Decolonizing the Mind: Schwimmer, Habermas and the Anthropology of Postcolonialism

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Abstract: Running through the anthropological work of Eric Schwimmer is a constant encounter with postcolonialism. Unlike the more conventional forms of postcolonial theory, Schwimmer draws on a vocabulary derived from symbolic anthropology, semiotics, the anthropology of religion and most recently ecology. In doing so he has provided a theory of the role of ontologies in framing the negotiated sociocultural predicaments of postcolonial societies rooted in his ethnographic work in Melanesia and Polynesia and with indigenous peoples and settlers in Quebec. This essay explores this dimension of Schwimmer's work and develops a comparison between his approach to the decolonization of the mind and that of Jurgen Habermas. In doing so it attempts to show both the innovative and nuanced nature of Schwimmer's postcolonial anthropology and its utility in addressing the issues of globalization, the successor to colonialism as the current world transformative movement.

Keywords: Schwimmer, Habermas, postcolonialism, ontologies, semiotics, globalization

Résumé : Les questions postcoloniales sont toujours au centre de l'œuvre anthropologique d'Éric Schwimmer. Ce dernier se distingue des courants théoriques post-coloniaux habituels en puisant dans le vocabulaire de l'anthropologie symbolique, de la sémiotique, de l'anthropologie de la religion et plus récemment, de l'écologie. Ce faisant, il a développé une théorie sur le rôle des ontologies dans la définition des difficiles situations socioculturelles négociées dans lesquelles se retrouvent les sociétés post-coloniales. Cette théorie prend racine dans le travail ethnographique de Schwimmer en Mélanésie et en Polynésie, ainsi que dans les recherches qu'il a menées sur les Autochtones et les colons du Québec. Le présent article explore cette dimension de l'œuvre de Schwimmer et établit un parallèle entre sa vision de la décolonisation de l'esprit et celle que propose Jurgen Habermas. Ainsi, l'article vise à mettre en relief le caractère innovateur et nuancé de l'anthropologie postcoloniale de Schwimmer ainsi que sa capacité à rendre compte des questions liées à la mondialisation, phénomène qui a succédé au colonialisme en tant qu'agent de transformation du monde contemporain.

Mots-clés : Schwimmer, Habermas, postcolonialisme, ontologies, sémiotique, mondialisation

Postcolonial discourse has left anthropology curiously untouched. While the subject of the relationship of anthropology to the colonial process, and in particular the issue of its role in promoting forms of colonial policy and practice through its generation of knowledge about subjugated peoples, has been keenly debated for some considerable time (Asad 1973, Copans 1975), anthropological (as opposed to say historical) investigations of the actual cultures of colonialism are much rarer (for a notable exception see Thomas 1994), and close studies of the cultures of postcolonialism and the deep cultural dilemmas and fissures that they embody are rarer still. As a consequence, Geertz, amongst others, has found it reasonable to challenge the work of many of the modern classics of anthropology for their implicated role in, or at least silence about, the very colonial conditions that made their researching and writing possible in the first place (Geertz 1988).

The result has been a curious hiatus between "postcolonial studies," which has emerged as a discourse with its own specific language, founding and sustaining fathers and mothers, body of citations and organic relationships to literary criticism, history and geography, but with little reference to anthropology (for example Williams and Chrisman 1993, Hall 2000), and anthropology itself—self-declared authority (at least until the coming of cultural studies, with its own close links to postcolonial studies) on culture and with a long history of involvement in colonial and postcolonial contexts, about which it appears to manifest more guilt than creative or re-creative engagement. Anthropology as a whole has, as a result, been weak in its engagement with colonial and postcolonial social formations, and has tended instead to channel its contemporary political commitments in the directions of feminist anthropology, development, the critique of essentialism and culturalist explanations or a cosying up to what is perceived as the much more critical field of cultural studies (see for example the essays collected in Moore 2000, not one of

which touches on postcolonialism, globalization or the current range of social and ecological crises that the world very demonstrably is confronting).

A notable exception to these silences and evasions has been Eric Schwimmer. His work is of particular interest in this context precisely because, while not positioned as postcolonial criticism, it does in fact exemplify a deeply anthropological enquiry into the ethnography of colonialism and of the postcolonial heritages experienced, suffered and negotiated by peoples who have been colonized, and who subsequently and up into the current era of globalization, are attempting to reconstruct their cultures, identities and senses of self-worth, and to recover their own histories, languages, mythologies, rituals, art and philosophies, after experiencing the ruptures of invasion, dispossession and marginalization imposed on them by the imperial project of modernity and "civilization." In a distinguished group of studies that have encompassed the Maori peoples of New Zealand and the Orokaiva of Papua New Guinea in great ethnographic depth, and the Basques, Quebecois and Minangkabau with a broader brush, Schwimmer has constantly and at a number of levels which I will attempt shortly to draw out, interrogated postcolonialism and has implicitly suggested new models for its analysis that deepen and expand more conventional postcolonial studies (see Schwimmer 1965, 1966, 1968, 1973, 1992, 1995, 2004a, 2004b and 2004c for some major examples).

