GLOBAL ETHNOSCAPES

Notes and Queries for a Transnational

Anthropology

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IN my title, I use the term *ethnoscape*. This neologism has certain ambiguities deliberately built into it. It refers, first, to the dilemmas of perspective and representation that all ethnographers must confront, and it admits that (as with landscapes in visual art) traditions of perception and perspective, as well as variations in the situation of the observer, may affect the process and product of representation. But I also intend this term to indicate that there are some brute facts about the world of the twentieth century that any ethnography must confront. Central among these facts is the changing social, territorial, and cultural reproduction of group identity. As groups migrate, regroup in new locations, reconstruct their histories, and reconfigure their ethnic "projects," the *ethno* in ethnography takes on a slippery, nonlocalized quality, to which the descriptive practices of anthropology will have to respond. The landscapes of group identity—the ethnoscapes—around the world are no longer famil- iar anthropological objects, insofar as groups are no longer tightly terri- torialized, spatially bounded, historically unselfconscious, or culturally homogenous. We have fewer cultures in the world and more "internal cultural debates" (Parkin 1978).

By *ethnoscape*, I mean the landscape of persons who make up the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guestworkers, and other moving groups and persons constitute an essential feature of the world and appear to affect the politics of and between nations to a hitherto unprecedented degree. This is not to say that nowhere are there relatively stable communities and networks of kinship, friendship, work, and leisure, as well as of birth, residence, and other filiative forms. But it is to say that the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move. What is more, both these realities and these fantasies now function on large scales, as men and women from villages in India think not just of moving to Poona or Madras, but of moving to Dubai and Houston; and refugees from Sri Lanka find themselves in South India as well as in Canada; and the Hmong are driven to London as well as Philadelphia. As the needs of international capital shift, as production and technology generate different consumer needs, as nation-states change their policies on refugee populations, these moving groups can never afford to let their imaginations rest too long, even if they wished to.[1]

In this paper, I seek, through a series of notes, queries, and vignettes, to reposition some of our disciplinary conventions, while trying to show that the ethnoscapes of today's world are profoundly interactive.

ALTERNATIVE MODERNITIES
AND ETHNOGRAPHIC COSMOPOLITANISM

A central challenge for current anthropology is to study the cosmopolitan (Rabinow 1986) cultural forms of the contemporary world without logically or chronologically presupposing either the authority of the Western experience or the models derived from that experience. It seems impossible to fruitfully study these new cosmopolitanisms without analyzing the transnational cultural flows within which they thrive, compete, and feed off one another in ways that defeat and confound many verities of the human sciences today. One such verity concerns the link between space, stability, and cultural reproduction. There is an urgent need to focus on the cultural dynamics of what is now called *deterritorialization*. This term applies not only to obvious examples such as transnational corporations and money markets, but also to ethnic groups, sectarian movements, and political formations, which increasingly operate in ways that transcend specific territorial boundaries and identities. Deterritorialization (of which I offer some ethnographic profiles in another section of this paper) affects the loyalties of groups (especially in the context of

complex diasporas), their transnational manipulation of currencies and other forms of wealth and investment, and the strategies of states. The loosening of the bonds between people, wealth, and territories fundamentally alters the basis of cultural reproduction.

Deterritorialization is one of the central forces of the modern world, since it brings laboring populations into the lower-class sectors of relatively wealthy societies, while sometimes creating exaggerated and intensified senses of criticism of, or attachment to, politics in the home state. Deterritorialization, whether of Hindus, Sikhs, Palestinians, or Ukranians, is now at the core of a variety of global fundamentalisms, including Islamic and Hindu fundamentalism. In the Hindu case, for example (Appadurai and Breckenridge: in press), it is clear that the overseas movement of Indians has been exploited by a variety of interests both within and outside India to create a complicated network of finances and religious identifications in which the problem of cultural reproduction for Hindus abroad has become tied to the politics of Hindu fundamentalism at home.

At the same time, deterritorialization creates new markets for film companies, impressarios, and travel agencies, which thrive on the need of the relocated population for contact with its homeland. But the homeland is partly invented, existing only in the imagination of the deterritorialized groups, and it can sometimes become so fantastic and one-sided that it provides the fuel for new ethnic conflicts.

The idea of deterritorialization may also be applied to money and finance, as money managers seek the best markets for their investments, independent of national boundaries. In turn, these movements of monies are the basis of new kinds of conflict, as Log Angelenos worry about the Japanese buying up their city, and people in Bombay worry about the rich Arabs from the Gulf States, who have not only transformed the price of mangos in Bombay but have also substantially altered the profile of hotels, restaurants, and other services in the eyes of the local population—just as they have in London. Yet most residents of Bombay are ambivalent about the Arabs there, for the flip side of their presence is the absent friends and kinsmen earning big money in the Middle East and bringing back both money and luxury commodities to Bombay and other cities in India. Such commodities transform consumer taste in these cities. They often end up smuggled through air- and seaports and peddled in the "gray" markets of Bombay's streets. In these gray markets (a coinage which allows me to capture the quasi-legal characteristic of such settings), some members of Bombay's middle classes and of its lumpen proletariat can buy goods, ranging from cartons of Marlboro cigarettes to Old Spice shaving cream and tapes of Madonna. Similar gray routes, often subsidized by

moonlighting sailors, diplomats, and airline stewardesses, who get to move in and out of the country regularly, keep the gray markets of Bombay, Madras, and Calcutta filled with goods not only from the West, but also from the Middle East, Hong Kong, and Singapore. It is also such professional transients who are increasingly implicated in the transnational spread of disease, not the least of which is AIDS.

