

## INTRODUCTION



### Un/common Cultures *Racism and the Rearticulation of Cultural Difference*

#### DISCIPLINES AND PUNISHMENT

Feed me/Eat me: Anthropology

Help me/Hurt me: Sociology

— BRUCE NAUMAN, “Anthro-Socio,” 1992

In a space like the Tate Modern in London, Bruce Nauman’s video installation “Anthro-Socio” plays across several televisions, distributed through different rooms that project color or black-and-white versions of Man’s appeals to feed or eat him, help or hurt him. The effect is to imbed the viewer in a structure of address that is at once intimate and ubiquitous, disturbing yet seductive. Nauman forces the viewer to enter the installation as a participant-observer, then literally turns that experience on its head as he confronts the viewer, as an alienated spectator, with upside-down images of the opera singer Rinde Eckert’s revolving head (“Rinde Spinning” or “Rinde Facing Camera”) sonorously exhorting “Feed me/Eat me: Anthropology” . . . “Help me/Hurt me: Sociology.” The multiply positioned televisions and projection surfaces, all playing the same thing, but in different tonalities, speeds, and chronometric loops, produce an effect that is at once poetic, arrhythmic, and cacophonous — as if one is listening to a broken-down choir or a Gregorian dirge. And indeed, it is difficult, moving through the space, to distinguish the varied visual and aural forms of enunciation from the overall “mass effect” the installation is designed to produce. It seems impossible to imagine even disciplinary knowledge without the intercession of the media form.<sup>1</sup> For Nauman stages a reflection not only on the mass-

mediated forms of culture, but also on the mass-mediated explanations of culture that announce themselves as anthropology and sociology. Nauman's deft use of parody reduces disciplinary organicisms like "culture" or "society" to Durkheimian or Lévi-Straussian functions: feed:eat :: help:hurt. It is as if the disciplines, as a paradoxical success of their mass mediation, had doubled back on themselves, yielding productive and populist displacements of their central concepts. It is with these forms of production and displacement of *un/common culture* that these essays are concerned.

The possibilities for writing any kind of intellectual history have changed dramatically since Foucault first propounded the idea of a "history of the present," more than thirty years ago, in *Discipline and Punish*.<sup>2</sup> While psychoanalysis and ethnology have been the touchstone "counter-sciences" of Foucault's critique of History, his understanding of a kind of "anthropology" as both foundational to the human sciences and disintegrating within it may help us to understand the present moment. For "anthropology constitutes the fundamental arrangement that governed and controlled the path of philosophic thought . . . but it is disintegrating before our eyes, since we are beginning to recognize and denounce in it, in a critical mode, both the forgetfulness of the opening that made it possible and a stubborn obstacle standing obstinately in the way of an imminent form of thought."<sup>3</sup> How then, should we understand the task of writing intellectual history when "historical descriptions are necessarily ordered by the present state of knowledge," when "they increase with every transformation and never cease, in turn, to break with themselves," when "the great problem presented by such historical analyses is . . . one of transformations that serve as new foundations, the rebuilding of foundations"?<sup>4</sup>

In *Un/common Cultures* I attempt a "history of the present that is an attempt to uncover the structure of knowledge at the brink of another structure of transformation." It is an attempt to write through disciplinary historicisms of culture, and thus "to write of a present aperture which is almost history; less an effort to write beyond than to signal a possible becoming."<sup>5</sup> *Un/common Cultures* lies at the cusp of disciplinary breakage and transformation overtaking not just anthropology, but all of the human sciences.

Although I engage the disciplines of anthropology and sociology through the practices of close reading, I am not seeking to write a truer disciplinary history of the culture concept. Rather, I understand a history of the present to be self-consciously located in the field of

power relations and political struggle. I begin with the social fact and continuing existence of racism, not with its disappearance. I am thus attentive to shifts in the framing of the culture concept as the definitional base of relativism and antidote to racism. I seek to apply the genealogical method to race and culture as analytic objects as they travel though and are lodged against political fields. My attempt is to track points of their emergence as a result of substitutions, transpositions, displacements, and reversals.<sup>6</sup> I examine the ways in which “culture” often substitutes or stands in for race, and seek to track the displacements in fields of knowledge and power that occur when race decenters or dislodges culture. I examine what happens when race is moved to the center of social theory and when culture performs the work of racial difference. The tension between these two processes scores this book.

