

Imperialist Nostalgia

MY ANGER AT RECENT FILMS that portray imperialism with nostalgia informs this essay. Consider the enthusiastic reception of *Heat and Dust*, *A Passage to India*, *Out of Africa*, and *The Gods Must be Crazy*. The white colonial societies portrayed in these films appear decorous and orderly, as if constructed in accord with the norms of classic ethnography. Hints of these societies' coming collapse only appear at the margins where they create, not moral indignation, but an elegiac mode of perception. Even politically progressive North American audiences have enjoyed the elegance of manners governing relations of dominance and subordination between the "races." Evidently, a mood of nostalgia makes racial domination appear innocent and pure.

Much as one can argue that the language of social analysis is not a neutral medium, I shall attempt to show that the observer is neither innocent nor omniscient. In my view, it is a mistake to urge social analysts to strive for a position of innocence designated by such adjectives as detached, neutral, or impartial. Under imperialism, metropolitan observers are no more likely to avoid a certain complicity with domination than they are to avoid having strong feelings toward the people they study. Such a recognition need not lead either to confessional breast-beating or to galloping bias. If social analysts realize that they cannot be perfectly "clean," they no more should become as "dirty" as possible than airline pilots, invoking the limitations of human fallibility, should blind their eyes. The usual notions of evidence, accuracy, and argumentation continue to apply for their studies. Because researchers of necessity are both somewhat impartial and somewhat partisan, somewhat innocent and somewhat complicit, their readers should be as informed as possible about what the observer was in a position to know and not know. Has, for example, the writer of an ethnography on death suffered a serious personal loss?

Mourning for What One Has Destroyed

Curiously enough, agents of colonialism—officials, constabulary officers, missionaries, and other figures from whom anthropologists ritually dissociate themselves—often display nostalgia for the colonized culture as it was "traditionally" (that is, when they first encountered it). The peculiarity of their yearning, of course, is that agents of colonialism long for the very forms of life

they intentionally altered or destroyed. My concern thus resides with a particular kind of nostalgia, often found under imperialism, where people mourn the passing of what they themselves have transformed. Imperialist nostalgia thus revolves around a paradox: a person kills somebody and then mourns his or her victim. In more attenuated form, someone deliberately alters a form of life and then regrets that things have not remained as they were prior to his or her intervention. At one more remove, people destroy their environment and then worship nature. In any of its versions, imperialist nostalgia uses a pose of “innocent yearning” both to capture people’s imaginations and to conceal its complicity with often brutal domination.

Imperialist nostalgia occurs alongside a peculiar sense of mission, the white man’s burden, where civilized nations stand duty-bound to uplift so-called savage ones. In this ideologically constructed world of ongoing progressive change, putatively static savage societies become a stable reference point for defining (the felicitous progress of) civilized identity. “We” valorize innovation and then yearn for more stable worlds, whether these reside in our own past, in other cultures, or in the conflation of the two. Such forms of longing thus appear closely related to secular notions of progress. When the so-called civilizing process destabilizes forms of life, the agents of change experience transformations of other cultures as if they were personal losses.

Nostalgia is a particularly appropriate emotion to invoke in attempting to establish one’s innocence and at the same time talk about what one has destroyed. Doesn’t everyone feel nostalgic about their childhood memories? Aren’t these memories genuinely innocent? Indeed, much of imperialist nostalgia’s force resides in its association with (indeed, its disguise as) more genuinely innocent, tender recollections of what is at once an earlier epoch and a previous phase of life. For my generation, one can, for example, evoke nostalgia by imitating radio voices saying “Call for Philip Morris,” “The Shadow Knows,” or “Who Was That Masked Man?” The relatively benign character of most nostalgia facilitates imperialist nostalgia’s capacity to transform the responsible colonial agent into an innocent bystander. If most such recollections were not fairly harmless, the imperialist variety would not be nearly as effective as it is.

To “us,” feelings of nostalgia seem almost as “natural” as motor reflexes. How can one help but feel nostalgic about childhood memories? Don’t all people in all times and in all places feel nostalgia? Yet even the history of the concept in Western Europe reveals the historical and cultural specificity of our notion of nostalgia. Far from being eternal, the term *nostalgia* (from the Greek *nostos*, “to return home,” and *algia*, “a painful condition”) dates from the late seventeenth century when it was coined to describe a medical condition. The term described, for example, a pathological homesickness among Swiss mercenaries who were fighting far from their homeland. (Even in its origins, the term appears to have

been associated with processes of domination.) According to historian David Lowenthal, "Seventeenth-century nostalgia was a physical rather than a mental complaint, an illness with explicit symptoms and often lethal consequences. . . . To leave home for long was to risk death."¹ Evidently, nostalgia in the late seventeenth century was a weightier matter than the more innocent mood "we" at times experience in recalling our youths. In any case, the changing meanings of *nostalgia* in Western Europe (not to mention the fact that many cultures have no such concept at all) indicate that "our" feelings of tender yearning are neither as natural nor as pan-human, and therefore not necessarily as innocent, as one might imagine.