It is this fertile ground of deterritorialization, in which money, commodities, and persons unendingly chase each other around the world, that the group imaginations of the modern world find their fractured and fragmented counterpart. For the ideas and images produced by mass media often are only partial guides to the goods and experiences that deterritorialized populations transfer to one another. In Mira Nair's brilliant film, *India Cabaret* (discussed in greater detail in another section), we see the multiple loops of this fractured deterritorialization as young women, barely competent in Bombay's metropolitan glitz, come to seek their fortunes there as cabaret dancers and prostitutes, entertaining men in clubs with dance formats derived wholly from the prurient dance sequences of Hindi films. These scenes cater to Indian ideas about Western and foreign women and their "looseness," while dancing provides tawdry career alibis for these girls. Some of these girls come from Kerala, where cabaret clubs and the pornographic film industry have blossomed, partly in response to the purses and tastes of Keralites returned from the Middle East, where their diasporic lives away from women distort their very sense of what the relations between men and women might be. These tragedies of displacement could certainly be replayed in an analysis of the relations between Japanese and German sex tours to Thailand and the tragedies of the sex trade in Bangkok, and in similar loops that tie together fantasies about the Other, the conveniences and seductions of travel, the economics of global trade, and the violent fantasies that dominate gender politics in many parts of Asia and the world at large.

The vision of transnational cultural studies suggested by the discussion so far appears at first sight to involve only modest adjustments of anthropologists' traditional approaches to culture. In my view, however, a genuinely cosmopolitan ethnographic practice requires an interpretation of the terrain of "cultural studies" in the United States today, and of the status of anthropology within such a terrain.[2]

CULTURAL STUDIES IN A GLOBAL TERRAIN

Since this volume concerns anthropologies of the present, it may be important to ask about the status of anthropology in the present and, in particular, about its now-embattled monopoly over the study of "culture"

(from now on, without quotation marks). The following discussion sets the stage for the critique of ethnography contained in subsequent sections.

As a topic, culture has many histories, some disciplinary, some that function outside the academy. Within the academy, there are certain differences between disciplines in the degree to which culture has been an explicit topic of investigation, and the degree to which it has been understood tacitly. In the social sciences, anthropology (especially in the United States; less so in England) has made culture its central concept, defining it as some sort of human substance—even though ideas about this substance have shifted, over the course of a century, roughly from Tylorean ideas about custom to Geertzian ideas about meaning. Some anthropologists have worried that the meanings given to culture have been far too diverse for a technical term; others have made a virtue of that diversity. At the same time, the other social sciences have not been unconcerned with culture: in sociology, Max Weber's sense of *verstehen* and Simmel's various ideas have mediated between the German neo-Kantian ideas of the late nineteenth century and sociology as a social science discipline. As in many other cases, culture is now a subfield within sociology, and the American Sociological Association has legitimized this segregation by creating a subunit in "the sociology of culture," where persons concerned with the production and distribution of culture, especially in Western settings, may freely associate with one another.

At the epicenter of current debates in and about culture, many diverse streams flow into a single, rather turbulent river: the many poststructuralisms (largely French) of Lacan, Derrida, Foucault, Bourdieu, and their many subschools. Some of these streams are self-conscious about language as their means and their model, others less so. The current multiplicity of uses that surrounds the three words *meaning, discourse*, and *text* should be sufficient to indicate that we are not only in an era of "blurred genres" (as Geertz [1980] said presciently a decade ago)*, but we are in a peculiar state that I would like to call "post-blurring," in which ecumenism has—happily in my opinion—given way to sharp debates about the word, the world, and the relationship between them.

In this post-blur blur, it is crucial to note that the high ground has been seized by English literature (as a discipline) in particular and by literary studies in general. This is the nexus where the word "theory," a rather prosaic term in many fields for many centuries, suddenly took on the sexy ring of a trend. For an anthropologist in the United States today, what is most striking about the last decade in the academy is the hijack of culture by literary studies—though we no longer have a one-sided Arnoldian gaze, but a many-sided hijack (where a hundred Blooms

flower) with many internal debates about texts and antitexts, reference and structure, theory and practice. Social scientists look on with bewilderment as their colleagues in English and comparative literature talk (and fight) about matters which, until as recently as fifteen years ago, would have seemed about as relevant to English departments as, say, quantum mechanics.

The subject matter of cultural studies could roughly be taken as the relationship between the word and the world. I understand these two terms in their widest sense, so that *word* can encompass all forms of textualized expression, and *world* can mean anything from "the means of production" and the organization of life-worlds to the globalized relations of cultural reproduction discussed in this paper.