My work in this volume is thus more invested in “anti-positivities” than in positivities. I am less concerned with understanding “culture as a set of ideas,” with the work of forming cultural descriptions, than with how “ideas and descriptions about cultures” circulate; that is, with understanding the kinds of racializing work that ideas about culture perform. Culture is increasingly produced as an effect of the circulation of its descriptions. Such “cultural effects” mark a primary sense in which we might understand the production of un/common cultures. Therefore, our task is not to understand how culture operates, but to understand how explanations of culture function. These are not completely separable tasks; indeed, the latter is always constitutive of the former. Yet it is the former that has been taken as the normative object and work of the discipline.

My objective is to understand how culture is staged as a performative or as an “effect” wherein disciplinary debates about culture are as much a discursive point of articulation for processes of globalization (like the “New States” theory of cultural modernization, which I describe in chapter 6) as are popular cultural (or populist cultural) notions (about, for example, Islam and human rights, as discussed in chapter 7). This necessitates a strategy for following the points of application through the substitutions, transpositions, displacements, and reversals in debates as varied as the attempts of Indian Dalits to have casteism understood as a form of racism in Durban (see chapter 5) or the use of relativist notions of culture to justify liberal human-rights intervention (see chapter 7). These essays about Elsie Clews Parsons, Alice Fletcher, Franz Boas, W. E. B. Du Bois, B. R. Ambedkar, Clifford Geertz, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Louis Dumont, and



M. N. Srinivas enact a genealogical grid for making sense of the flow of ideas about culture in a history of the present.

The provocation for most of the essays in this volume emerged from two decades of graduate teaching in which I sought to tie the history of anthropology and the generation of its central concepts to the legacies of American and European imperialism. As I moved race and racism to the center of analysis, “culture” appeared to be less a solution to racism than a synonym for race, in contrapuntal relation with it. In one sense, these essays perform the simple act of asking what we make of the history of the discipline when its central defining concept, culture, is bracketed, and race is foregrounded. Yet an important argument I make in these essays is that the late-nineteenth-century consolidation of the culture concept in anthropology was ultimately a recidivist one, producing multiple “culture effects” which continue to perform the work of race, circulating at local, national, and transnational levels. A revitalized anthropological analysis lies not in the attempt to hone a better “culture concept” or even in laudable calls for “public anthropology,” but in recognizing that the recidivist nature of culture (or what some have called “the death” of culture) requires a genealogical method that can identify the ways in which racism is rearticulated through the enunciation of cultural difference.<sup>7</sup> In my view, the dislocation and relocation of disciplinary objects such as gender, sexuality, race, culture, caste, and class can best be mapped through forms of what I will call “affiliative interdisciplinarity.” As Scott Michaelson and David Johnson suggest, such interdisciplinarity would not be possible without “anthropology” in its broadest sense, and yet interdisciplinarity ultimately makes no difference to disciplinary thinking, because anthropology exists.<sup>8</sup>

These essays on Indian sociology and American and French anthropology, the disciplinary formations that have most shaped my intellectual orientation, were written over the course of the last decade, a time of transition in the economic and political order of things, and in the forms of social theory developed to describe the changing political order, at once both created by and enabling of the emergence of globalization. They aim to dislodge “culture” from its received meanings in disciplinary formations so that the histories of how culture emerges as flashpoints of political mobilization and intellectual debate can be apprehended across time and space.

However, my commitment lies not in narrating truer disciplinary histories, but in tracking how analytic objects such as “culture,”

“caste,” or “race” circulate across and through disciplines, places, and political formations. What interests me is how “race” and theories about it travel, and how gender and sexuality change our understanding of disciplinary objects like “society” or “culture.” Globalization not only produces a shift in what we take to be an analytic object, but also enables the displacement and relocation of apparently stable analytic objects like “caste” or “race” to new contexts. For example, the attempts by India’s Dalits at the 2001 World Conference on Racism to form analytic analogies between distinct forms of oppression to assert that casteism is like racism, or attempts by Palestinians at the same venue to assert that the Israeli state and its occupied territories represent a form of apartheid, illustrate how accounts of race and racism travel, and how the processes of dislocation and transposition have helped to reshape new political alliances and possibilities.