Although they do not use the term, a number of scholars who have recently analyzed imperialist nostalgia regard the process of yearning for what one has destroyed as a form of mystification. In a manuscript on the invention of Appalachia as a cultural category, anthropologist Allen Batteau, for example, studies the phenomenon in historical perspective.² He argues that during the last decade of the nineteenth century, as the frontier was closing, racism was codified and people began to deify nature and its Native American inhabitants. This attitude of reverence toward the natural developed at the same time that North Americans intensified the destruction of their human and natural environment. In showing how cultural notions about Appalachia were part of a larger dynamic, Batteau likens this process of idealization to forms of sacrifice where people draw a line between the profane (their civilization) and the sacred (nature), and then worship the very thing their civilizing process is destroying.

In a related analysis, North American historian Richard Slotkin suggests that frontier mythology in part revolves around a hunter hero who lives out his dreams in spiritual sympathy with the creatures of the wilderness who teach him their secret lore. "But his intention," Slotkin says, "is always to use the acquired skill against the teachers, to kill or assert his dominance over them. The consummation of his hunting quest in the killing of the quarry confirms him in his new and higher character and gives him full possession of the powers of the wilderness."³ In this analysis, the disciple turns on his spiritual masters and achieves redemption by killing them. This frontier myth, which Slotkin calls regeneration through violence, shaped American experience from the westward expansion through the imperialist venture in the Philippines to the early official rhetoric of the Vietnam War.

Yet other scholars attempt to demystify imperialist nostalgia through a more frontal assault: they vigorously assert that the past was no better, and most probably worse, than the present. Rather than claim that nostalgia conceals guilt, they try to eliminate altogether the validity of elegiac postures toward small towns and rural communities. In a recent stimulating book on modernity, for example, social critic Marshall Berman attacks reverential postures toward traditional

society by claiming that they are “idealized fantasies” designed to gloss over violence and brutality. The devastating portrait of such a society in Goethe’s Gretchen tragedy, he says, “should etch in our minds forever the cruelty and brutality of so many of the forms of life that modernization has wiped out. So long as we remember Gretchen’s fate, we will be immune to nostalgic yearning for the worlds we have lost.”⁴ Although Berman and I both aspire to “immunize” readers from such nostalgia, he apparently misses the paradox (about which society is brutal) in his claim that modernization has “wiped out” the “cruelty and brutality” (does he mean barbarism?) of past forms of life. In my view, Berman combats overly romantic visions of bygone harmonious societies by simply standing them on their head. Instead of inflating the value of face-to-face communities, he comes uncomfortably close to reproducing an ideology of progress that celebrates modernity at the expense of other forms of life.

The preceding analysts share a classic perspective which asserts that ideologies are fictions (in the sense of falsehoods) designed to conceal feelings of guilt. In more general terms, this mode of analysis argues that the work of ideology is either deliberately to disguise real class interests or unintentionally to express underlying social strains. The former posits a conspiracy to deceive subordinate groups and the latter assumes an unthinking connection rather like that between a disease and its symptom. Thus an analysis will reveal that the ruling class, for example, ideologically beats the drums about tax simplification in order to conceal the fact that it has turned Robin Hood upside down by taking from the poor and the middle class in order to give to the very rich. Although such demystifying approaches have proven their value, they all too often short-circuit their analyses by rushing to reveal the “real” interest involved and failing to show how ideology convinces those caught in its thrall. If the cultural forms involved never convince and never prove compelling, why not more directly study the “interests” they conceal or the “social strains” they express? In the extreme cases, why bother to speak of ideology at all?

What follows attempts to dismantle rather than demystify ideology. Presented more in the manner of a montage than a linear narrative, my heterogeneous examples attempt to show how ideology can at once be compelling, contradictory, and pernicious.⁵ The dismantling occurs by giving voice to the ideologies, even at their most persuasive, and allowing them, as the analysis proceeds, to fall under their own weight as the inconsistencies within and between voices become apparent. Just as no ideology is as coherent as it tries to appear, no single voice remains without its inconsistencies and contradictions. My dismantling analytical strategy attempts to infect the reader, so to speak, with a minor case of the ideology’s persuasiveness in order to provide immunity against more pathological episodes.

The Civilizing Mission

Let me now turn to North America's imperial venture in the Philippines by working with materials related to my field research among the Ilongots. I shall discuss in turn a series of voices, ranging from certain writings by an early-twentieth-century lieutenant in the Philippine Constabulary, to more recent evangelical Christian missionaries, to a turn-of-the-century anthropologist, to present-day anthropologists Michelle Rosaldo and myself. The writers discussed move from a man who enforced law and order under imperialism, to people who imposed their religion on a non-Christian group, to three individuals who tried not to change the culture they studied. Despite the differences that divide them, I shall argue that all are complicit in reproducing the ideology of imperialist nostalgia.