Cultural studies, conceived this way, could be the basis for a cosmopolitan (global? macro? translocal?) ethnography. To translate the tension between the word and the world into a productive ethnographic strategy requires a new understanding of the deterritorialized world that many persons inhabit and the possible lives that many persons are today able to envision. The terms of the negotiation between imagined lives and deterritorialized worlds are complex, and they surely cannot be captured by the localizing strategies of traditional ethnography alone. What a new style of ethnography can do is to capture the impact of deterritorialization on the imaginative resources of lived, local experiences. Put another way, the task of ethnography now becomes the unravelling of a conundrum: what is the nature of locality, as a lived experience, in a globalized, deterritorialized world? As I will suggest in the next section, the beginnings of an answer to this conundrum lie in a fresh approach to the role of the imagination in social life.

The master narratives that currently guide much ethnography all have Enlightenment roots, and all have been called into serious question. Foucault's searing critique of Western humanism and its hidden epistemologies has made it difficult to retain much faith in the idea of "progress" in its many old and new manifestations. The master narrative of "evolution," central to anthropology in the United States, suffers from a profound gap between its short-run, culturally oriented versions (as in the work of Marvin Harris) and its long-run, more appealing, but less anthropological versions such as the biogeological fables of Stephen Jay Gould. The "emergence of the individual" as a master narrative suffers not only from the counterexamples of our major twentieth-century totalitarian experiences, but also from the many deconstructions of the idea of self, person, and agency in philosophy, sociology, and anthropology (Parfit 1986; Giddens 1979; Carrithers, Collins, and Lukes 1985). Master narratives of the "iron

cage" and the march of bureaucratic rationality are constantly refuted by the irrationalities, contradictions, and sheer brutality increasingly traceable to the pathologies of the modern nation-state (Nandy 1987). Finally, most versions of the Marxist master narrative find themselves embattled as contemporary capitalism takes on an increasingly "disorganized" and deterritorialized look (Lash and Urry 1987) and as cultural expressions refuse to bend to the requirements of even the least parochial Marxist approaches (see the debate between Frederic Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad in *Social Text* [Jameson 1986; Ahmad 1987]).

Cosmopolitan ethnography, or what might be called macroethnography, takes on a special urgency given the ailments of these many post-Enlightenment master narratives. It is difficult to be anything but exploratory about what such a macroethnography (and its ethnoscapes) might look like, but the following section seeks, by illustration, to point to its contours.

IMAGINATION AND ETHNOGRAPHY

We live in a world of many kinds of realism, some magical, some socialist, some capitalist, and some that are yet to be named. These generic realisms have their provinces of origin: magical realism in Latin American fiction in the last two decades; socialist realism in the Soviet Union of the 1930s; and capitalist realism, a term coined by Michael Schudson (1984), in the visual and verbal rhetoric of contemporary American advertising. In much aesthetic expression today, the boundaries between these various realisms have been blurred. The controversies over Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* (*Public Culture*, vol. 2, fall 1989:2), over the Robert Mapplethorpe photographic exhibition in Cincinnati, and over many other works of art in other parts of the world remind us that artists are increasingly willing to place high stakes on their sense of the boundaries between their art and the politics of public opinion.

More consequential for our purposes is that the imagination has now acquired a singular new power in social life. The imagination—expressed in dreams, songs, fantasies, myths, and stories—has always been part of the repertoire, in some culturally organized way, of every society. But there is a peculiar new force to the imagination in social life today. More persons in more parts of the world consider a wider set of "possible" lives than they ever did before.[3] One important source of this change is the mass media, which present a rich, ever-changing store of possible lives, some of which enter the lived imaginations of ordinary people more successfully than others. Important also are contacts with, news of, and

rumors about others in one's social neighborhood who have become in-habitants of these faraway worlds. The importance of media is not so much as direct sources of new images and scenarios for life possibilities, but as semiotic diacritics of great power, which also inflect social contact with the metropolitan world facilitated by other channels.

One of the principal shifts in the global cultural order, created by cinema, television, and VCR technology (and the ways in which they frame and energize other, older media), has to do with the role of the imagination in social life. Until recently, whatever the force of social change, a case could be made that social life was largely inertial, that traditions provided a relatively finite set of "possible" lives, and that fan-tasy and imagination were residual practices, confined to special persons or domains, restricted to special moments or places. In general, they were antidotes to the finitude of social experience. In the last two decades, as the deterritorialization of persons, images, and ideas has taken on new force, this weight has imperceptibly shifted. More persons throughout the world see their lives through the prisms of the possible lives offered by mass media in all their forms. That is, fantasy is now a social practice; it enters, in a host of ways, into the fabrication of social lives for many people in many societies. I should be quick to note that this is not a cheerful observation, intended to imply that the world is now a happier place with more "choices" (in the utilitarian sense) for more people, and with more mobility and more happy endings.