*Un/common Cultures* begins and ends with a critique of feminist universalism, the assumption that gendering cultural analysis inevitably worked toward relativist rather than racist or culturalist stereotypes. The framing chapters address what might be called the “gender question” of culturalism. Although they cannot resolve the question of why gender relations are so frequently the site of culturalist formulations, they do follow the production of racialized “woman questions” in the history of Americanist anthropology, and the way this strain of particularly feminist anthropology is imbedded in feminist legal practice and human rights discourses. While the first essay scrutinizes the imbedding of racialized forms of gender in a relativist notion of culture, the last essay, in a quite different tenor, describes how immigration and legal studies lay claim to this notion of culture, describing circuits of culturalism in interpenetrating levels of juridicality through the roles expert witnesses and anthropologists play in marking cultural practices detrimental to women in human-rights activism.

There is no doubt that histories of imperialism are imbedded in the very processes through which intellectual concepts emerged to make sense of society. Thus, while chapter 1 explores how the conquest of the Americas played out through an “Indian question” imbricated in the emergence of cultural relativism, chapters 2, 4, and 5 explore how the “Negro question” plays out in disciplinary discussions of culture. Taken together these essays enact a tracking of displacements between the “Woman question,” the “Indian question,” and the “Negro question” across national and disciplinary fields.

These essays thus interrogate the ways in which the modern an-



thropological notion of culture and an internationalized notion of race were inevitably linked. They describe how race works its way through the national disciplinary traditions of American anthropology, French anthropology, and Indian sociology, as well as international institutions such as UNESCO or the UNHCR. Chapters 2 and 3 explore the role UNESCO played in the internationalization of the modern concept of race. Chapters 3 through 7 pose India as the site for the working through of debates about race and culture. India is a rhizomatic node for the circulation of debates about culture and culturalist discourses. Whether it is Claude Lévi-Strauss's travels in India and Pakistan refracted in his melancholic view of cultural loss and decline (chapter 3); Louis Dumont's use of India to reflect more deeply on the character of Western democracy (chapter 4); Boas's views on race recycling themselves sixty years later in a debate between Indian sociologists on whether caste should be considered a form of racism (chapter 5); Clifford Geertz's misunderstanding of the Dalit intellectual and statesman B. R. Ambedkar's work to frame a primordialist explanation of Indian politics (chapter 6); or human-rights reportage fixing culture rather than polity as the source of violence against South Asian women (chapter 7), India is but one circuit through which forms of culturalist explanation flow.

#### CULTURE LINES: THE "NEW CULTURALISMS"

We are constantly reminded, as a matter of routine scientific and political consensus, that we live in a "postracial" world. Yet, as Paul Gilroy notes in *After Empire*, with the apparent defeat of racist ideologies in the postwar era, the problem of the twenty-first century is no longer the color line, but the culture line. If the relativist notion of culture seemed to triumph over an absolutist notion of culture at the beginning of the twentieth century, its nature was irresolute by the beginning of the twenty-first century, in some ways as tied to the distribution and legitimation of power as was its nineteenth-century predecessor. As Ashis Nandy observes: "The concept of cultural relativism, expressed in the popular anthropological view that each culture must be studied in terms of its own categories, is limited because it stops short of insisting that every culture must recognize the way it is construed by other cultures. It is easy to leave other cultures to their own devices in the name of cultural relativism, especially if the

visions of the future of these other cultures have already been cannibalized by the world view of one's own."<sup>9</sup>

The contemporary use of relativist notions of culture or community as a catch-all explanation for a variety of phenomena that used to be explained by race, biology, or genetics has been remarked on by a wide range of critics. There is by now an unfortunate canon, from intelligence studies to studies of primate mothering, which purportedly proves the influence of nature over nurture. Thus, the growing dissatisfaction with the so-called limits of social-constructivism explanation coincides with a reemergence of biological explanation.<sup>10</sup> While it is unsurprising that ethological and sociobiological models of culture correspond to aggressive neoliberalism, there has not been a straightforward shift from sociological to biological signifiers of difference.<sup>11</sup> Rather it would seem that what I term the "new culturalism" has emerged alongside the resurgence of organic or genetic explanation to both describe and justify racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism.