My discussion begins with the writings of Wilfrid Turnbull, a lieutenant in the Philippine Constabulary during the first decade of this century. Turnbull spent time among the Ilongots, especially in 1909 and 1910 when he was in pursuit of the men who murdered an American ethnographer named William Jones (who in turn is discussed later in this essay).

The *Philippine Magazine* of 1929 carried a story by Turnbull entitled "Among the Ilongots Twenty Years Ago." His story, for the most part, turns out to be a dry, unsentimental piece written in the ethnographic present and laced with native terms. Turnbull's ethnographic observations on subsistence, material culture, and customary practices on the whole are reasonably accurate, despite his modest disclaimer: "The writer of the present article wishes it to be considered as an assembly of reminiscences of the people and conditions as found by him, a layman with no pretense to a knowledge of anthropology, twenty years ago."⁶ Turnbull's disarming denial of expertise did not inhibit him from using the classic norms of ethnographic description, however.

In the article as a whole, lapses from conventional form are more occasional than representative. Excesses usually surface during attributions of character, an especially fertile site for the cultivation of ideology. After describing the so-called Ilongot man—a fictional construct, if there ever was one—as "wonderfully active" and "effeminate in appearance," he goes on to describe "his" warrior vices of sloth, male dominance, vanity, and surliness:

Taught from childhood to regard himself as a fighting man and nothing else, that it is below his dignity to perform any but the prescribed manual labor which is hazardous, that he is of superior mould to the female who is given him as a slave and admirer, all tend to make him somewhat arrogant and vain, and with advancing years he is apt to become overbearing and finally crabbed, some of the old men reminding one of old bad-tempered canines.⁷

The canine simile in this American colonial condemnation of the “Ilongot man” appears particularly striking because, as the article draws to a close, Turnbull simultaneously reintroduces his simile and adopts a more sympathetic stance toward the Ilongots: “Formerly it was customary to kill the Ilongots on sight; they were hunted like mad dogs.”⁸

In a more striking instance, Turnbull abruptly interrupts his detached, distanced description with a personal narrative that begins as follows:

The presentation of the seventeen *cabezas* [heads] not having produced the pleasure and enthusiasm anticipated, the Ilongots gave the writer two live children, a boy and a girl of about ten years of age, from different rancherias and unrelated. The youngsters were quite agreeable to the transfer, were accepted, given soap with directions necessary for its use, were deloused and sterilized as nearly as possible with materials at hand, were furnished with new wardrobes, and became the source of great usefulness and much entertainment.⁹

This story begins very much in the middle. The seventeen human heads appear without antecedent or explanation; the narrative makes it appear that they were given against the lieutenant’s wishes. On the other hand, the two children appear to be a more welcome gift (at least after their induction to civilization via ritual cleansing).

Turnbull’s willingness to assume adoptive paternity gives an air of innocence to the whole exchange. The author goes on to tell a version of the wild child story. When, for example, the two Ilongot children enter their first Christian settlement, they yell in excitement, according to Turnbull, “‘Look, sir, there are carabao, shoot them’—not being able to understand why it was not done. To them the keeping of a live animal was just a waste of food.”¹⁰ As a guardian, Turnbull enjoyed a somewhat indulgent paternal relation toward his two wards. When the Ilongot boy sharpens his long knife and tells a Christian Filipino that he wants to behead him, Turnbull stands back and notes that the boy’s fun “caused several undesirable situations.”¹¹ If the wild child mixes naive innocence with violent impulses, Turnbull combines fond indulgence with patronizing understanding. The narrative embodies an attitude of humanitarian imperialism.

Turnbull makes his adoption of the children appear humane and intelligible. Yet the reader still wonders about the mysterious appearance of the seventeen human heads. For further illumination one must consult an earlier text, which Turnbull wrote as an official constabulary report at the time the episode actually occurred in 1909. There the lieutenant explains how his actions (perhaps initially unknowingly) led to the decapitations and how he personally received the heads as he pursued the murderers of the ethnographer William Jones. Written to a senior officer, Turnbull’s 1909 report describes how Ilongots were in his camp to hunt down Jones’s murderers:

As the people of Alicad and Tamsi were in camp in compliance with an order of the governor to hunt these people, an expedition was organized next day and rationed (2 chupas

of corn per man per day) by me with instructions to surround and capture all these people. . . . On the 8th the cabecilla of Tamsi and the people from Panipigan returned with two heads, claiming that they were unable to find any but these, who showed fight and could not be captured. . . . The head-taking ceremony was celebrated and lasted two days, men, women, and children participating.¹²

While Turnbull did not literally order the Ilongots to deliver human heads, this episode repeats itself often enough in the report to suggest that the lieutenant must have known that his orders were more likely to result in decapitations than in the taking of prisoners. The mystery and lack of pleasure he shows at the gift of human heads, as depicted in the *Philippine Magazine*, appears quite at odds with his 1909 report. Indeed, one suspects that in 1909 the gift of heads must have been less surprising to Turnbull than the presentation of the two children he received as wards and hostages.