Two things stand out in this approach. The first is the constant attention to the postcolonial situation. As himself a geographically and culturally displaced person, Schwimmer's work shows a constant sensitivity and delicacy when dealing with the negotiation of postcoloniality on the part of its minoritized subjects, and in fact, although not flagged as such, a large part of his work represents a subtle anthropological variety of postcolonial theory. The second is that in building this approach, virtually nowhere in his extensive work does Schwimmer refer to conventional postcolonial theory. Rather he draws from an anthropological tool-kit, much of which in turn he has been instrumental in creating, including the resources of symbolic anthropology, linguistics, structuralism, ritual theory, the anthropology of religion and most recently ecological anthropology and the explication of ontologies as a route to understanding intercultural relations in postcolonial situations (Schwimmer 2004a). Central to this endeavour has been the problem of decolonizing the mind, an idea parallel to and perhaps overlapping with Habermas' notions of the colonization of the life world and its subsequent decolonization as the project of a critical sociology the aim of which is to promote the mutual understanding of subjects through the creation of a model of "communicative rationality" (Habermas 1987a). While both Schwimmer and Habermas deploy a communicative model of culture and interaction, as I shall shortly attempt to show, Habermas' model is deficient in grasping the actual qualities of conflictual postcolonial situations, something directly addressed by the model developed by Schwimmer. While to the best of my knowledge never formally contrasted, I will argue that bringing these two fecund models into juxtaposition and dialogue with one another will prove an effective means of highlighting the originality and power of Schwimmer's much less well-known position.

In locating in Schwimmer's work a developed if unpublicized theory of postcolonial formations, I will also suggest that his work is highly relevant for two other but connected reasons. The first is that at the very moment when many anthropologists are apparently losing faith—for a variety of postmodernist reasons—in the very concept of culture that has long sustained their discipline (for example Fox and King 2002), Schwimmer's work provides a fresh approach to the revitalization of the notion of culture, by-passing many of the sterile arguments within anthropology about definitions, and showing, in good Wittgensteinian manner, its uses, including those employed by postcolonial minorities themselves as a strategic resource for self definition, and showing the links postcolonial subjects implicitly establish between cognitive anthropology and symbolic anthropology as seemingly esoteric zones of the discipline and the actual negotiation of postcolonial identities. Schwimmer does so by showing that existential issues and psychic suffering continue to provide a base-line, a "foundation" to use a non-postmodernist term, of human being-in-the-world especially in contexts of relative or absolute powerlessness. The approach and methodology of symbolic anthropology turn out to be highly political in unexpected ways. The second is that for many social analysts, including anthropologists, globalization has become the issue of the moment, and the intense attention given to it has perhaps deflected attention from the continuing significance of the postcolonial. The ethnographic realities that anthropologists have made it their business to uncover and display are now dynamically reframed not only by the ongoing processes of decolonization, but now also by the actually or potentially re-colonizing processes of globalization and its mechanisms of marketization and commodification. These processes further destabilize the delicate renegotiations of identity and sovereignty emerging from or constituting the decolonization process. While anthropologically globalization in principle allows all of us to access the

many alternative and competing sociocultural systems and ontologies that weave the fabric of total world-society, in practice it has tended, as Sahlins has reminded us (Sahlins 1996), to the further and neo-colonial imposition of actually local but contingently hegemonic systems of knowledge, beliefs and institutions (the Western) onto the complex map of world society and the many variations that it collectively contains. I will argue that a Schwimmerian anthropology provides a way of confronting globalization through the anthropological analysis of the multiple negotiations with its hegemonic tendencies at the neglected level of culture (economics having got most of the attention hitherto) and as such raises the largely unexplored possibility of there not only being many anthropological societies, but also of there being many alternative anthropologies, at least some of them as capable of interrogating the West as largely hegemonic Western anthropology has been of interrogating the rest.

The Elements of a Schwimmerian Anthropology

Symbolic anthropology and the anthropology of religion are rarely linked to the study of postcoloniality. In his studies of the Maori and the Orokaiva, Schwimmer links these both to each other and to the postcolonial situation in which his subjects find themselves through the notion of ontology, understood as the systems of signs and objects used to construct local theories of being-in-the-world, and also as the social practices for realizing this desired state of being, some of which are public, but others of which are secret, private and concealed. As James F. Weiner, another Melanesianist, has argued, one of the functions of language and communication is to *conceal*, to mask in the indirect, in secrecy or in symbolism that which does not need to be said or cannot be said openly—what he terms, following the usage of the Foi people of Papua New Guinea, "tree leaf talk" (Weiner 2001)—and that furthermore this language of the indirect and of concealment has profound political consequences for communication between groups that have radically different assumptions about the motives inspiring such talk. This has critical implications for colonized peoples facing, for example, the legal systems of the colonizers (Weiner 2001:169-170) where what Schwimmer and collaborators define as ontological obstacles to intercultural communication come into play in very significant ways, and usually to the detriment of those who do not share the cultural logic of the dominant system (Clammer, Poirier and Schwimmer 2004).

The recognition of these different forms of communicative rationality has a number of implications: that, unlike for Habermas, a number of such rationalities exist and can and do co-exist within the same political space; and that the very indirectness and "secrecy" of many of these modes of communication protects uncolonized areas of life inaccessible to the counter-rationality of the hegemonic system. This draws our attention to the *depth* of culture where multiple and even contradictory levels coexist and interact—the religious and the technological for example, or the simultaneous use of both "alternative" and conventional biomedicine, even though the cosmologies, somatologies and explanatory logics of the competing systems can be at considerable variance. In his analyses of Maori culture, Schwimmer raises two interesting questions: how did Maori ontology survive a century and a half of European colonization, and how, given the radical differences and contradictions between Maori and European ontologies, did and can parallel institutions (courts, schools, medical services, churches) function? The key question for postcolonial theory becomes that of how the acting colonized subject manages identity while situated in relation to two incompatable ontologies, or what Schwmmer calls "semiospheres" (Schwimmer n.d.:2, 2004c).