What is implied is that even the meanest and most hopeless of lives, the most brutal and dehumanizing of circumstances, the harshest of lived inequalities is now open to the play of the imagination. Prisoners of con-science, child laborers, women who toil in the fields and factories of the world, and others whose lot is harsh no longer see their lives as mere outcomes of the givenness of things, but often as the ironic compromise between what they could imagine and what social life will permit. The biographies of ordinary people, thus, are constructions (or fabrications) in which the imagination plays an important role. Nor is this role a simple matter of escape (holding steady the conventions that govern the rest of social life), for it is in the grinding of gears between unfolding lives and their imagined counterparts that a variety of "imagined communities" (Anderson 1983) is formed, communities that generate new kinds of poli-tics, new kinds of collective expression, and new needs for social disci-pline and surveillance on the part of elites.

All this has many contexts and implications that cannot be pursued here. But what does it imply for ethnography? It implies that ethnogra-phers can no longer simply be content with the "thickness" they bring to

the local and the particular, nor can they assume that as they approach the local, they approach something more elementary, more contingent, and thus more "real" than life seen in larger-scale perspectives. For what is real about ordinary lives is now real in many ways that range from the sheer contingency of individual lives and the vagaries of competence and talent that distinguish persons in all societies to the "realisms" that individuals are exposed to and draw upon in their ordinary lives.

These complex, partly imagined lives must now form the bedrock of ethnography, at least of the sort of ethnography that wishes to retain a special voice in a transnational, deterritorialized world. For the new power of the imagination in the fabrication of social lives is inescapably tied up with images, ideas, and opportunities that come from elsewhere, often moved around by the vehicles of mass media. Thus, standard cultural reproduction (like standard English) is now an endangered activity that succeeds only by conscious design and political will, where it succeeds at all. Indeed, where insulation from the larger world seems to have been successful, and the role of the global imagination withheld from ordinary people—in places like Albania, North Korea, and Burma—what seems to appear instead is a bizarre state-sponsored realism, which always contains within it the possibility of the genocidal and totalizing lunacies of a Pol Pot or of long-repressed desires for critique or exit, as are emerging in Albania and Myanmar (Burma) as this paper is being written.

The issue, therefore, is not how ethnographic writing can draw on a wider range of literary models, models which too often elide the distinction between the life of fiction and the fictionalization of lives, but to figure out a way in which the role of the imagination in social life can be described in a new sort of ethnography that is not so resolutely localizing. There is, of course, much to be said for the local, the particular, and the contigent, which have always been the forte of ethnographic writing at its best. But where lives are being imagined partly in and through "realisms" that must be in one way or another official or large scale in their inspiration, then the ethnographer needs to find new ways to represent the links between the imagination and social life. This problem of representation is not quite the same as the familiar problem of micro and macro, small and large scale, though it has important connections to it. The connection between the problem of ethnographically representing imagined lives and of making the move from local realities to large-scale structures is implicit in Sherry Ortner's paper in this volume. Taken together, Ortner's argument and mine point to the importance of embedding large-scale realities in concrete life-worlds, but they also open up the possibility of divergent interpretations of what "locality" implies.

The link between the imagination and social life, I would suggest, is increasingly a global and deterritorialized one. Thus, those who represent "real" or "ordinary" lives must resist making claims to epistemic privilege in regard to the lived particularities of social life. Rather, ethnography must redefine itself as that practice of representation which illuminates the power of large-scale, imagined life possibilities over specific life trajectories. This is "thickness" with a difference, and the difference lies in a new alertness to the fact that ordinary lives today are increasingly powered not by the givenness of things but by the possibilities that the media (either directly or indirectly) suggest are available. Put another way, some of the force of Bourdieu's idea of the "habitus" can be retained (Bourdieu 1977), but the stress must be put on his idea of improvisation, for improvisation no longer occurs within a relatively bounded set of thinkable postures, but is always skidding and taking off, powered by the imagined vistas of mass-mediated master narratives. There has been a general change in the global conditions of life-worlds: put simply, where once improvisation was snatched out of the glacial undertow of habitus, habitus now has to be painstakingly reinforced in the face of life-worlds that are frequently in flux.

Three examples will suggest something of what I have in mind. In January 1988, my wife (who is a white American historian of India) and I (a Tamil Brahman male, brought up in Bombay and turned into *Homo academicus* in the United States), along with our son, six members of my eldest brother's family, and an entourage of his colleagues and employees, decided to visit the Meenaksi Temple in Madurai, one of the great pilgrimage centers of South India. My wife has done research there, off and on, for the last two decades.

Our purposes in going were various. My brother and his wife were worried about the marriage of their eldest daughter and were concerned to have the good wishes of as many powerful deities as possible in their search for a good marriage alliance. For my brother, Madurai was a special place, since he spent most of his first twenty years there with my mother's extended family. He thus had old friends and memories in all the streets around the temple. Now he had come to Madurai as a senior railway official, with business to conduct with several private businessmen who wished to persuade him of the quality of their bids. Indeed, one of these potential clients had arranged for us to be accommodated in a garish "modern" hotel in Madurai, a stone's throw from the temple, and drove him around in a Mercedes, while the rest of us took in our own Madurai.

Our eleven-year-old son, fresh from Philadelphia, knew he was in the

presence of the practices of heritage and dove to the ground manfully, in the Hindu practice of prostration before elders and deities, whenever he was asked. He put up graciously with the incredible noise, crowding, and sensory rush that a major Hindu temple involves. For myself, I was there to embellish my brother's entourage, to add some vague moral force to their wishes for a happy marriage for their daughter, to reabsorb the city in which my mother grew up (I had been there several times before), to share in my wife's excitement about returning to a city and a temple that are possibly the most important parts of her imagination, and to fish for cosmopolitanism in the raw.