In a later piece, published in a 1937 issue of the *Philippine Magazine* and appropriately entitled “Return to Old Haunts,” Turnbull describes his return, as a prospector, to Ilongot territory he first knew in 1909 and 1910. His essay revolves around a series of before-and-after contrasts, as seen in the following: “I noted several significant divergences from former local Ilongot custom at old Panippagan. The present day house has its floor only about four instead of ten or more feet from the ground and the ordinary native *hagdán* or ladder has replaced the notched pole. . . . Stinking clothing was also in evidence.”¹³ Turnbull’s efforts to comprehend change are diminutive and tacitly metonymic: houses close to the ground indicate the end of headhunting (earlier houses on high stilts served as protection against raiders); the disappearance of the notched pole signals deculturation (the loss of a “typical” item of material culture); stinking clothes stand for debasement (Christian garb as opposed to Ilongot bark cloth). This metonymy presents the culture as a tableau frozen in two slices in time, before and after. It remakes the culture in miniature, not unlike the mini-drama of foster-parenting the two Ilongot children. Relations that once were paternalistic have soured and become beggarly.

Turnbull explicitly remarks on the civilizing process in these terms:

The present condition of the people and houses at Pongo was a shock! If such condition is a necessary stage to the less than semi-civilization of the nearby Christian settlements, it were better to segregate the Ilongots and allow them to follow their own mode of life. If there is a real desire to improve these people—and they are well worth it, especially the women—suitable teachers should be sent into the interior who by precept and example will show them the advantages of real civilization. For the right kind of teacher, the protection of soldiers is neither necessary nor desirable.¹⁴

These humanitarian sentiments—moral uplift, the value of education, and the white man’s burden—appear curiously at odds with Turnbull’s own role as a constabulary officer. Rather than the stark dichotomy of savage and civilized, this passage plays more complexly on semicivilization, defined primarily in eco-

conomic terms, versus real civilization, known through moral values imparted by education.

Yet in his essay the former lieutenant, as if speaking in another voice, recalls his punitive expedition after the Jones murder: "The people of Dickni visited us frequently, attracted to a certain extent by our winning ways, I should like to say, but fear it was only by the rice the cargadors [carriers] fed them and the crackers I dealt out to the children. I did not grudge them anything they got, for in 1910 I destroyed the settlement to the very last camote plant and in self-defence had to kill one man, all of which I now know was more my fault than theirs, due to my ignorance of local customs."¹⁵ Once he was harsh and ignorant, now he is older and wiser. Not unlike his seemingly self-effacing denial of ethnographic competence, his apparently humble posture authorizes him to go on, by now forgiven his youthful excesses, and describe his warrior feats. His textual field of inconsistent discourses ranges from innocence (his soldiering had nothing to do with the Ilongots' degradation) to valor (but he completely destroyed a settlement and killed a man).

Moreover, the changes that Turnbull encountered on his return as a prospector to his old haunts were, in part, produced by (or at any rate happened in accord with) his design, as his 1909 report indicates. There, he suggests that Ilongots be given help "to adopt better methods of cultivation, seeds, one or more carabao, ploughs cultivation, harrows, etc. be provided; and that trails be built *within* this section during the coming year. . . . Later trails can be made to connect with the outside, and gradually all will become friendly."¹⁶ Agricultural development, the end of headhunting, and contact with the outside appear to have been the primary changes that Turnbull witnessed in his 1937 article. His vision of 1909 had come true, but apparently he didn't like what he saw. He felt nostalgia for things as they had been when he first encountered the Ilongots, and this attitude absolved him of guilt and responsibility.

To bring the "civilizing mission" up to date, one must at least speak briefly about the major role evangelical missionaries have played in transforming Ilongot culture from the mid 1950s onward. The most active group in the area has been the largely Baptist organization called the New Tribes Mission that operates throughout the world among remote tribal groups. These missionaries quite often spoke with joy at how Ilongots had, as they put it, accepted Christ as their personal savior. Perhaps this jubilant discourse can best be seen in an article called "Old Things Are Passed Away," which appeared in the New Tribes Mission magazine *Island Challenge*. The article by Sarabelle Graves, the wife of one of the first New Tribes missionaries, describes the initial phase of converting the Ilongots:

How I wish you could hear the children of Taang when they get together! Marvin [her husband] told me of the great difference between them and those in savage villages where he and Florentino [his Tagalog-speaking companion] have been. Children just big enough

to walk can be seen smoking, chewing betel nut, singing the head-hunting song and doing the dance; but the children of Taang love to gather around many times a day to sing “Isn’t it Grand to be a Christian,” “Thank You Lord for Saving My Soul,” and many, many other songs they have learned in Tagalog. Yes, the POWER of God, the Gospel, has transformed these precious lives.¹⁷

It’s clear that, for Sarabelle Graves, there are two types of Ilongots, the savage and the Christian. This passage displays a reverential mood, not of nostalgia for the old form of life, but of a similar tenderness toward the transformed precious lives of new converts. Can one speak of nostalgia for the new?