In a sense, the "new culturalism" is not new at all. One can locate its roots in eighteenth-century philosophy or in the nineteenth century's obsession with civilizational ranking; one can date it to the era of decolonization, or to the end of the Cold War, or to the emergence of globalization.<sup>12</sup> Thus, I am less concerned with a purely historicist reading that would attempt to fix its origins to a particular era, than with seeing culturalism as a form of circulation which, while temporally specific, is not unique to any one historical epoch. My objective is to formulate a means of tracking, through political fields and national disciplinarity, the shifting ways in which culture has stood in for race or as a form of negative ideology. The essays in this collection weave across and through different discourses of what produces culture as an analytic object and form of social description: American anthropology, Indian and French sociology, and international institutions like the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) or the United Nations High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR).

Culturalism, according to Aijaz Ahmad, is simply, "an ideology which treats culture not only as an integral element in social practices but as the determining element."<sup>13</sup> Yet, in perhaps the most persuasive account of the new culturalism, or "neoracism," Etienne Balibar argues that it is tied to the ascendance of postwar international institutions that defined and denounced biological racism, so that "its



dominant theme is not heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others, but only the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of lifestyles and traditions.”<sup>14</sup> This “racism without races” is what Pierre-Andre Taguieff calls “differentialist racism”—the result of a turn-about effect that actually absorbs antiracist discourses, such that “races do not constitute visible biological units because in reality there are no human races.”<sup>15</sup> This differentialist racism insists that cultures can neither be composite, shared, nor held in common; it rather articulates *uncommon cultures* as forms of alterity and incomprehensibility, positing that adverse outcomes arise from such cultural difference. Anthropology has been implicated in such differentialism, because it has taken its normative work to be the description of cultural *difference*, rather than the mapping of cultural commons or affinities. The line demarcating difference from commonality in un/common cultures is meant to emphasize that what is uncommon, singular, or distinct about cultures can only be understood in relation to the work of finding affinity or of making common cause—what Claude Lévi-Strauss might have meant when he spoke of a “coalition of cultures.”

The extent to which globalization (regardless of whether its historic origins are located in the sixteenth century or late twentieth) both produces and is produced by culturalist explanation is far from clear. Yet my understanding of how ideas of culture both frame and instantiate neoliberal economies through processes of circulation differs from world-systems theorists’ insistence on the production of a uniform “geoculture” or even a highly differentiated global culture.<sup>16</sup> It is also distinct from the idea that globalization produces the professionalized and mediating “third cultures” of large cosmopolitan cities—“practices, bodies of knowledge, conventions and lifestyles which have developed in ways that have become increasingly independent of nation-states.”<sup>17</sup> Such work, while valuable, tends to focus on culture as a set of positivities and processes, rather than as forms of circulation.<sup>18</sup> Culture is thus not something merely acted on by globalization, nor is it primarily a bounded set of social interactions constituting social space. Culture, as it travels through, but also shapes the world system, is about tracking shifting logics of culturalist explanation across and within multiple sites of circulation that destabilize the distinction between life world and analytic system.<sup>19</sup>

The last half of the twentieth century can be seen to have ushered in a transition or shift in modes of knowing; that this shift—labeled “poststructuralism” or, in Jamesonian terms, “postmodernism: the cultural logic of late capitalism”—was experienced as a crisis by a number of disciplines has already been well-remarked. And yet the decades of the 1980s and 1990s in particular—what some analysts have referred to as the era of “high globalization”—seem to have corresponded to a particularly intense period of crisis, not just for anthropology, but for the human sciences in general. Intensified, but also dispersed forms of political struggle produced a plethora of analytic objects that were no longer theoretically recognizable, or whose forms had been emptied of agreed-upon meanings within the human sciences. The primary response of anthropology to this crisis was to reify its understanding of culture, insisting that its understanding of cultural relativism was an antidote to racism, instead of recognizing how both popular and disciplinary explanations of culture or “culturalism” were increasingly deployed to perform the work of racism. This is perhaps clearest when culture enters the courtroom, and forms of culturalism as “cultural rights” come to mark zones of expanding juridicality and shrinking community (see chapter 7).