To answer this question two steps are necessary. The first is the ethnographic description of the two semiospheres and their elements—in the Maori case the anthropocentrism of the European cosmology as opposed to the cosmocentrism or connaturality of the indigenous one, the "unicity" or totalizing nature of the Western model of the universe and its underlying religious and "scientific" basis compared with the plurality of the Maori model and its roots in mythology, and so forth. The second is the examination of the strategies through which the autochtons, with varying degrees of success, maintained their cosmology and the set of social relationships between humans intertwined with it (the role of ancestors for example), in the face of the colonizing practices of the Europeans that extended far beyond control of land and resources to the transformation of education and above all of the religious landscape. In fact, the contemporary vitality of Maori mythology, performing and visual arts, educational initiatives and literature (and of a vibrant oral tradition amongst the Orokaiva) demonstrates clearly the persistence of basic ontological patterns despite the inroads of Christianity, Western medicine and schooling and the general spread of a consumerist lifestyle. While the "semiospheres" of the Maori and the Pakeha are indeed radically different (although as Schwimmer notes, the spread of New Age ideas, alternative medicine and non-Western religions in New Zealand, has begun to incline citizens of European descent to embrace concepts long enshrined in Maori cosmology), this does not nec-

essarily imply the successful colonization of one by the other.

In fact, a variety of mechanisms have sustained Maori cosmology including a different interpretation of the 1840 Treaty of Waitangi (one version of which was written in Maori, implying that it conferred equal status on the indigenes); and the active re-figuring of Maori identity by native intellectuals and social movement leaders such as Te Motorohanga, Te Kooti and Te Rangikaheke, in which—while a degree of creolization occurred—authentic new ontological constructions were produced through which Maori were enabled to renegotiate their relationship to the new order (and in any case all cultures change over time, the colonized or the colonizers). The major examples of these have persisted down to the present day and are active elements in contemporary New Zealand debates about biculturalism and sovereignism, and an active synthesising of Christianity and indigenous religious concepts. Indeed while Christianity itself has been looked upon largely negatively from the perspective of postcolonial theory as either destroying indigenous belief systems and the webs of social relationships and social practices dependent on them, or as part of the colonial practice of actually consitituting native "religions" such as Hinduism according to Western or Christian conceptions of what a "religion" (even a false one) should look like (Balagangadhara 1994), Schwimmer's analysis (particularly of the Maori) suggests a more subtle model. In this version there is certainly transformation, but far from the destruction of the indigenous religion occuring wholesale, in fact it was Christianity that was reinterpreted from the Maori point of view and to a great extent assimilated into the Io ontology and its hierarchy of lesser gods, Io being in fact a universal god. Hence even as the Treaty of Waitangi was seen as establishing a partnership between equals and as a covenant rather than as a law in the Western, enforceable sense, so the Io religion and Christianity were seen as two sacred histories, geographically separated, but each linked to its own distinctive mythology and each legitimizing claims to distinctive but equal identities. Theologians have apparently now caught up with this idea, and some at least have begun to discuss not only the Bible as a liberative document, as in liberation theology, but as a document capable of both colonial and postcolonial readings—the latter in a sense rendering it an indigenous document, something which even if introduced in one semiosphere, can be appropriated by the members of another, even to the extent of being usable against its original introducers (Sugirtharajah 1998).

Some conceptual consequences flow from this. One is that the notion commonly employed in postcolonial studies of "hybridity" is called into question. In Schwimmer's model all cultures are hybrid (or "creolized" to use the term he actually employs) since all change and all borrow and assimilate. Furthermore both the colonizers and the colonized are affected (as we know very well from studies of colonial India for example), not only in the situation of original contact, but especially in situations of postcolonial renegotiation of identities. In New Zealand this has taken the form primarily of discussions of biculturalism, implying both the equality of the two major cultures of the country, and the real possibility of sharing and boundary crossing from both directions, but for freely chosen motives that have nothing to do with power, domination or assimilation. The notion of hybridity, with its implication of the patching together of the dissimilar, might better be replaced by the notion of negotiation between semiospheres or ontologies, not only at the formal political level, but much more significantly and as revealed by anthropology, at the many levels of subtle borrowing, rejection, transformation, secrecy, apparent borrowing, misunderstanding, mistranslation, forgetting and re-remembering that make up the actual fabric of all "culture contact" situations.

Speaking of the three major Maori ontology constructors Schwimmer says the following:

> These three versions—by Te Matorohanga, Te Kooti and Te Rangikaheke—aimed, each in its own way, at preventing what Thomas (1994) calls "Colonialism's Culture."...Taken together they provided some underpinnings for a solid Maori post-contact ontology, adapting its basic elements to symbiosis with the Pakeha. Te Matorohanga offers a neo-Polynesian model for spiritual reempowerment of the person; Te Kooti builds a comprehensive scheme of cultural defence, centred on the church-marae, stockaded by an ontologically secure praxis of lawful resistance. Te Rangikaheke's style, honed for external as well as internal communication, is like a charm drawing values of Maori ontology into the periphery of the Pakeha semiosphere. [Schwimmer, n.d.:23, and c.f. 2004c]

Resistance (a notion that we will return to later) need not take only political forms; it may equally take the form of the creation, or rediscovery of ontologies through ideological creativity and through practices and social movements. In the Maori case, the prime examples are the biculturalist and sovereignty movements which encourage the evolution and transmission of such ontologies.