My first personal encounter with the discourse of imperialist nostalgia in fact came while doing field research among the Ilongots in 1969. Although the incident was not inscribed in my field notes, I vividly recall a conversation with a Tagalog-speaking evangelical New Tribes missionary. She began to reminisce, perhaps because she thought it would interest an anthropologist, about how things were when she first arrived about a decade earlier. She spoke with nostalgia about threats on their lives from men she called headhunters, about how people always sang their indigenous songs, and about the absence of store-bought shirts. These remarks puzzled me; they seemed ill fitting to a missionary. Ilongot baptized believers, as the New Tribes missionaries called them, purposely abandoned their songs, saying they tugged at their hearts and awakened their old ways. The end of headhunting, for the missionary, marked the success of her evangelical efforts. Many of the shirts were donations that she herself had distributed. She had played a major role in producing, and evidently desired, the changes that took place. At the time I puzzled that she could yearn for the Ilongots to be as they had been before she transformed their lives. The notion of imperialist nostalgia had not yet occurred to me.

Mourning the Passing of Traditional Society

By now most anthropologists probably find such notions as the “vanishing primitive” or “mourning the passing of traditional society” more conventional than insightful. Like most clichés, they were once good metaphors, and they have enjoyed a venerable history in the discipline. Bronislaw Malinowski, for example, anticipated a theme played throughout Claude Lévi-Strauss’s *Tristes Tropiques* when he said, “Ethnology is in the sadly ludicrous, not to say tragic position, that at the very moment when it begins to put its workshop in order, to forge its proper tools, to start ready for work on its appointed task, the material of its study melts away with hopeless rapidity.”¹⁸ Malinowski himself, of course, was articulating the doctrine of salvage ethnography—record the precious culture before it disappears forever—that helped authorize the funding and institutional sup-

port of field research. One should probably add that the vision of the vanishing primitive has proven sometimes false and sometimes true. Confronted with the assaults of imperialism and capitalism, cultures can show remarkable resilience (as among the Native American Pueblos), and they can also disappear (as have many Negrito groups in the Philippines).

The notion of the “vanishing savage” forms an ideological pattern recently explored, for example, by James Clifford, who points out that the pattern extends beyond ethnography.¹⁹ He notes that in *Middlemarch* George Eliot uses a broadly ethnographic mode to describe a society placed about thirty years into the less industrialized past. Clifford locates this ideological pattern primarily in the act of writing, the inscription of oral culture into textual modes. He argues that bringing a culture into writing, rather like sacrifice, simultaneously creates the culture as book and destroys it as oral life. Where I diverge from Clifford’s view is when he asserts that ethnographic writing is primarily an allegory about writing, much in the modernist sense that the subject of much poetry is poetry itself. My own view is that such writings refer to and are conditioned by social reality, including forms of dominance and subordination. Surely such allegories must be understood in relation to imperialism.²⁰

The social critic Raymond Williams generalizes about the ideological pattern of pastoral pasts by documenting the historical persistence of nostalgic feelings toward the epoch about a generation back in time. He argues, however, that not all nostalgias are the same; under different historical circumstances, they mean quite different things. “What seemed a single escalator,” he says, “a perpetual recession into history, turns out, on reflection, to be a more complicated movement: Old England, settlement, the rural virtues—all these, in fact, mean different things at different times, and quite different values are being brought into question.”²¹

What follows further explores imperialist nostalgia with a view to reaching the uncomfortable recognition that missionaries, constabulary officers, and ethnographers inhabit partially overlapping ideological spaces, as can be seen in the writings of William Jones, Michelle Rosaldo, and myself. Lest there be any confusion, I recognize that anthropologists have often used the notion of the “vanishing savage” to criticize the destructive intrusions of imperialism and its colonial regimes. Similarly, somewhat idealized versions of the “primitive” have served as foils against which to judge modern industrial society. In her film *To Keep the Balance*, for example, anthropologist Laura Nader uses a sympathetic portrait of Mexican Zapotec Indian legal practices to satirize “our” own more dehumanized system of law. Nonetheless, my discussion in what follows underscores the ideological similarities between anthropologists and the agents of change from which “we” so often attempt to separate ourselves.