Aside from the critiques of national character studies conducted during the Second World War, or of Oscar Lewis’s “culture of poverty” ethnography (which came most powerfully from affected groups outside anthropology), the production of culturalist explanation within anthropology is one the discipline has been slow to confront. This may be in part due to the fact that “anthropological culturalism had provided humanist and cosmopolitan anti-racism of the post-war period with most of its arguments.”<sup>20</sup> Thus, anthropologists, in particular, have tended to see the modern, relativist notion of culture itself as a corrective not only to racism (see chapter 2), but also to culturalism. This is why what Holmes and Marcus refer to as “para-ethnography,” the production of meta-level cultural explanations by political or other social actors, may be valuable as a diagnostic, but is ultimately unsatisfying.<sup>21</sup> It holds that the popular forms of culturalism (or in Taguieff’s words, “differentialist racism”) of a Jean-Marie Le Pen can eventually be countered by a truer ethnographic account of culture (the para-ethnographer is to the ethnographer



what the paramedic is to the doctor, or the paralegal is to the lawyer); it also assumes that anthropology as a discipline is not also a producer of culturalist forms of knowing.

Anthropological “culturalism” also tends to insist on culture as the residuum or limit point for understanding communities, rather than as a site of multiple determinations working to produce the “effects” of culture or community. The economic processes of globalization often literally fracture communities by producing labor or conflict diasporas. Yet state policies and corporate practices also work to produce the effect of an operating community, or “community effects,” which become the points of articulation for immigration panics on the one hand, and mass mobilizations for immigrant rights on the other. Such an understanding of immigration as one where culture or community is situated as effects that produce mobilizational sites of contestation and solidarity constitutes another sense in which we might speak of the production of un / common cultures.

The essays of this book were produced within and through specific histories of the neoliberal Indian state and neoliberal U.S. state. These forms of neoliberalism are conjunctive, as in 1991, when the culmination of structural adjustment policies in India produced new polarities of labor migration to the United States — highly paid holders of H-1B (non-immigrant) visas on the one hand, and taxi-drivers and domestic workers on the other. At the same time, they are disjunctive, as with neoliberalism in the United States, which tends to produce a racialized state in which racial conflict is muted by pluralist or multiculturalist ideology, while in India, it produces a weakening of secular pluralism and a heightened sense of ethnic or communal conflict. Although there are important differences between them, both the Indian and U.S. nation-states produce displacements of contestations over experiences of sexuality, “caste,” and “race,” which in turn yield new transnational relationships as analytics and as forms of identity.

Nowhere is affirming the existence of common culture more important than in the two poles of multiculturalist failure: the demise of the secular Indian state’s guiding ethos, “unity in diversity,” at the hands of an increasingly virulent Hindu nationalism; and the conservative attack on curricular multiculturalism in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. In the former case, Indian secularists have had to roll back Hindu nationalist changes to textbooks identifying “foreign” populations and have called for the recognition of “composite” culture as a practice of lived affinities (reminiscent of

Robin Kelly's notion of "polyculturalism"), while in the latter case, secular multiculturalists have seen their demands for work across and within diverse intellectual traditions absorbed by calls for "inclusive curricula," resulting in faith-based representation in primary- and secondary-school curricula. While state forms of multiculturalism have been explored as part of an emerging anthropology of neoliberalism, the extent to which cultural difference structures neoliberalism or to which neoliberalism requires certain articulations of culture for its working is not well understood.<sup>22</sup>