From an anthropological point of view, drawing on the language of semiotics and symbolic anthropology favoured by Schwimmer and developed from his earlier work on signs and objects (Schwimmer 1974, 1977), the most inter-

esting point of analysis resides in the interstitial spaces between semiospheres and the dynamic interplay between the two or more such spheres that constitute a postcolonial social space. As Schwimmer (following Lotman 1984) suggests, such interplay is neither all one-way nor constant in volume, but may be discontinuous with periods of rapid absorption alternating with periods of internal consolidation, of reinterpretation, and of the reemergence of much older elements that reshape the new according to a much more foundational (in this case Polynesian) cultural code, as Christianity for the Maori was "recoded" by reference to the cult of Io, the paramount deity of southern Polynesian belief. Furthermore, the flow of contact is not only from the outside, from the colonial, but equally occurs because of internal debate within the indigenous semiosphere. While these labyrinthine struggles are perhaps most apparent in relation to religion (clearly a fundamental element in the construction of many ontologies),they also appear in relation to ideas of law, education, ecology and health. For, as Schwimmer points out, in Polynesian and Melanesian societies (and no doubt in Quebec and Indonesia as well), health is as much a religious matter as it is a technical one (Samson 2004; Tanner 2004).

Woven into this semiotic conception of cultural interchange is an implicit theory of the aesthetics of postcoloniality, or of what Schwimmer calls "style." Schwimmer understands cultural style as a practical expression of ontology, echoing the work of Maffesoli in which style is seen as a way of grasping the totality of a culture (Maffesoli 1993), not as an essentialized entity but as a succession of identifications. So all aspects of social communication, including food, architecture, theater, music and even the language of gesture as well as discursive forms are implicated in the composition of a collective selfhood, many dimensions of which will be inaccessible to the colonizer or which may quietly colonize whole areas of his own culture, as with curry, which has now become the most popular restaurant dish in England. Identity then lies at the heart of ontological construction, since different semiospheres have radically different ideas as to the ontological status of the individual. The Western atomistic view being greatly at variance with the Maori (and for that matter with the Japanese and other East Asian Buddhist) view of the individual in which the person is not so much an entity as a node in the flow of energy—*mana* or *ki*—that actually comprises the main substance of the universe. In sum, in Schwimmer's view, all semiospheres are "open" in the sense that they are all subject to revision since all, especially in a situation of biculturalism, interact dynamically, and all contain their own internal contradictions. While there are no "bicultural ontologies," each one being a distinct semiosphere, all are permeable. While wars of liberation have been extensively studied in the process of decolonization, little attention has been given to what Badiou calls, following Rimbaud, "les revoltes logiques," the logical revolts that he sees as forming the core of a critical philosophy (Badiou 2003). We might here suggest that the heart of anthropology is precisely the same, but with an ethnographic content: not only to name the logical revolts that constitute postcolonial ontologies, but to reveal their actual mechanisms, something even more vital in a globalizing context where cultural options and alternatives are becoming ever more proscribed despite the apparent expansion of freedoms.

But this optimistic view should not be read as suggesting that there are not severe costs in the construction of postcolonial identities. In fact, as many studies show that are alert to these issues, colonized peoples may continue to "emit signals of deep crisis and suffering, in an ontological idiom that remains meaningless to the mainstream" (Schwimmer 2004b:xi). This is not surprising given that disputes over land, hunting and fishing rights, the interpretation of the law, the extraction of resources, language and many other issues continue to erupt between the colonized and the colonizers as the literature on Australia, Canada, New Zealand, Latin America, the USA, South Africa, Zimbabwe and many other locations attests. And these issues, serious enough as they are, do not include the problems of societies like Malaysia or Fiji where the colonizers deliberately introduced new ethnic groups as workers and compradors, or like Britain, France or the USA where the formerly colonized or enslaved peoples now comprise a large part of the metropolitan population. While the continuation of such conflicts rightly raises questions of their ontological basis, it also has significant implications for the nature, role and methodology of anthropology as a discipline poised between feelings of guilt about its own colonial past and uncertainty about its role, if any, in the future and faced with the challenges of postcolonial theory, cultural studies, and the temptation to retreat into some kind of interpretative approach in which anthropology becomes little more than a culturally informed version of literary criticism. If the latter is an escapist option given the conflicts, ecological crises, poverty and widespread social injustices experienced by most of the world's population especially the formerly colonized, does a Schwimmerian anthropology offer any solutions?