While doing field research among the Ilongots, anthropologist William Jones

wrote a letter home dated 25 February 1909. Letters home, of course, are the exemplary genre for nostalgic discourse, and this one, as can be seen from the following recollections of the Oklahoma territory where Jones was raised as an Indian and worked as a cowboy, was no exception:

I wish the plains could have remained as they were when I was a "kid." . . . I cannot put into words the feeling of remorse that rose within me at the things I saw. The whole region was disfigured with a most repelling ugliness—windmills, oil wells, wire fences. Go to so and so for drugs, go to another for groceries, and so on. The cowboy and the frontiersman were gone. The Indians were in overalls and looked like "bums." The picturesque costumes, the wigwams, horsemen, were things of the past. The virgin prairies were no more. And now they say that the place is a state! Nevertheless you saw the stars that I used to see. Did you ever behold clearer moonlight nights anywhere else? Did you hear the lone cry of the wolf and the yelp of the coyote? I wish you could have seen the longhorn and the old time punchers. The present would-be punchers are of a different build.²²

Jones's longing for an irretrievably lost time, at once his childhood and a period of history, can appear almost natural, as if it were only human nature to be nostalgic for lost youth and bygone eras. His letter surely manifests authentic and deeply felt sentiments, yet even such moments of "pure subjectivity" do not remain untouched by social force and dominant ideologies.

Written from the interior of America's newly acquired Philippine colony, Jones's letter home uses, not a panhuman spontaneous sentiment, but a discourse already appropriated by Teddy Roosevelt. In attempting to mask the harsh realities of turn-of-the-century industrialization and immigration, Roosevelt invoked rugged individualism, especially as personified in the cowboy and the frontiersman.²³ His actual frontier was an imperialist venture in the Philippines, not the Wild West. Viewed in this larger context, Jones's feelings were at once genuine and shaped by North American nationalist ideology of the time. Even in a heartfelt letter home, it becomes apparent that most cultural phenomena contain tacit ideologies, and most ideologies are culturally shaped. In other words, the terms *culture* and *ideology* refer more to distinct analytical perspectives than to separate realities.

In his field journal, written over the same period as the letters home, Jones strikes quite a different note. He describes, for example, hunting wild carabao or feral water buffalo with a group of Ilongots:

Mangurn ran crouching low; D. made it by standing erect. I could have clubbed him. The carabao then began to move away. I urged the two men to hurry; when we got to the ridge the herd had gone around it and were just entering the thick wood of the mountain. It was bitter disappointment, for from the ridge I could have had a fine shot. These people cannot come upon game like an Indian.²⁴

Jones finds that the Ilongots, in contrast with American Indians, are miserable hunters. Hunting, the very activity around which James Fenimore Cooper could

so readily construct a romance in the forest primeval, appears as a shabby field for disappointment. Possible nostalgia has been interrupted by nationalism, the sense that Philippine savages are inferior to the American variety.

Another representative passage from Jones's field journal shows a side of his activities, his material relations with the Ilongots, that a published ethnography would most probably have concealed. He often tells of the strain and distress created, on all sides, by the "gifts" he gave, both spontaneously and in compensation for specific services. Once, when he was going through his mail, an Ilongot woman and her boy came to ask him for brass wire, a scarce good much valued by Ilongots for making belts and jewelry:

While going through my mail in came Anan and her boy. She took her seat on the box near me. She was hardly through panting when she began begging for the wire. I asked her to wait, told her that I was busy and that we would see about it later. She almost broke into tears, her eyes watered; she told me it was hard work coming up the mountain, that it was painful to her legs. And this evening she and her husband took me aside and told me to give them the wire secretly at night, and that they would go home with it tomorrow without anyone seeing it! I was surprised to find that my remarks on such a course, that it was not a right thing to do, met with no heed.²⁵

Jones's "gifts" of brass wire, cloth, combs, and beads to the Ilongots doubtless produced only small changes in their lives, but they were part of a larger economy that was penetrating the region. Although the ethnographer was not a central agent in transforming the Ilongot form of life, he did participate in and bear witness to the changes taking place under the colonial regime. Yet ethnographic discourse of the time saw its mission as the textual preservation of traditional society, and would not have seen fit, as it if were a breach of etiquette, to describe the exchanges of goods and services between the ethnographer and the people under study.