So we entered the fourteen-acre temple compound, an important entourage, though one among many, and were soon approached by one of the several priests who officiate there. This one recognized my wife, who asked him where Thangam Bhattar was. Thangam Bhattar was the priest she had been closest to and with whom she had worked most closely. The answer was "Thangam Bhattar is in Houston." This punch line took us all a while to absorb, and then it all came together in a flash. The Indian community in Houston, like many communities of Asian Indians in the United States, had built a Hindu temple, this one devoted to Meenaksi, the ruling deity in Madurai. Thangam Bhattar had been persuaded to go there, leaving his family behind. He leads a lonely life in Houston, assisting in the complex cultural politics of reproduction in an overseas Indian community, presumably earning some dollars, while his wife and children stay on in their small home near the temple. The next morning, my wife and niece visited Thangam Bhattar's home, where they were told of his travails in Houston, and they told the family what had gone on with us in the intervening years. There is a transnational irony here, of course: Carol Breckenridge, American historian, arrives in Madurai waiting with bated breath to see her closest informant and friend, a priest, and discovers that he is in faraway Houston, which is far away even from faraway Philadelphia.

But this transnational irony has many threads that unwind backward and forward in time to large and fluid structures of meaning and of communication. Among these threads are my brother's hopes for his daughter, who subsequently married a Ph.D. candidate in physical chemistry in an upstate New York university and recently came to Syracuse herself; my wife's recontextualizing of her Madurai experiences in a world that, at least for some its central actors, now includes Houston; and my own realization that Madurai's historical cosmopolitanism has acquired a new global dimension, and that some key lives that constitute the heart of the temple's ritual practices now have Houston in their imagined biographies.

Each of these threads could and should be unwound. They lead to an understanding of the globalization of Hinduism, the transformation of "natives" into cosmopolites of their own sort, and the fact that the temple is now not only a magnet for persons from all over the world but also itself reaches out. The goddess Meenaksi has a living presence in Houston.

Our son, meanwhile, has in his repertoire of experiences a journey of the "roots" variety. He may remember this, as he fabricates his own life as an American of partly Indian descent. But he may remember more vividly his sudden need to go to the bathroom while we were going from sanctum to sanctum in a visit to another major temple in January 1989, and the bathroom at the guesthouse of a charitable foundation in which he found blissful release. But here too is an unfinished story, which involves the dynamics of family, of memory, and of tourism, for an eleven-year-old hyphenated American who has to go periodically to India, whether he likes it or not, and encounter the many webs of shifting biography that he encounters there. This account, like the ones that follow, needs not only to be thickened but to be stirred, but it must serve for now as one glimpse of an ethnography that focuses on the unyoking of imagination from place.

My second vignette comes from a collection of pieces of one kind of magical realism, a book by Julio Cortázar called *A Certain Lucas* (1984). Since there has been much borrowing of literary models and metaphors in recent anthropology, but relatively little anthropology of literature, a word about this choice of example seems appropriate. Fiction, like myth, is part of the conceptual repertoire of contemporary societies. Readers of novels and poems can be moved to intense action (as with *The Satanic Verses* of Salman Rushdie), and their authors often contribute to the construction of social and moral maps for their readers. Even more relevant for my purposes, prose fiction is the exemplary province of the post-Renaissance imagination, and in this regard it is central to a more general ethnography of the imagination. Even small fragments of fantasy, such as Cortázar constructs in this brief story, show the contemporary imagination at work.

Magical realism is interesting not only as a literary genre but also as a representation of how the world appears to some people who live in it (for an interesting commentary on one aspect of this approach to literary narrative, see Felman 1989). Cortázar is doubtless a unique person, and not everyone imagines the world his way, but his vision is surely part of the evidence that the globe has begun to spin in new ways. Like the myths of small-scale society, as rendered in the anthropological classics of the past, contemporary literary fantasies tell us something about displace-

ment, disorientation, and agency in the contemporary world (for an ex-
cellent recent example of this approach, in the context of cultural studies,
see Rosaldo 1989: chapter 7).

Since we have now learned a great deal about the writing of ethnog-
raphy (Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer 1986; Geertz
1988), we are in a strong position to move to an anthropology of repre-
sentation that would profit immensely from our recent discoveries about
the politics and poetics of "writing culture." In this view, we can restore
to the recent critiques of ethnographic practice the lessons of earlier cri-
tiques of anthropology as a field of practices operating within a larger
world of institutional policies and power (viz., Hymes 1969).