Crafting a Postcolonial Anthropology

One of the major turns in current anthropology has been towards understanding its role as primarily that of recov-

ering indigenous knowledge, and in many cases then applying that knowledge to the solution of developmental problems (Sillitoe 1998). But this approach, whatever its virtues, leaves many questions unanswered. These include moral issues (who has the right to access, reveal or utilize such knowledge?), philosophical ones (ontologies are not simply cognitive systems, but are equally sets of practices and ways of being-in-the-world), and political ones (in a globalized world where cultures are necessarily in contact, peaceful exchanges may well be outweighed by the less benign ones of neo-liberal economic penetration and the whole package of consumerist culture and popular culture that goes with it). Furthermore, it raises questions of what might be termed political epistemology: is that knowledge, in fact, to be regarded as equal in status to the "scientific" knowledge of the investigator? If it is not, this returns us once again to a form of concealed ethnocentrism masquerading as anthropology, but if it is equal, this entails a radical democratization of knowledge and hence of multiple valid worldviews and the possibility of multiple anthropologies, any one of which would have the right to interrogate the West, even as the West has historically interrogated the rest. One major dimension of this is that while mainstream Western sociology has until recently almost entirely neglected the interplay of society and nature, some sociologists, Giddens for example, have argued that there is no logical or conceptual connection between them, (some notable exceptions are Martell 1999 and Dickens 2004), Schwimmer's approach places nature at the very centre of the ontology building process, not only in terms of the *perception* of nature, but in terms of its actual role in the constitution of human persons and non-human persons and of the relationships between them implied by a non-anthropocentric vision of the world. Or, to put it in slightly different terms, the entities and relationships postulated by "animists" actually exist, and are not simply the figments of some Lévy-Bruhlian "pre-logical" mind at work (Ingold 2004; Clammer 2004).

Why is this important? Firstly, it draws attention to one of the great silences of both sociological theory and postcolonial theory. While some innovative postcolonial feminist theory has indeed noted the role of competing conceptions of the body and of sexuality in the contact between colonized and colonizers, this insight has not been extended beyond the realm of geography and its concern with mapping the physical and conceptual realms, to nature itself and its constitutive role in defining inter-cultural relations (for example Thongchai 1994). Secondly, it provides a means to move beyond the culturalism that infests a good deal of postcolonial theory. Rather than culture becoming the explanation of last resort—an irreducible basis against which criticism cannot be directed (and hence derivatively the foundation of the Occidentalism characteristic of so much South and Southeast Asian postcolonial theory)—it is seen in Schwimmer's model as negotiated, inevitably creolized and intimately encoding views of embodiment and nature. It is also the site of struggle and the mechanism through which, for many peoples a struggle for identity, often disguised as a political or militant struggle, takes place, whatever reservations armchair anthropologists might have about the problems of unambiguously defining the term. This has an apparently paradoxical outcome, for while it allows the ethnographic appreciation of individual cultures in all their complexity and richness (the scientific and also the literary vocation of the anthropologist), it also creates a universal language in which the whole range of issues involved in postcolonial studies—domination, trauma, dispossession, psychic possession as well as the obviously historical and political—can be framed, and one which furthermore extends this framing to encompass the new mechanism through which neo-colonial forces reassert themselves, globalization. In this context, the observations of Yoshinobu Ota are highly pertinent when he writes that in the context of the unmaking of the subalternity of dominated peoples it is necessary to "envision an anthropological future out of the common experience of global ethnographic modernity," such that anthropology itself does not become yet another form of knowledge held over the dominated, and in which "it is no longer clear and meaningful to dichotomize the native and the anthropologist." In that "the concept of culture can be refashioned—not simply borrowed—by many for cultural mobilization," his question becomes "could anthropology be used...to unmake subalternity?" (Ota 2002:79-80). I would suggest that the answer to his questions is "yes" and that the resources for this enterprise reside in Schwimmer's anthropology.

This possibility goes at least some way towards addressing the critical questions raised by Linda Tuhiwai Smith about fieldwork in the postcolonial world (Smith 1999). These include the very legitimacy of traditional anthropological research, and the possibility not of the recovery of indigenous knowledge (with all of the ethical and political pitfalls that approach entails), but of her even more radical agenda of developing indigenous *methodologies* that actually imply alternative and local anthropologies envisaged not only as different modes of ethnography, but also as local forms of critical theory. But this itself is not the end of the chain, for from the perspective of applied anthropology there are policy implications for

the furthering of biculturalism, of legal pluralism, of promoting the conditions in which the flourishing of new cultural imaginaries can take place, or as Schwimmer himself argues, for the design of professional procedures that bridge the fact of ontological contradiction in areas as seemingly prosaic as the delivery of health care (Schwimmer 2004c). But policy is in fact based on anthropological realities and dynamics, that in this latter case include the slow relinquishing of the very colonial ontology that has so shaped Maori experiences of being in the world, the warding off of the crypto-colonialist elements that creep in via consumerism and globalization, the struggle with objective social injustice (the very high rates of unemployment and other forms of social exclusion experienced by the contemporary Maori) and experiments with building new forms of community. The resources for a postcolonial anthropology have been created by Schwimmer, not as an obvious project, but seamlessly in the very act of pursuing a symbolic anthropology of postcolonialism through the project of bringing into dialogue postcolonialism and religion, utilizing politically the unexploited possibilities of that very symbolic anthropology that he himself has been instrumental in creating, through introducing into the anthropological vocabulary the notion of the negotiation of ontologies, and by re-reading the postcolonial history of Oceania in particular from the viewpoint of an anthropological semiotics. The question then becomes, where does this lead?