Let me continue with a brief consideration of the research that Michelle Rosaldo and I conducted among the Ilongots. Not unlike those of William Jones, my letters home were no doubt the most nostalgic texts I wrote about the Ilongots. In late December 1968, a group of Ilongots and I walked to the nearest lowland municipal center where we witnessed the mayor's inauguration on January 1. During that walk, my Ilongot companions appeared in my imagination as if they were Hollywood Apaches (at other times, incidentally, I imagined them as pirates), and the towns we visited appeared (to me) to be straight out of the Wild West. All of this entered letters home in some detail, yet my field journal, with perhaps a greater sense of decorum than Malinowski's indiscretion would suggest, contains only the laconic phrase, "All very frontier town," referring no doubt to my vivid fantasies of cowboys and Indians. In my ethnography this nostalgia enters, but by then in an ironic mode: "Like William Jones, I felt that I was bearing witness to the end of an era. Yet no one would have been more surprised

than Jones to learn that nearly 60 years after his death I would be meeting Ilongot young men who still walked about in G-strings and red hornbill earrings (a sign of having taken a human head)."²⁶ This, as I now see it, was an effort to undermine yet acknowledge the force of an ideology, the quest to experience "real" fieldwork, that led me to the Ilongots in the first place. Because there seemed to be no other available trope, I recast nostalgia for the "vanishing savage" in the ironic mode rather than as sincere romance. Had classic norms still been in full force, I could have simply ignored what Jones saw and did before me as well as the present-day social forces—loggers, settlers, missionaries, schools, and hydroelectric projects—that, under such a description, appear alien to Ilongot traditional culture. At the time I could only acknowledge (but not as fully as I now would) that the very processes that aided my presence among the Ilongots were bringing devastating changes on them.

In September 1981, Michelle Rosaldo and I returned for a brief visit among the Ilongots. We were struck at the changes Ilongots were undergoing and we felt a sense of lost innocence. There was no moment, a generation before either we or William Jones arrived on the scene, when the Ilongots were their pristine selves. Perhaps we once had enjoyed thinking so, for the romantic quest of the untouched society had been a factor in our first seeking out the Ilongots, but ethnography as pastoral romance no longer seemed conceivable. No more could we place settlers, a schoolhouse, gold mining, and missionaries on the margins of our discourse. They belonged as much on center stage as our previous studies of headhunting and Ilongot notions of self and social life.

During our return visit of 1981 Michelle wrote in her field journal: "Much of me wanted to write an article, a sort of nostalgia for a time when my nostalgia seemed to make more sense, reflections on the reason that if one were to start NOW one couldn't do as much blocking out of 'the outside' as we had previously." She goes on to speak of the changes she notices: people feel vulnerable to their future; they see hope in evangelical Christianity; they are more caught up in a cash economy; young men are smoking cigarettes instead of chewing betel nut; items of dress and material culture from less than a decade before have been discarded. Her observations redeploy the discourse used by the missionary Sarabelle Graves, who spoke with such passion about the smoking betel chewers versus the transformed converts, and the constabulary officer Wilfrid Turnbull, who took such sad note of the changes he witnessed on returning to his old haunts.

It seems that times had changed. Yet when Michelle's field journal described our initial trip to a projected field site, she found herself on an anxious search for cultural traits that would invoke her nostalgia, "I was pained to find myself in quest of something everyone said was dying: where are there priests? do any young men learn this? which hamlets have most betel chewers, G-strings?" When asked, people told her item by item—priests, betel chewers, G-strings—that the

“traditional culture” was dying. Although she once embraced the romantic quest for the “vanishing savage,” she now found it painful. No doubt it is easier, if perhaps more painful, to discern an ideological pattern as it begins to lose its grip.

Although not the one Michelle Rosaldo would have written, this essay is part of a larger anthropological effort to speed the demise of a conventional trope—mourning the passing of traditional society—and to remind “us” of how complicit we are with imperialism. The anthropological trope and the colonial official’s curious longing for what he or she has destroyed—the sentimental discourse I have called imperialist nostalgia—cannot neatly be separated from one another. Both attempt to use a seemingly harmless mood as a mask of innocence to cover their involvement with processes of domination.

Rather than invoke a coherent self who worships what he or she has killed or grieves the demise of pristine societies, I have tried to show the place of imperialist nostalgia within a heterogeneous discursive field where writers like Wilfrid Turnbull can at once yearn for the old ways and acknowledge their warrior role in destroying them. Nostalgia at play with domination, as in Turnbull’s relation with his Ilongot foster children, uses compelling tenderness to draw attention away from the relation’s fundamental inequality. In my view, ideological discourses work more through selective attention than outright suppression, hence the feasibility of reading such inconsistent texts against their explicit intentions.

Ethnography has participated in much the same ideological discourse as that of Sarabelle Graves and Wilfrid Turnbull. In Jones’s case, official discourse suppresses painful observations: disappointment in Ilongot hunting prowess, excruciating material transactions, and the brutal changes he witnessed. Processes of drastic change often are the enabling condition of ethnographic field research, and herein resides the complicity of missionary, constabulary officer, and ethnographer. Just as Jones received visits from American constabulary officers during his field research, Michelle Rosaldo and I often used the missionary airplane for transportation in the Ilongot region. Jones did not police and we did not evangelize, but we all bore witness, and we participated, as relatively minor players, in the transformations taking place before our eyes.