The Cortázar story in question, which is both more light-handed and
more heavy-hitting than some other, larger chunks of magical realism, is
called "Swimming in a Pool of Gray Grits." It concerns the discovery in
1964, by a certain Professor José Migueletes, of a swimming pool in
which, instead of water, there are gray grits. This discovery is quickly
taken note of in the world of sports, and, at the Ecological Games in
Baghdad, the Japanese champion, Akiro Tashuma, breaks the world rec-
ord by "swimming five meters in one minute and four seconds" (Cortázar
1984:80). Corázar's piece goes on to speak of how Tashuma solved the
technical problem of breathing in this semisolid medium. The press then
enters the picture, and here is the rest of the vignette (pp. 82–83), in
Cortázar's own irreducibly spare words:

> Asked about the reasons why many international athletes show
> an ever-growing proclivity for swimming in grits, Tashuma would
> only answer that after several millenia it has finally been proven
> that there is a certain monotony in the act of jumping into the
> water and coming out all wet without anything having changed
> very much in the sport. He let it be understood that the imagi-
> nation is slowly coming into power and that it's time now to apply
> revolutionary forms to old sports whose only incentive is to lower
> records by fractions of a second, when that can be done, which
> is quite rare. He modestly declared himself unable to suggest
> equivalent discoveries for soccer and tennis, but he did make an
> oblique reference to a new development in sports, mentioning a
> glass ball that may have been used in a basketball game in Naga,
> and whose accidental but always possible breakage brought on
> the act of hara-kiri by the whole team whose fault it was. Every-
> thing can be expected of Nipponese culture, especially if it sets
> out to imitate the Mexican. But to limit ourselves to the West and

to grits, this last item has begun to demand higher prices, to the particular delight of countries that produce it, all of them in the Third World. The death by asphyxiation of seven Australian children who tried to practice fancy dives in the new pool in Canberra demonstrates, however, the limitations of this interesting product, the use of which should not be carried too far when amateurs are involved.

Now this is a very funny parable, and it could be read at many levels, from many points of view. For my purposes, I note first that it is written by an Argentine, born in Brussels, who lived in Paris from 1952 until his death in 1984. The link between magical realism and the self-imposed exile in Paris of many of its finest voices deserves further exploration—but what else does this vignette have to offer for the study of the new ethnoscapes of the contemporary world? The story is partly about a crazy invention that captures the faraway imagination of Tashuma, a person who believes that "the imagination is slowly coming into power." It is also about the transnational journey of ideas that may begin as playful meditations and end up as bizarre technical realities that can result in death. Here one if forced to think about the trajectory of *The Satanic Verses*, which began as a satiric meditation on good, evil, and Islam, and ended up a weapon in group violence in many parts of the world.[4]

The vignette is also about the internationalization of sport, and about the spiritual exhaustion that comes from technical obsession with small differences in performance. Different actors can bring their "imaginations" to bear on the problem of sport in different ways. The Olympic Games of the past are full of incidents that reveal complex ways in which individuals situated within specific national and cultural trajectories imposed their imaginations on global audiences. In Seoul in 1988, the defeated Korean boxer who sat in the ring for several hours to publically proclaim his shame as a Korean, and the Korean officials who swarmed into the ring to assault a New Zealand referee for what they thought was a biased decision, were bringing their imagined lives to bear on the official Olympic narratives of fair play, good sportsmanship, and clean competition. The whole question of steroids, including the case of Ben Johnson, the Canadian runner (see MacAloon 1990), is also not far from the technical absurdities of Cortázar's story, in which the body is manipulated to yield new results in a world of competitive and commoditized spectacle. The vision of seven Australian children diving into a pool of grits and dying also deserves to be drawn out into the many stories of individual abnegation and physical abuse that sometimes power the spectacles of global sport.

Cortázar is also meditating on the problems of imitation and cultural transfer, suggesting that they can lead to violent and culturally peculiar innovations. The adjective "cultural" appears gratuitous here, and needs some justification. That Tokyo and Canberra, Baghdad and Mexico City are all involved in the story does not mean that they have become fungible pieces of an arbitrarily shifting, delocalized world. Each of these places does have complex local realities, such that death in a swimming pool has one kind of meaning in Canberra, as do hosting large spectacles in Iraq and making bizarre technical innovations in Japan. Whatever Cortázar's idea about these differences, they remain cultural, but no longer in the inertial mode that the word previously implied. Culture does imply difference, but the differences now are no longer, if you wish, taxonomical; they are interactive and refractive, so that competing for a swimming championship takes on the peculiar power that it does in Canberra partly because of the way some transnational forces have come to be configured in the imagination of its residents. Culture thus shifts from being some sort of inert, local substance to being a rather more volatile form of difference. This is an important part of the reason for writing *against* culture, as Lila Abu-Lughod suggests in her paper in this volume.

There are surely other macronarratives that spin out of this small piece of magical realism, but all of them remind us that lives today are as much acts of projection and imagination as they are enactments of known scripts or predictable outcomes. In this sense, all lives have something in common with international athletic spectacle, as guestworkers strive to meet standards of efficiency in new national settings, and brides who marry into households at large distances from home strive to meet the criteria of hypercompetence which these new contexts often demand. The deterritorialized world in which many people now live—some moving in it actively, others living with their absences or sudden returns—is, like Cortázar's pool of grits, ever thirsty for new technical competences and often harsh with the unprepared. Cortázar's vignette is itself a compressed ethnographic parable, and in teasing out the possible histories of its protagonists and their possible futures, our own ethnographies of literature can become exercises in the interpretation of the new role of the imagination in social life. There is in such efforts a built-in reflexive vertigo, as we contemplate Cortázar inventing Tashuma, but such reflexivity leads not only into reflections on our own representational practices, as writers, but also into the complex nesting of imaginative appropriations that are involved in the construction of agency in a deterritorialized world.