NEW INTELLECTUAL FORMATIONS:  
AFFILIATIVE INTERDISCIPLINARITY

What, then, are the intellectual fields of inquiry that can help map the conjunctures and disjunctures between communities and social movements in India and the United States, between histories of racism and histories of casteism, between the neoliberal Indian state and the "liberal-democratic" U.S. state? Scholarship on caste tends to remain entrenched within area studies, becoming difficult to track within African or South Asian diaspora studies, while scholarship on race also tends to be nation-bound, producing a Brazilian racial paradigm, an American or British racial paradigm, even within African diaspora studies. As an example, we might consider W. E. B. Du Bois's thinking on caste (see chapter 4). Though "caste" is frequently a marker for race as both a descriptive idiom and an analytic device throughout Du Bois's writings, neither African diaspora studies nor South Asian area studies has sought to understand its presence in Du Bois's work, falling as it does between the national spaces through which their ordering concepts are framed: race on the one hand, caste on the other. Similarly, we might examine how the Dalit intellectual B. R. Ambedkar's understanding of "caste" was influenced by his comparative study of slavery, and the ways in which a particular understanding of the history of race and racism in the American South animated Ambedkar's call for "The Annihilation of Caste" and casteism (see chapter 5).<sup>23</sup> Reading the interventions of such thinkers away from their foundational places in black politics on the one hand, and Dalit politics on the other, stages an interpellation of these figures as "trans-status subjects," opening ways for understanding new forms of solidarity.<sup>24</sup> These essays thus map the genealogical dislocation and relocation of disciplinary objects from differ-



ent parts of the world: caste used to explain American race relations, or the Dalit movement's attempt to claim casteism as a form of racism. In chapters 4 and 5 I seek to surface the submerged influence of W. E. B. Du Bois and B. R. Ambedkar on political and disciplinary formations between India and the United States. Though both were contemporaries, one receiving a doctorate at Harvard, the other at Columbia, they did not know each other. Yet the parallels in their lives as intellectuals and the conjunctural intersection of their politics broaches what Nahum Chandler has called, in another context, "the possible form of an interlocution," potentially transforming our understanding not only of the history of American anthropology and Indian sociology, but also of the relationship between area studies and ethnic studies.<sup>25</sup>

This means that anthropology (and ethnic studies) must move away from a tendency to frame communities as organic entities and to see cultures primarily as exemplars of (national or racial) difference. The historical strength of ethnic studies has been its focus on community, while area studies has typified a processual view of a cultural region or area. This collection of essays argues for taking the intersection between area studies and ethnic studies seriously as these two interdisciplinary formations learn to track the displacements and relocations of their central organizing concepts. It asks area studies to revise its formative core idea of an area geography to better conceptualize how processes of globalization are changing our understanding of what constitutes a place or area of the world, particularly in terms of social movements' sense of shared history across regions.<sup>26</sup> It asks ethnic studies to address more centrally the globalizing processes that work to create the effect of operating communities, and to engage more deeply with the geographic areas and languages of region that mark not just a pre-history but ongoing history of diasporic migrations in the world.

The emergent nexus between ethnic studies and area studies allows for a form of affiliative interdisciplinarity with the potential to read cultural displacements, transpositions, and reversals between community and the state, and between disciplines. It differs from other ways of thinking about interdisciplinarity, which presume either a free borrowing and transfer of methods and ideas across disciplines or a congenial amalgamation of disciplinary traditions.<sup>27</sup> What I am calling "affiliative interdisciplinarity" identifies tensions between intellectual traditions such as area studies and ethnic studies — the first a product of the Cold War, the second a product of its critique — but

allies these traditions in pursuit of a conjunctural analytic that can track the emergence and circulation of culturalist argument through local, regional, and national registers. Doing so enables us to study transnational circuits and regional processes comparatively, where the United States and India are linked circuits for understanding refugee and conflict diaspora flows, state minoritization and racialization strategies, and subaltern forms of resistance and citizenship.