Michelle Rosaldo and I were not innocent. The conditions that enabled us to reside among the Ilongots already made us complicit in imperialism. Our initial efforts to disguise our complicity, however, were heartfelt and sincere: the “pristine culture” of the Ilongots did tug at our hearts, and our capacity to experience changes in their lives as personal losses was enormous. Even today, when I remember how Ilongots gave up their music and oratory because, they said, they had become Christians, I cannot help but feel hurt, angry, and grieved (for whom?). Thus I have argued that surrender to such memories and the recognition of our complicity will enable us, not to detour around, but to move through, and hopefully beyond, imperialist nostalgia. This analytical movement more nearly resembles the long convalescence than the miraculous cure.

The memories that evoke moods of imperialist nostalgia both reproduce and disrupt ideologies. The notion of such memories as pure innocence, like that of the social scientist as impartial detached observer, should probably go the way of other efforts, guided by an ethic of masculine heroics, to do the impossible. Similarly, efforts to produce seamless identities—the celebration of Turnbull as valiant hero or his vilification as imperialist monster—usually produce carbon copies or inverted images of the ideologies they are meant to combat. It is in their inconsistent plenitude that memories eventually unravel the ideologies they so vividly animate. Such analytical recollections are more a process of immersion and gradual dissolving than a latter-day *veni-vidi-vici* of agonizing introspection, breast-beating confession, and absolute redemption. This mode of analysis attempts not so much to overpower an ideology, by grabbing hold and demystifying it, as to evoke it and thereby make it more and more fully present until it gradually crumbles under the weight of its own inconsistencies.

Notes

This essay is reprinted from my recent *Culture and Truth: The Remaking of Social Analysis* (Boston, 1989), by permission of Beacon Press.

1. David Lowenthal, *The Past Is a Foreign Country* (New York, 1985), 10. See also Jean Starobinski, "The Idea of Nostalgia," *Diogenes* 54 (1966): 81–103; and Fred Davis, *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (New York, 1979). I am grateful to Richard Terdiman for calling my attention to the above works.
2. Allen Batteau, "Romantic Appalachia: The Semantics of Social Creation and Control" (unpublished typescript).
3. Richard Slotkin, *Regeneration Through Violence: The Mythology of the American Frontier, 1600–1860* (Middletown, Conn., 1973), 551.
4. Marshall Berman, *All That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* (New York, 1982), 60.
5. My mode of analysis parallels that of Michael Taussig in his work on the culture of terror in Colombia entitled *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing* (Chicago, 1987). For a review of classic modes of studying ideology plus a critique partially related to mine—that such studies do not attend sufficiently to what ideologies actually say—see Clifford Geertz, "Ideology as a Cultural System," in *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, 1973), 193–233.
6. Wilfrid Turnbull, "Among the Ilongots Twenty Years Ago," *Philippine Magazine* 26 (1929): 262–63, 307–10, 337–38, 374–79, 416–17, 460–70, esp. 262.
7. *Ibid.*, 263. 8. *Ibid.*, 469. 9. *Ibid.*, 376.
10. *Ibid.* 11. *Ibid.*, 378.
12. Wilfrid Turnbull, "1909 Report of an Inspection Trip Through the Ilongot Rancherias and Country on and near the Cagayan River" (unpublished typescript, Philippines Studies Library, Chicago), 8.
13. Wilfrid Turnbull, "Return to Old Haunts," *Philippine Magazine* 34 (1937): 449, 460, 462–64, 546–47, 557–58, esp. 449.

14. *Ibid.*, 462. 15. *Ibid.*, 464.
16. Turnbull, "1909 Report of an Inspection Trip," 13.
17. Sarabelle Graves, "Old Things Are Passed Away," *Island Challenge* (May 1956).
18. Bronislaw Malinowski, *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* (New York, 1961), xv.
19. James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Allegory," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed. James Clifford and George Marcus (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1986), 98–121.
20. For a recent critique of the relations between anthropology and imperialism, see Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors," *Critical Inquiry* 15 (1989): 205–25. One can usefully compare anthropology's relation to imperialism with history's to nationalism and literary criticism's to cultural elitism. In response to these problematic connections, significant sectors of all three disciplines are now attempting to remake themselves. See also Rosaldo, *Culture and Truth*.
21. Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (New York, 1973), 12.
22. Henry Milner Rideout, *William Jones: Indian, Cowboy, American Scholar, and Anthropologist in the Field* (New York, 1912), 200–201.
23. For a discussion of North American "innocence" and the ideological character of visions of individualism in the Wild West, see Garry Wills, *Reagan's America* (New York, 1988), 93–102, 448–60.
24. William Jones, diary, 1907–9, 27 June 1908, Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago.
25. *Ibid.*, 26 July 1908.
26. Renato Rosaldo, *Ilongot Headhunting, 1883–1974: A Study in Society and History* (Stanford, Calif., 1980), 46.