But not all deterritorialization is global in its scope, and not all imagined lives span vast international panoramas. The world on the move affects even small geographical and cultural spaces. In several different

ways, contemporary cinema represents these small worlds of displace-
ment. Mira Nair's films capture the texture of these small displacements,
whose reverberations can nevertheless be large. One of them, *India Caba-
ret*, is what I have called an ethnodrama.[5] Made in 1984, it tells about a
small group of women who have left towns and villages, generally in the
southern part of India, to come to Bombay and work as cabaret dancers
in a seedy suburban bar-nightclub called the Meghraj.

The film contains (in the style of the early Godard) extended conver-
sations between the filmmaker and a few of these women, who are pre-
sented facing the camera, as if they are talking to the viewer of the film.
These interview segments, which are richly narrative, are intercut with
dance sequences from the cabaret and with extended treatments of the
sleazy paradoxes of the lives of some of the men who are regulars there.
The film also follows one of the women back to her natal village, where
we are shown the pain of her ostracism, since her occupation in Bombay
is known to everyone. It is rumored that this scene was staged (replayed)
for the benefit of the filmmaker, but if anything this replay adds to the
awkwardness and pain of the sequence. The film is not about happy end-
ings, and it leaves us with possibilities of various sorts in the lives of these
women, all of whom are simultaneously proud and ashamed, dignified
and defiant, de facto prostitutes who have fabricated identities as artists.

For the present purposes, what is most important about this film is
the way in which it shows that the cabaret club is not simply a market-
place for desire but also a place where imagined lives are negotiated: the
dancers act out their precarious sense of themselves as dancers; the sec-
ond-rate band tries to work up its musical passions, which are fed by the
aspiration of the Catholic community in Goa (western India) to play Eu-
ropean and American instrumental music well. The men who come as
customers clearly see themselves as participants in something larger than
life, and they behave exactly like the customers in cabaret scenes in many
Hindi commercial films. In fact, the scenario that provides the meeting
ground for all these characters is provided by the cabaret sequences from
Hindi commercial cinema.

In many such stock scenes, a tawdry nightclub quartet plays an op-
pressively sensuous melody, combining Western and Indian instruments
and tonalities, while the villain and his cronies consume obviously nasty
alcoholic drinks and watch a painfully explicit dance routine by a vamp-
star. The hero is usually insinuated into the action in some way that si-
multaneously emphasizes his virility and his moral superiority over the
tawdry environment. These scenes are usually filled with extras from the
film studio, who struggle to maintain the sophisticated visage of persons

habituated to the high life. All in all, these scenes are stereotypically vi-
carious in their approach to drink, dance, and sound, and are somehow
depressing. The clients, the dancers, and the band at the Meghraj seem to
play out a slightly out-of-step, somnambulistic version of such classic
Hindi film sequences.

Life in the Meghraj is surely driven by commercial cinematic images,
but their force is inadequate to cover the anxieties, the self-abasement,
and the agonized drama of leisure in which the characters are all engaged.
Yet the characters in this ethnodrama have images and ideas of themselves
that are not simply contingent outcomes of their "ordinary" lives (or
simple escapes from them), but are fabrications based on a subtle com-
plicity with the discursive and representational conventions of the Hindi
cinema.

Thus, though this film is a documentary in conventional terms, it is
also an ethnodrama, in the sense that it shows us the dramatic structure
and the characters that animate a particular strand of Bombay's ways of
life. These "actors" are also "characters," not so much because they have
obvious idiosyncrasies attached to them but because they are fabrications
negotiated in the encounter between the efforts of cinema to represent
cabaret and of "real" cabarets to capture the excitement of cinema. It is
this negotiation, not only the negotiation of bodies, that is the real order
of business at the Meghraj. The women who work in the cabaret are de-
territorialized and mobile: if you wish, they are guestworkers in Bombay.
It is hard to see in them the discourse of resistance (though they are
cynical about men, as prostitutes everywhere are), although their very
bodily postures, their linguistic aggressiveness, their bawdy, quasi-lesbian
play with each other does imply a kind of raunchy and self-conscious
counterculture. What we have is a sense that they are putting lives to-
gether, fabricating their own characters, using the cinematic and social
materials at their disposal.

There are individuals here, to be sure, and agency as well, but what
drives these individuals and their agency are the complex realisms that
animate them: a crude realism about men and their motives; a sort of
capitalist realism that animates their discourse about wealth and money;
a curious socialist realism that underlies their own categorizations of
themselves as dignified workers in the flesh trade, not very different from
the housewives of Bombay. They constitute a striking ethnographic ex-
ample for this essay because the very displacement that is the root of their
problems (though their original departures turn out usually to be re-
sponses to even worse domestic horrors) is also the engine of their dreams
of wealth, of respectability, of autonomy.