Theorizing Schwimmer

Although an intensely theoretical thinker (and certainly a deeply philosophical one), Schwimmer has not for the most part (not including here his technical contributions to semiotics, symbolic anthropology and linguistics) presented his work as a theoretical enterprise as such. Unlike Habermas, who is clearly involved in the grand German project of building a totalizing system, Schwimmer's postcolonial project is masked. Far from being an objection, this is itself methodologically subtle. Unlike those culture and development, or gender and development, writers whose approach is to "add culture (or women) and shake," Schwimmer has shown how a method still deeply committed to the close ethnography of the best classical anthropology can embody at the same time an engagement with the conditions of that knowledge's own production and with the larger historical and world systems context of which it is ultimately a part. If colonialism was the great system of world scale appropriation and domination of the last three centuries, as economic globalization promises to be of the next, anthropology makes no sense either scientifically or morally if it does not define its own role in the examination and critique of these world-forming (at the global level) and existential (at the personal level) processes. But as a science historically committed to the study of the microscopic, does it in fact any longer have a role? Schwimmer's anthropology would suggest a positive answer to this question, since his emphasis, named clearly in his latest work, on the construction of ontologies and the absolute validity of "indigenous" ones—in fact all ontologies are "indigenous" local knowledges, some of which have expanded through historically contingent processes to become hegemonic ones—both defines the contested ground on which such semiospheres are conceived and erected and fully allows them to address the suffering and dispossession that colonialism has brought in its wake. This latter point is important as interpretative and symbolic anthropologies have, on the whole, been very weak in incorporating the dimension of justice. To adequately answer Linda Tuhiwai Smith's entirely valid strictures, not only must indigenous methodologies be born, and counted as equal to their historically colonial counterparts, but any such methodology must itself, as Smith suggests, be critical. It must, that is, provide a way to link the interpretative and descriptive to the struggle for justice. What Schwimmer has shown is that this justice is not simply or even primarily economic or political, but is cultural, religious, psychic and communal, and that the struggle for ontologies reflects, at the deepest level usually untouched by conventional sociology, the existential quest for meaning and authenticity which is often lost sight of even in the more politically correct forms of identity politics—themselves frequently little more than power struggles dignified by a nicer name.

Significantly postcolonial studies have taken a turn towards the philosophical in a number of ways: contestation from the perspective of African and Asian philosophers of the hegemony of Western philosophy and of its monopoly on the very term "philosophy"; philosophical questioning of the ethical and epistemological justifications of colonialism; and, as with Schwimmer, paying attention to "local" philosophies as ontologies, as ways of being in the world that must be taken seriously in themselves and not simply relegated to the category of the "belief systems" of introductory anthropology textbooks (Eze 1997). For while subaltern studies has certainly placed the question of (whose?) knowledge at the centre of postcolonial debate, it runs the risk of adopting an overly cognitive model of human agency (one tempered by Schwimmer's ontological approach) and a power-oriented view of social processes which excludes the possibility of other politics than those of recognition or of identity, or which only allows those politics to appear in a particular set of

predetermined forms that themselves may occlude other modes of radically alternative politics or even question the validity of politics itself as the primary social mechanism for relating to the world (cf. Badiou 2003:69-78).

The broader project implicit in Schwimmer's anthropology is consequently the overcoming of modernist anthropology. In an important volume of essays on Amazonian anthropology, the editors comment that "the thread common to most of the recent writings within anthropology that have been involved in unraveling the splits of modernist social theory, particularly between subject and object, is a dedication to the creation of an 'anthropology of consciousness,' where the conviction is to 'decolonise' the human subjects of our studies" (Overing and Passes 2000:10). To do this they argue that:

> If intellectual *de*colonisation is our aim, we cannot with justice reduce this Amazonian sociality—as has been our habit in the past when communication was more of a monologue for Western consumption only—to structures of kinship and affinity, or such equally reductive principles as exchange, reciprocity and hierarchy. In order to understand an indigenous metaphysics of sociality, we must take another road, for when it comes to explanations, theirs is a logic that is neither expansive nor reductive...To decolonize Amazonian ethnography, we must familiarize ourselves with indigenous poetics, and their aesthetics of living a human sort of life. [2000:12]

Arguing for transcending the classical anthropological and sociological view of societies as essentially *structures* towards understanding their *ontologies* (which includes their aesthetics), in which indeed the very idea of *society* becomes problematic, is to state a position already anticipated by Schwimmer in his work on both the Maori and the Orokaiva, and which is now growing not only within anthropology, but also within "native history," particularly as it is being practiced, interestingly enough, in Canada. As Brown and Vibert argue for instance, the study of native history (the history that is of colonized peoples) must begin precisely with the decolonization of knowledge, a demythologizing or deconstruction of the ideas on which images of the Other were founded and propagated, part of which involves the recognition that all colonial encounters, albeit unequal ones, involved a complex process of dialogue and mutual adjusting of attitudes (Brown and Vibert 2003:xiii). Each of these encounters, in turn, takes place in a context the interpretation of which itself can shift over time and from different perspectives. But as the texts of the ethnohistorian as much as the oral data of the anthropologist reveal (and as Schwimmer has demonstrated by using both in a complex interplay), nuanced philosophical views are embedded in every ontology, views which sometimes the indigenous culture has been robbed of by colonialism, but in many other cases that have persisted and provide the basis for cultural integrity during the colonial and on into the postcolonial situation.

