; postcoloniality cannot.⁶⁷

It could be demonstrated without much effort that every canonical anthropological figure since Boas – Bronislaw Malinowski, Levi-Strauss, Clifford Geertz – others her object. Of more immediate concern to postcoloniality, however, is that even

⁶⁴ Kroeber and Kluckhohn (1952): p.11.

⁶⁵ F. Boas, ‘*The Aims of Ethnology*’ in (1982) *Race, Language and Culture* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press): p.636.

⁶⁶ Ibid: p.634.

⁶⁷ The point is not to demonise Boas, who actively, publicly, fought against racism – especially that directed at Jews and African-Americans – his entire career: see, for instance, ‘*Selections*’ in Stocking (1974): pp.42-44. Rather, the problem is structural: he could not escape the script of eurocentrism.

more recent, avowedly – though allegedly also suggests itself – postcolonial anthropology cannot avoid othering, either. James Clifford and the “interpretive turn” in anthropology being the recent exemplar. In the ‘Introduction’ to the influential collection, *Writing Culture*, he informs us that “the predominant metaphors in anthropological research have been participant-observation, data collection and cultural description, all of which presuppose a standpoint outside – looking at, objectifying...”⁶⁸ In contrast, the new, good, reframed, reformed anthropology refuses to objectify, sees those the discipline once considered “native informants,” objects, as “co-authors,” subjects. Clifford promises a decentering of the authority of the west; and a critique of the inside/outside distinction, of the objectification of the other. Consequently, culture, the object of study, is “not [seen as] an object to be described...[or] a unified corpus of symbols and meanings that can be definitively interpreted. Culture is contested, temporal and emergent. Representation and explanation – both by insiders and outsiders – is implicated in this emergence.”⁶⁹ On page eleven, Clifford informs us that to see oneself as a subject standing empirically outside one’s object is to objectify it and, therefore, objectionable on these grounds. Just eight pages later, he asserts, empirically, the existence of cultural insiders (natives) and outsiders (anthropologists), objectifiers. When faced with this sort of straightforward contradiction, I am reminded of what I often tell my graduate students: don’t forget later in an essay what you have written before. But at stake here, of course, is not the incompetence of an individual anthropologist, however famous; rather, the work of disciplinary reason. Anthropology would be impossible without the empiricist distinction between inside and outside, subject and object; both the (relativist) concept of culture and the authority of the discipline ground themselves on it.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ J. Clifford & G. Marcus (Eds.) (1986) *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press): 11.

⁶⁹ Ibid: 19.

⁷⁰ Responding critically to the Clifford position, Lila Abu-Lughod argues that the discipline hasn’t changed since Boas: “anthropology...helps construct, produce, and maintain” othering. L. Abu-Lughod, ‘*Writing Against Culture*’ in R.G. Fox (Ed.) (1991) *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present* (Santa Fe: School of American Research Press): pp.137-162 at p.143. She advocates, instead, “writing against culture,” what she calls “ethnographies of the particular.” Specifically, the stories of individuals from “the Bedouin community in Egypt.” But, of course, to invoke a term like Bedouin is,

Clifford exemplifies this. He may align himself with postcoloniality, express a desire to see his informants as equals, coauthors; his text divulges otherwise. For one thing, if informants are actually co-authors, instead of simply being proclaimed to be such, then their names should be on book covers, copyright and royalty agreements and the like; they should be allowed to teach classes, be considered for, if not granted, tenure, invited to conferences, entitled to frequent flier miles and so on. (Quite apart from the fact that the very signifier “co-author” implies a cathexis of authoritative interpretation.) For another, this is how the ‘Introduction’ to *Writing Culture* opens, with an account of its cover photograph:

“Our frontispiece shows Stephen Tyler, one of this volume’s contributors, at work in India in 1963. The ethnographer is absorbed in writing – taking dictation? fleshing out an interpretation? recording an important observation?...An interlocutor looks over his shoulder – with boredom? patience? amusement? In this image the ethnographer hovers at the edge of the frame – faceless, almost extraterrestrial, a hand that writes. It is not the usual portrait of anthropological fieldwork.”⁷¹

The reader does not need access to this photograph to get the point; though it would help. Because, among other things, it will show that the ethnographer dominates the image, even if he is at the “edge” of the frame: Tyler is in the light; the informant, in shadow, almost blending into his hut. But that could be let pass. To Clifford, both Tyler and the unnamed Indian in the photograph are “interlocutors.” (OED: “One who takes part in a dialogue, conversation, or discussion.”) Implicit in the term, as in its accomplice “co-authors,” is the suggestion that both participants in this dialogue or discussion are equal. But only one of them – the “white” male – is granted the courtesy, or perhaps the privilege, of a name in Clifford’s text. (Is there such a thing as

inescapably, to work with the general not particular, write with culture; to produce ethnography is to maintain the distinction between subject/author and object/informant.