Thus, pasts in these constructed lives are as important as futures, and the more we unravel these pasts, the closer we approach worlds that are less and less cosmopolitan, more and more local. Yet even the most local-ized of these worlds, at least in societies like India, has become inflected, even afflicted, by cosmopolitan scripts that drive the politics of families, the frustrations of laborers, the dreams of local headmen. Once again, we need to be careful not to suppose that as we work backward in these imagined lives, we will hit some local, cultural bedrock, constituted of a closed set of reproductive practices, untouched by rumors of the world at large (for a different, but complementary, angle on these facts, see Han-nerz 1989). Mira Nair's *India Cabaret* is a brilliant model of how ethnog-raphy in a deterritorialized world might handle the problems of "character" and "actor," for it shows how self-fabrication actually proceeds in a world of types and typification. It retains the tension between global and local that drives cultural reproduction today.

The vignettes I have used in this section have two purposes. One is to suggest the sorts of situations in which the workings of the imagination in a deterritorialized world can be detected. The second is to suggest that many lives are now inextricably linked with representations, and thus we need to incorporate the complexities of expressive representation (film, novels, travel accounts) into our ethnographies, not only as technical ad-juncts but as primary material with which to construct and interrogate our own representations.

CONCLUSION: INVITATIONS AND EXHORTATIONS

Although the emergent cosmopolitanisms of the world have complex local histories, and their translocal dialogue has a complex history as well (Is-lamic pilgrimage is just one example), it seems advisable to treat the pres-ent as a historical moment and use our understanding of it to illuminate and guide the formulation of historical problems. This is not perverse Whiggishness; it is rather a response to a practical problem: in many cases it is simply not clear at present how or where one would locate a chrono-logical baseline for the phenomena we wish to study. The strategy of "beginning at the beginning" becomes even more self-defeating when one wishes to illuminate the lived relationships between imagined lives and the webs of cosmopolitanism within which they unfold. Thus, not to put too fine a point on it, we need an ethnography that is sensitive to the historical nature of what we see today (which also involves careful com-parison, as every good historian knows), but I suggest that we cut into the problem through the historical present.

While much has been written about the relationship between history and anthropology (by practitioners of both disciplines) in the last decade, few have given careful thought to what it means to construct genealogies of the present. Especially in regard to the many alternative cosmopolitanisms that characterize the world today, and the complex, transnational cultural flows that link them, there is no easy way to "begin at the beginning." Today's cosmopolitanisms combine experiences of various media with various forms of experience—cinema, video, restaurants, spectator sports, and tourism, to name just a few—that have different national and transnational genealogies. Some of these forms may start out as extremely global and end up as very local—radio would be an example—while others, such as cinema, might have the obverse trajectory. In any particular ethnoscape (a term we might wish to substitute for earlier "wholes" such as villages, communities, and localities), the genealogies of cosmopolitanism are not likely to be the same as its histories: while the genealogies reveal the cultural spaces within which new forms can become indigenized (viz., tourism comes to inhabit the space of pilgrimage in India), the histories of these forms may lead outward to transnational sources and structures. Thus, the most appropriate ethnoscapes for today's world, with its alternative, interactive modernities, should confront genealogy and history with each other, thus leaving the terrain open for interpretations of the ways in which local historical trajectories flow into complicated transnational structures. Of course, this dialogue of histories and genealogies itself has a history, but for this latter history, we surely do not yet possess a master narrative. For those of us who might wish to move toward this new master narrative, whatever its form, new global ethnoscapes must be the critical building blocks. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, in chapter 2 of this volume, suggests that the historical role of anthropology was to fill the "savage slot" in an internal Western dialogue about utopia. A recuperated anthropology must recognize that the genie is now out of the bottle, and that speculations about utopia are everyone's prerogative. Anthropology can surely contribute its special purchase on lived experience to a wider, transdisciplinary study of global cultural processes. But to do this, anthropology must first come in from the cold and face the challenge of making a contribution to cultural studies without the benefit of its previous principal source of leverage—sightings of the savage.

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there, to critical readings of a subsequent draft by Carol Breckenridge and Sherry Ortner, and to several suggestive observations by Richard Fox.

1. These ideas about the cultural economy of a world in motion, as well as the logic of terms such as "ethnoscape," are more fully developed in Appadurai (1990).

2. This is not the place for an extended review of the emergent field of cultural studies. Its British lineages are carefully explored in Hall (1986) and Johnson (1986). But it is clear that this British tradition, associated largely with the now-diasporic Birmingham school, is taking new forms in the United States, as it comes into contact with American cultural anthropology, the new historicism, and language and media studies in the American tradition.

3. This theme, as well as a series of related ideas, is more fully developed in a book in progress, *Imploding Worlds: Imagination and Disjuncture in the Global Cultural Economy*, which I am writing with Carol Breckenridge.

4. The Rushdie controversy is well on its way to becoming an industry. Some of the issues in this controversy are touched on in *Public Culture*, vol. 1, no. 2, and are followed up in a special section devoted to the Rushdie debate in *Public Culture*, vol. 2, no. 1, fall 1989).

5. The following discussion draws heavily on Appadurai and Breckenridge (in press).