Schwimmer, Habermas and the Communicative Theory of Culture

Habermas has been read by many of his interpreters as both an extreme rationalist and as deeply Western. Although he has nowhere in his writing addressed the problem of decolonization directly, nor has he specifically considered the situation of non-Western societies, there are hints in his work of a theory of modernist (colonial) history seen as a failed project. In more conventional postcolonial historiography (for example Prakash 1995), imperial history is seen as monolithic and triumphant, while it is the history of the colonized that is radically displaced. But recently Habermas has suggested that historiography has necessarily (after Foucault, postmodernism and the disintegrating world situation) shifted its attention from what he calls "the exemplary" to an "intense awareness of ever more widely spreading contingencies" (Habermas 1998:7). These "contingencies" include a history lesson about history itself—that from it we learn not only the content of the great traditions, but also of their failures, of the history of what he calls "proof of shattered expectations." This admission signals what might be seen as a weakening of Habermas' resolutely modernist position and as an indication of how his work might be related to that of anthropology, with which there has been virtually no dialogue from either side.

Here is not the place to attempt a full exposition of Habermas' extensive and complex thought. But some of its contours can be seen most clearly when we do stop to compare it with parallel or different ideas emerging from anthropology. Habermas, as is well known, has attempted to establish a communicative model of society, something which can also be seen in some anthropological accounts of culture. In understanding the limitations as well as the possibilities of anthropology, Fabian for example writes of the necessity for a "communicative view of the pursuit of understanding" that like Habermas' conception of history recognizes that "sweeping our failures under the rug of invariably positive accounts of success" is not only false, but distorts the real contributions of anthropology as itself a kind of conversation or dialogue (Fabian 1995:41). Implicit in both views is a *critical theory* of society, something which Habermas in particular has had to defend

against the deconstructive trends of postmodernism and their destabilization of symbolic orders. But Habermas' method of doing so is to fall back on a defence of the modernist project and its Enlightenment foundations against the "new nihilists"—of whom Baudrillard is probably the preeminent example—which takes his thought in two directions. One is the defence of human reason against the irrationalism of postmodernism, and the other is the defence of the belief that moral communities and social solidarities can still provide the context in which individuals are grounded. For as Habermas himself acknowledges, modernity has, although not failed, extended itself too far in some undesirable directions, including leading to what he terms a "structurally overloaded subject (a finite subject transcending itself into the infinite)" (Habermas 1987a:261). As Ashley suggests, "according to Habermas, the 'pathologies' of modernism stem from the underdevelopment of the *lifeworld* (the system of intersubjective communicative action) compared with the more complete and thoroughgoing rationalization of the social *system* (which is viewed by Habermas in terms of functional differentiation and the instrumental problems associated with the objective maintenance of social order)" (Ashley 1990:91-92). The solution to this for Habermas lies in the recognition that whereas the philosophy of the subject has postulated two (unsatisfactory) relationships of the individual to the world—through "cognitive relations regulated by the *truth* of judgments" and "practical relationships regulated by the *success* of actions" (Habermas 1987a:274)—the real answer lies in mutual understanding of the lifeworld itself and the principles of communicative rationality that animate their interaction with different life spheres—science, ethics, art and language.

Stated in this way we can begin to see both the parallels and the differences between Schwimmer's and Habermas' models of communication. For Habermas the issue is principally one of rationality, whereas we have seen that Schwimmer's conception of ontology extends far beyond the cognitive. While for Habermas "rationality complexes" are embodied in these different and differentiated life spheres which he understands essentially as *discourses* (art, science and so on), and not as concrete ethnographic lived situations, for Schwimmer these "life spheres" are real cultures that actually interact in complex ways and are by no means fully differentiated from each other except as the outcome of a formal rational procedure. For Habermas they represent schematic and contingent *a priori* categories, not actual empirical or ontological ones. And this is where the anthropological limitations of Habermas are clearly revealed. For in the philosophical anthropology of Habermas, the essential and irreducible element is the rational and self-contained individual, undermined by what he sees as the philosophy of the subject of postmodernism which leads, and presumably for entirely different reasons than does anthropology, to "a painful de-differentiation, a de-limitation of the individual, a merging with amorphous nature within and without" (Habermas 1987a:94). For in arguing against postmodernism, Habermas has in fact unwittingly argued against anthropology, or certainly of the kind of anthropology recommended by Schwimmer. While the argument for such an anthropology is certainly not an argument for postmodernism too, it does show that the social outcomes of Habermas' own philosophical position have not been sufficiently pursued.

Schwimmer himself has argued that in certain situations of biculturalism, formal procedures can indeed go some way to bridging the gap between semiospheres (Schwimmer 2004c), in other respects his empirically and philosophically grounded work brings into question a number of the key elements of Habermas' system. These include questioning the possibility, other than in a utopian situation, of the "pure communication" and the sharing of habitus implied by the mutual understanding that is the ultimate outcome of satisfactory social relationships (Habermas 1987b), the separation of the lifeworld from the "system" intent on colonizing it, when in fact both system and lifeworld are subsets of a theoretical totality (the world system) interacting and influencing each other, and the problematic notion of the extending of rational control over the moral and aesthetic domains, particularly if precisely in his discussion of art and aesthetics that Habermas is particularly weak. For, as Dallmayr suggests, "by making validity claims the yardstick of proper communication, his model marginalizes or excludes modes of interaction and broad domains of human experience not subsumable under argumentative reason" (2002:43). Where they certainly would agree is that lifeworlds have been rationalized, dominated and colonized, and that distorted communication has been a major factor in this process. It is Schwimmer however who gives a concrete form to these forces and their agents, and a prescription for their management, by actually exploring not only the programmatic desirability of better skills of communication to build a better society, but the ways, utilizing the tools of symbolic anthropology, that these might actually be crafted.