⁷¹ Clifford & Marcus (1986): p.1.

an author without a name?) More significantly, they are not depicted interlocuting or in dialogue; indeed, just one of them – again the same “white” anthropologist – is said to write. Clifford may insist that the new anthropology is a collaborative exercise; it is a partnership – if one at all – between unequals. One, the subject, writes, the other, the object, just looks on; one is active, the other passive (by Clifford’s own admission). For the picture to actually mean what Clifford says it does, surely it should show both “interlocutors” writing? For the interpretive turn to be a truly collaborative exercise, should there not be a relationship of equality between the partners, a disturbance, at the very least, of the us/them, subject/object distinction? But, quite apart from the photograph, Clifford’s own narration signifies that there isn’t. To the postcolonialist reader, nothing significant has changed, not just since Boas, but Tylor. A decentering is promised; but it cannot, quite literally, be seen in the photograph. “Representation” (speaking/writing for), as Spivak puts it, “has not withered away.”⁷² The point being quite simple: there is no structural difference between the interpretive turn and ethnography in its colonial incarnation. Both speak to the west; the native is written for, not by. The difference with the interpretive turn is that it works by passing: passing a metaphor, or relation of substitution, speaking for, taking the place of, ventriloquising the native, as a metonym or relation of continuity, speaking with the native.⁷³

In *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World*, a book that examines the relation between eurocentrism and anticolonial nationalism, epistemology and politics, Partha Chatterjee addresses some of the questions raised here about anthropology and culture:

“...in this whole debate about the possibility of cross-cultural understanding, the scientist is always one of ‘us’:

⁷² G.C. Spivak, ‘*Can the Subaltern Speak?*’ in C. Nelson & L. Grossberg (Eds.) (1988) *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press): p.308.

⁷³ This is not, strictly speaking, *halal*; but the paragraphs on Clifford are taken from already published work, *Abiding by Sri Lanka*; the book also contains a critique of Geertz. Q. Ismail (2005) *Abiding by Sri Lanka: On Peace, Place and Postcoloniality* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press).

he is a Western anthropologist, modern, enlightened and self-conscious (and it does not matter what his nationality or the color of his skin happen to be). The objects of study are ‘other’ cultures – always non-Western. No one has raised the possibility, and the accompanying problems, of a rational understanding of ‘us’ by a member of the ‘other’ culture...For there is a relation of power involved in the very conception of the autonomy of cultures.”⁷⁴

Chatterjee doesn’t get to the problem of culture through quite the same terms as this essay but, of course, his argument resonates: it does not find the contemporary study of culture an empirical, veridical exercise that recognises, even honours peoples the discipline once denigrated; it takes place within power, the very concept of cultural difference being the product of power, not disinterested knowledge. Power, that is, as eurocentrism (though Chatterjee, writing soon after Said, uses the term Orientalism); thus the significance of his claim that the other, qua other, could not produce an account of the west; not credibly, within the protocols of disciplinary reason. (Though this begs the question whether, given the epistemic violence of colonialism, the other could even produce an account of herself outside eurocentrism.) From Tylor to Clifford, the scientist – or should one say ventriloquist – is *always*, structurally, one of us, the subject (even if her name is Abu-Lughod or Visweswaran). Prompted in part by Chatterjee, this essay contends that anthropology relativised the universalist concept under pressure from “oppositional” politico-epistemological forces that, as we saw in Fletcher and Boas, reasoned within eurocentrism. (This would include, in the U.S., the anti-racism initiated by the NAACP, an organisation founded by W. E. B. DuBois, amongst others, in 1909; Boas and DuBois were active accomplices.⁷⁵) Chatterjee’s book offers the postcolonialist a way to theorise this and, simultaneously, finally, also theorise postcoloniality. Eurocentrism, in his understanding, has two levels, the “thematic” and “problematic.” In sum, the thematic – the terms are not really that important – authorises

⁷⁴ P. Chatterjee (1993) *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: Univ. of Minnesota Press): p.17.