For example, although states like the United States or India might share a convergent definition of a “Muslim problem,” in India the demarcation of Muslims lies within an implicit (and often explicit) communalism at the heart of the democratic process of “reform,” while in the United States the racialization of Muslims points to an allegory of reform in the “democratization” projects of the past administration.<sup>28</sup> Even as Muslim communities are constituted by the Indian and U.S. states in ways that yield distinct histories, our understanding of the place of Muslims in American racial formations is enhanced by looking at the pre- and post-Partition experiences of South Asian Muslims in the context of overlapping forms of anti-terrorism legislation in India and the United States which mark a juridical break with the experiences of other communities of color subjected primarily to the violence of U.S. immigration law. Culturalism flows unevenly through systems of juridicality, representing particular communities as concentration points for the application of state power such that Muslims in the United States are subject to exceptional practices of special registration and extraordinary rendition apart from normative but harsh immigration laws which nevertheless entail (at least the expectation of) due process.

Differentialist racism, or the complaint of “uncommon culture,” increasingly targets Muslim societies in the resurgence of civilizationalist argumentation, not only in the United States, but throughout Western Europe.<sup>29</sup> Yet the problem with culturalist explanations of Islam is not just that they result in stereotypic or flattened representations of culture, but that they are produced by the ruling institutions of society, the government, and elite academic institutions.<sup>30</sup> The task of some recent criticism has thus been either to expose the ways in which “culture talk” “assumes that every culture has an essence that defines it, and then explains politics as a consequence of that essence,” to show the deep derivation of culturalist assumptions from political argumentation, or to explain the ways in which Islam becomes both a product and agent of globalization.<sup>31</sup> Unsurprisingly, culturalist representations of Islam frequently place the status



or condition of women at the center of such reform agendas, often as a justification for political intervention.<sup>32</sup> Thus, each of the above critiques of culturalist descriptions of Islam—written by a political scientist, a philosopher, a historian, and anthropologist—speak to the need to develop affiliative strategies for dealing with culturalist arguments as they emerge through different disciplinary and political formations. Such critiques of culturalism also reveal different conjunctural formations of culture as politics, or cultural politics, showing that the task at some moments is to disaggregate the cultural from the political, as in Mahmood Mamdani's analysis of civilizationist argument, while at others it is to show how they are inextricably linked, as in Akeel Bilgrami's critique of "Occidentalism." The emergence of culture as politics, however, need not always signal the hegemonic exercise of power, but can also point to a counter-hegemonic cultural politics of resistance. As I suggest in chapter 7, these are complementary forms of deconstructive and reconstructive analysis; they can work unevenly and at multiple registers; our task is to maintain a productive tension between them. Learning to inhabit this tension can be seen as a method for reading across these essays as well. Some perform essentially deconstructive work on disciplinary formations (chapters 1, 2, 3, and 6); others enact the recombinant or reconstructive work of affiliative interdisciplinarity to undertake connective "histories of the present" (chapters 4, 5); while the concluding essay engages both strategies (chapter 7).

#### TOWARD CULTURES OF THE COMMON

One response to the "new culturalism," especially in its nationalist guises, has been the attempt to define something like a cosmopolitics that would articulate an ethical, but ultimately non-hegemonic form of universalism—either a rooted or vernacular cosmopolitanism, a plural and discrepant cosmopolitanism, a critical and dialogic cosmopolitanism, or a "minority cosmopolitanism."<sup>33</sup> In the persuasive tone of the advocates of minority cosmopolitanism,

cosmopolitans today are often the victims of modernity, failed by capitalism's upward mobility, and bereft of those comforts and customs of national belonging. Refugees, peoples of the diaspora, and migrants and exiles represent the spirit of the cosmopolitan community. Too often, in the West, these peoples are grouped together in a

vocabulary of victimage and come to be recognized as constituting the ‘problem’ of multiculturalism to which late liberalism extends its generous promise of a pluralist existence. Cultural pluralism recognizes difference so long as the general category of the people is still fundamentally understood within a national frame. Such benevolence is often well-intentioned, but it fails to acknowledge the critique of modernity that minority cosmopolitans embody in their history witness to the twentieth century.<sup>34</sup>

Minority cosmopolitanism thus seems poised as an ethical response to the differentialist racism of “uncommon cultures,” but in holding that “cosmopolitanism is infinite ways of being,”<sup>35</sup> the assumption is that minority cosmopolitans passively embody a critique of modernity, rather than actively shape practices of opposition and critique through something like a “common culture.”