But for Schwimmer the thrust of his anthropology is to work against the exclusion and marginalization involved in colonial encounters and the bigger project of modernity itself, and indeed against the exclusion of forms of discourse and non-discursive reasoning expelled from

Habermas' rationalist model. Highlighting this aspect of Habermas' work, Coole points out that he is incapable of attributing "any emancipatory potential to alterity or otherness" precisely because "his basic ideas concerning communicative reason and the emancipatory project of modernity are predicated on this exclusion" (1996:221, 225). As she suggests, Habermas' model is a dualistic one, incorporating a deeply Western binary oppositional structure (reason/non-reason, inside/outside) , in which alterity is suppressed by his discursive model as the product of mystical or primordial unreason. In fact, she suggests, communicative reason and the emancipatory project in general, require "an appreciation of the prediscursive and nondiscursive levels on which power and alterity circulate" (Coole 1996:231). The anthropology of postcolonialism (as with anthropology in general) must of course give this alterity central place. It is in the gaps left by Habermasian reason that in fact real communication and the struggle for identity actually take place.

By Way of a Conclusion

Eric Schwimmer's work has addressed many issues and has ranged across a number of ethnographic fields, including insightful excursions into fields such as economic anthropology that he has not subsequently developed in any detail (e.g. Schwimmer 1979), and this essay does not attempt to address them all. Rather what it seeks is delineation of one important "deep structure" of his main body of work, and a charting of the trajectory that has taken him from his early work on the Maori by way of his analyses of Orokaiva society and theoretical elaboration of ideas in symbolic anthropology and semiotics to his most recent interest in ontology and a recovery of the relationship between humanity and nature.

This, I have suggested, can be found in the subtle anthropological engagement with postcolonialism running throughout his work. Its subtlety lies in its addressing the questions raised by postcolonial theory as it is generally recognized and actually showing how these can be informed by anthropological analysis and utilizing the tools of semiotic anthropology to do so. This dialogue with postcolonial theory has several significant dimensions, other than taking that theory beyond the literary and historical. By exploring in detail the ethnography of colonial and postcolonial contact situations, Schwimmer reveals the complexity of mutual ontological negotiation and renegotiation, now intensified by the impact of globalization on all the parties concerned, the vitality of apparently dominated peoples when it comes to continuing cultural creativity, and the role of ontology building as a profound mode of resistance. However he has done so in two particularly interesting ways. One of these is by turning anthropology away from its preoccupation with the problem of representation, something in part reaching it through critiques of Orientalism, by focusing not on the discourses of anthropologists, but on the voices (particularly of the ontology builders) of the colonized. Ethnography then becomes less description than giving voice; the postcolonial anthropologist becomes more of a conduit than a "researcher." The second is by showing that the resources of symbolic anthropology, far from being confined to the analysis of (in the context of globalization and colonialism) the relatively trivial—fashion, food, gesture—has significant applications as a method for both uncovering the cultures of colonialism, and equally of the knowledges of the colonized. Schwimmer's postcolonial anthropology might, in this respect, be termed a "soft" one—the subtle probing of the semiotics of contact and negotiation—compared with the "hard" postcolonial anthropology of, say, Michael Taussig who is concerned with the violence of colonialism and its traumas and cruelties (Taussig 1991). While this might in part be explained by the differences in ethnographic areas—Taussig in Latin America, Schwimmer in Oceania and Southeast Asia—they in fact represent complementary approaches. Both are concerned with the colonial construction of subjects, both with the counter-power of the colonized, and both, significantly, with religion. Whereas for Schwimmer, a major source of ontological reconstruction is the colonized subjects' dialogue with Christianity, something true of most of the rest of Oceania (see Clammer 1976 for the case in Fiji), for Taussig it is through the figure of the shaman as the "guide to those lost in the space of death" (Taussig 1991:7). Resistance comes through the body through healing as the antithesis of colonial terror and through drawing on the very "wildness" that the colonialists had ascribed to the natives. This then comes to be the very space within which the elaboration of indigenous ontologies can take place, in the elaboration of the aesthetics of everyday life (Clammer and Ozawa 1998).

As James Scott (1985) has classically shown, the anthropology of resistance is itself an antidote to the one-sided domination posited by much postcolonial theory, but yet it remains a very underdeveloped area. Anthropologists are, of course, prone to announcing, as a prelude to the revelation of their own discovery of a "new" field of their discipline, the shockingly little amount of work that has hitherto been done in that particular area. But here we may have stumbled on a really significant one: the anthropology of resistance. Anthropologists, it is true, have been slow to respond to the work on social movements being done by their colleagues in sociology and

political science, probably because they see it as over macroscopic and insufficiently cultural in approach. But Schwimmer, as I have tried to demonstrate, has provided the elements for such an anthropology and indeed I mean an *anthropology*, not an ersatz sociology. While the study of resistance has tended to take the form of the analysis of resources, mobilization, politics and ideology, here we see a different approach in which real and often individual voices are heard at length and where the politics of identity is distilled back into the culture of authenticity—a place an anthropologist might argue it should never have left in the first place—and which relocates anthropology as a rich voice within postcolonial theory (the methodology of which it greatly expands and the vocabulary of which it deepens) and announces its coming successor, the anthropology of globalization, which is only just starting to take on a shape.

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