⁷⁵ On this, see Lee D. Baker. L.D. Baker (1998) *From Savage to Negro: Anthropology and the Construction of Race, 1896-1954* (Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press).

categorical statements; most crucially, that a fundamental distinction exists between west and other. (We found this explicitly in Tylor, Fletcher, Boas, implicitly in Clifford.) The problematic – and this is a reading of Chatterjee, not a literal deployment – assigns value to the categories west and its difference. Schematically put: colonialism accepts the thematic, assigns positive value exclusively to the dominant, holds the west superior (Tylor); anticolonialism or, in the U.S. debate, its affine anti – racism/sexism, accepts the thematic but reverses the problematic – asserting that the other and west (or white and black/Native American, male and female) are indeed heterogeneous, but equal (Boas, Fletcher).⁷⁶ Given this, Chatterjee finds the latter “a different discourse, yet one that is dominated by another”; in the terms of this essay, anticolonialism would be within the script of, overdetermined by eurocentrism. (To iterate, Butler makes an analogous argument about feminism, that it reasons within the thematic of patriarchy, while reversing the problematic: it accepts the distinction between men and women, but finds women equal, not inferior.)

Though Chatterjee doesn't address the question of postcoloniality, his argument enables, prompts, provokes its conceptualisation. Following the readings, positions developed throughout this essay, a third possibility could be read, divulged within his schema, one that seeks to go beyond the limit of anticolonialism: it would cathect the “post” in postcoloniality, find merely reversing the problematic inadequate, put to question the thematic or, in poststructuralist terms, the episteme that produces, authorises, regulates the distinction between west and other – in a word, eurocentrism. (Butler makes an analogous move, in relation not just to gender, but sex.) In so doing, at the risk of stating the obvious, postcoloniality finds poststructuralism an indispensable accomplice. Such a conceptualisation does not understand postcoloniality – as has been the trend – historically, geographically, empirically, as a specific period of time in particular places that were once colonised; rather, as a politico-epistemological problem. But what might it mean, exactly, to put

⁷⁶ In the case that Chatterjee addresses, India, Jawaharlal Nehru is taken as the symptomatic instance of anticolonial nationalism, opposing eurocentrism within its terms.

the modern Anglo-U.S. episteme to question? Briefly, to call attention to its eurocentric structure, texture; to read carefully the concepts that organise, regulate, bind, ground, hold it together; culture being, of course, a cardinal, foundational such concept (but then, so would other terms we take for granted, including nature, society, imagination, civilisation). To address the work of the disciplines not just in authorising these concepts, but in abetting the constitution and naturalisation of subjectivity, the overdetermined scripts written for us. To push the critique of the subject initiated by poststructuralism. In relation to culture, to ask, quite simply: could we continue to cathect an imposition, interdiction of us by them, even if one we've long naturalised, taken for granted, understand as signifying a vital element of our subjectivity?

Working within the thematic of eurocentrism, Martin Wickremasinghe would undoubtedly answer in the affirmative. For instance, he finds the Sinhalese language an important “carrier” of their culture, a discrete signifier of difference that distinguishes an inside from an outside, even as the Sinhalese share some of the implements, elements of their modern culture with other Sri Lankan groups (though all of these implements turn out to have emerged outside Sri Lanka – but then, some would point out that most Sri Lankans emerged from India, in the first place). However, as hinted at above, his writing does not stage culture as uncritically enabling. He also holds it to have “the power and ability to discipline a society, an ethnic group and the individuals of that group.” Wickramasinghe illustrates this claim anecdotally:

“A girl cousin of mine fell ill one day. A doctor...examined her, prescribed a mixture, and advised her parents to give her egg albumen. They were reluctant to do so...I prepared the albumen water. She refused to touch it...We persisted in urging her. At last, perhaps to get rid of our pestering, she took the albumen water only to bring it up. The cultural conditioning of the villagers

for generations seems to have changed a physiological function.”⁷⁷

In this staging, her culture prevented the child from accepting (modern? western?) medical advice. An alternative interpretation of this happening, of course, is that Buddhism, the girl’s religion, not culture, shaped her aversion to taking a (potential) life, consuming the egg; but Wickramasinghe reasons otherwise: “The fishermen of Buddhist villages killed hundred of large fishes daily and thousands of small fry. But they abhorred killing a fowl or a marauding rat. Their irrational and inconsistent attitude is due to their cultural practice.”⁷⁸ One can pass without too much comment the indelicate charge of calling the actions of the girl, and other Buddhists, irrational; though one must note, again, Wickramasinghe’s effective anti-nationalism: he refuses to repress what he deems Sinhala Buddhist inconsistencies. More significantly, though, by arguing that culture disciplines, constraints, limits its objects, he produces a conception of subjectivity not that distant from Althusserian interpellation. Which should make us ask, once more, even if Wickremasinghe does not: could we celebrate something that disciplines us? (We often do, of course: teaching, for instance, or religion.)