Critics have also worried that globalization produces not so much differing forms of cosmopolitanism or hybrid and diverse forms of identity, as a homogenization of cultures. Even in Anthony Appiah’s optimistic account,

in the global system of cultural exchanges there are, indeed, somewhat asymmetrical processes of homogenization going on, and there are forms of human life disappearing. Neither of these phenomena is particularly new, but their range and speed probably is. Nevertheless, as forms of culture disappear, new forms are created, and they are created locally, which means they have exactly the regional inflections that the cosmopolitan celebrates. The disappearance of old cultural forms is consistent with a rich variety of forms of human life, just because new cultural forms, which differ from each other, are being created as well.<sup>36</sup>

Appiah effects a benign substitution of cultural forms while noting that some are disappearing under the guise of what Paul Gilroy would call an “armoured cosmopolitanism.”<sup>37</sup> In contrast, then, to those who would see cosmopolitanism as opposed to differentialist racism, there is a way in which racism can be driven by cosmopolitanism, particularly in its instantiation as a universal ethical form. As I discuss in chapter 7, nowhere is this clearer than in the instance of human rights as a set of apparently cosmopolitan values being leveraged for (neo)imperial projects.<sup>38</sup> An adequate response to such universalizing ethics may not be contained within the history of anthropology, either in the kind of salvage ethnography Alice Fletcher,



Mathilda Stevenson, or Franz Boas undertook (discussed in chapters 1 and 2), or in the self-reflexive structuralism of Lévi-Strauss's *Tristes Tropiques*, or Louis Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* (discussed in chapters 3 and 4). Rather, it seems to me that we are, at this moment in history, called to analyze and sometimes affirm, less the relativist project of culture than its constructivist and conjunctural capacities to catalyze new forms of political alliance—both hegemonic and resistive. Our task is to understand the ways in which culture appears as a site of debate or contestation—a mark not of cultures under disappearance, but of cultures engaged in definitional and political struggle, as when Indian Dalits insist that the cultural experience of caste oppression approximates what they understand to be the social experience of racism (discussed in chapter 5). An analogical imperative works through distinct cultural experiences of oppression and resistance to translate them into other social idioms so that new forms of political affinity can be enacted which enable the possibility of “cultures in common.”

In this volume I thus track the ways in which uncommon cultures have been articulated through forms of differentialist racism or culturalist explanation. At the same time, I seek to surface the possibilities of culture in common through the enactment of new forms of political alliance. Anthropological or sociological frames often miss the solidarities of lived experience of plural cultures and societies. While some anthropologists have seen culturalism to be constitutive of social movements, particularly as forms of “identity politics mobilized at the level of the nation-state” or as “the mobilization of cultural differences in the service of larger national or transnational politics,” in the epilogue I suggest that transnational social movements enact not culturalism, but forms of common culture shaped by making “common cause.”<sup>39</sup>

In closing I lay out other forms of affiliative and interdisciplinary scholarship that allow a better understanding of the politics of emerging common cultures. While there is a rather substantial literature in economics (and increasingly in anthropology) on “common pool resources,” my contention is that dominant forms of social and political theory have often been inadequate for the task of understanding the emergence of common cultures.<sup>40</sup> In part this is because not only does the literature of the social sciences take nationalism to be its primary object, but its central view of culture was itself the product of nationalism. Insofar as political theory has also been called on to do the work of neoliberal economics, and neoliberalism advocates privatization,

ostensibly to protect against the “tragedy of the commons,” the forms of anthropological theory produced through globalization often fail to apprehend the emergence of cultures in common.

The prospect of a common culture raised in this book is not so much one of a hybridized, cosmopolitan, or universalized relativism, as one that rejects hegemonic versions of culture in favor of a politics of affiliation or solidarity, sometimes enabled by the appropriation and relocation of conceptual categories emergent from radically different histories of oppression. Leela Gandhi, for one, has seen in the making of such histories, the construction of “affective communities.”<sup>41</sup>