Wickramasinghe’s essay also provokes another question implied throughout this essay, that Chatterjee raises: how does one tell the inside of a culture from its outside? If the automobile and lipstick are (modern) Sri Lankan cultural implements, what does that signify about the relativist concept of culture as a discrete whole, way of life? If a culture is always already open, permeable, could it have an outside, a border, that distinguishes one way of life from another? If it doesn’t have a limit, cannot be circumvallated, could it be a whole? If cultures aren’t coherent wholes there could be no diversity amongst Sri Lankan groups to produce the unity Wickramasinghe desires. There would be no groups to begin with. (Pressured by the transgender movement, a certain feminism poses an analogous question: how does one tell man from woman? There are, for instance, lesbians who identify as masculine; some, undoubtedly, in Sri Lanka.) To iterate, this is

⁷⁷ Wickramasinghe (1997): p.18.

⁷⁸Ibid: p.19.

Wickramasinghe's list of "the cultural implements of modern Ceylon": "motor car, modern furniture, the fountain pen and pencil, plates, cups and saucers, spoons and forks, lipstick and perfumes, and printed books." But, surely, one would find these objects used in every country on earth, though not necessarily by every person. What, then, would distinguish Sri Lankan culture from others? Some of us speak Tamil and Sinhalese, not to mention Malay and Gujarati. But so do many others not interpellated as Sri Lankan; and many Sri Lankans, including myself, are effectively monolingual English-speakers. Some of us like katta sambol – but I can buy a bottle from 'Little India' down the street in Minneapolis, where I live; in fact, the store also sells Maldivian fish, enabling me to make the sambol from scratch, if I so desire. (The object is not discrete, but always already networked: one cannot "be" Sri Lankan, with the exception of some vegetarians, without help from the Maldives.) Faced with the problem of delimitation, one could try and refine, rewrite one's definition until it is watertight, irrefutable. But there would always be some Sri Lankan, somewhere, who would not fit in the box, defy circumvallation. To which the empiricist would respond, in an essentialist spirit: the majority of Sri Lankans are (supply predicate). However, if one is opposed to majoritarianism, domination, as is this essay, then one cannot deploy its logic against it. Indeed, majority and minority are terms we should work towards disappearing, not just from the Sri Lankan debate, but episteme (even if the minority rights industry will protest); they make groups insignificant while pretending to neutrally describe.

This essay holds that words do things to us; not on their own, but as products of the episteme, accomplices by ideology. They constrain the way we think – of ourselves, and everything else. Culture is one such term. Authorised by anthropology, literature, eurocentrism, it produces our subjectivity as discrete. But, quite apart from the impossibility of definition, it has been argued here that interpellation works differentially. Which raises the question: could one be, for instance, a Tamil in Sri Lanka and remain untouched, unmarked, by Muslimness or Sinhaleanness, the trace of the other? Tamil and Sinhala nationalism, narcissisms that care only about the self, and that, too, narrowly defined, would insist one could. The demand for self-determination in the one case, sovereignty and domination in the other, grounds itself on

narcissism. Post- structuralism/coloniality suggests otherwise: that the other is inside, not outside us. It also suggests that, while we cannot revoke the scripts that produce, bind us, we can rewrite them, recognise the other in ourselves. Without the concept of culture as a discrete inside that could be distinguished from an outside, both Tamil and Sinhala nationalisms could not exist. If, contemplating the Republic at forty, one holds, as does this essay, that our lives have been devastated not just by war and oppression, but nationalism itself, both the Sinhala instance that produced the Republic, and the Tamil that opposed it, if we abhor narcissism and its dismal, abysmal, self-affirming, self-defeating, other-repressing subjectivity, then perhaps we should take the risk of the next step, ask the question of culture.