
MEETING THE OTHER ON THE SAME GROUND: THE PREDICAMENT OF CULTURE IN ANTHROPOLOGY

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The concept of history [or culture] in its most profound sense does not shut the thinking subject up in a point of space and time; he can seem to be thus contained only to a way of thinking which is itself capable of going outside all time and place in order to see him in his time and place. Now it is precisely this presumption to absolute thought which is discredited by the historical sense... "You believe you think for all times and all men, the sociologist [or the anthropologist] says to the philosopher and by that very belief you only express the preconceptions or pretensions of your culture." That is true, but it is no less true of the dogmatic sociologist [or anthropologist] than it is of the philosopher. Where does he speak from, the sociologist [or anthropologist] who speaks this way. The sociologist [or anthropologist] can only form this idea of an historical time [or "culture"], which allegedly contains philosophers as box contains an object by placing himself outside history [culture] in turn and claiming the privileged position of an absolute spectator.

Merleau-Ponty, cited in McGrane (1989)

1. Culture Under Siege

Culture and anthropology appears to be inseparably bound in a symbiotic existence. Today, anthropology owes its existence to culture as much as the concept of culture itself is a product, mainly of anthropology. It is the significance assigned in anthropological studies to culture, the relation between culture and anthropology which is the broad theme underlying the present paper. In particular, the paper focuses on how anthropology perceives the other through the concept of culture, and on political implications of such a perception.

Elvi Whittaker (1992) in a discussion of what is identified as the current siege of reification of culture raises several issues relevant to a dialogue on the relation between culture and anthropology. Whittaker points out that anthropologists have invested enormously in culture and its 'perseverance.'¹ The concept of culture facilitates the pursuit of 'differences,' the central problematic of social sciences including anthropology, with the promise of 'homogeneity and certainty' and assuring 'a comforting consensus.' Furthermore, each 'new culture' 'documented' 'and salvaged from possible oblivion' is simultaneously a record of 'another success story about the power of culture.' Culture is anthropologists' text and 'the major key to understanding the discipline itself' (111). The significance of the concept of culture has gained wider currency spreading far outside the confines of academia in anthropology; even much-hallowed economic giants such as the World Bank have

'succumbed.' However, in an irony of fate, at this very moment of culture's ascendancy in the contemporary social discourse, it is threatened with what some fear as its 'imminent demise' (109). The threat is identified as coming from postmodernism. The general postmodernist critique of culture emanates from the suspicion of essentialist, logocentric, modernist, grand narratives with their attendant negative political implications of totalization and domination (111). Attempts at deconstructing essences merely for one's opposition to them in principle, may not have any purpose (112). In contrast to such an approach, discussions on culture and anthropology can be fruitful, if they are focussed, as Whittaker suggests, on 'what it reveals about the relations of anthropologists to their world' 'for the political affiliations these relationships suggest' (111) or about the function of such reifications in particular discourses (112). A closer examination of the concept of culture has to be invariably focused on the construction of "the other," a basic idea in all social, psychological and human sciences, and the very 'raison d'etre,' in anthropology. Culture is the very 'epitome of othering' (113).

Culture as Othering

In fact, 'understanding ourselves through the study of the Other' is supposed to be one of the major contributions of anthropology. Another is the representation of the Other, either as cultures facing the threat of elimination or now increasingly, as those marginalized who are 'denied' their voices. The negative political implications of Othering in anthropology are now well known and efforts have been underway for some time now to find solutions. Heightened reflexivity on the part of anthropologists, have led to strategies to empower the Other through action anthropology; as opposed to generalizing, conscious attempts are made to concretize the Other through ethnographic fieldwork. The Other has begun to speak and assert independence; the silence of the Other has been broken. However, the impact of all such well-intentioned efforts have not generated anything more than 'a surface concession, revealing the anthropologist's own discontent,' 'leaving the othering essentially untouched.' Whittaker suggests that, in contrast to efforts such as the above, a more substantial effort at rescuing the identity of the Other through particularization is made in the work of symbolic interactionism, socio-linguistics and narrative perspectives, which generally 'rely wholly on active participation of the Other and the voice of the Other' (114). The tendency to which Whittaker refers above is illustrated by the growing enthusiasm in producing ethnographies with increased presence of the Other through dialogic narratives, biographies; self-reflexivity on the part of anthropologists is also elevated by focusing on 'writing culture' and increased presence of anthropologists themselves in

ethnographies, thus locating oneself closer to the Other. The growth of a poetic anthropology is another method used to enhance the representation of the Other, giving voices to the poetics of the Other (Clifford and Marcus 1986). While the well-intentionality and the genuine concern on the part of many anthropologists who are involved in opening up anthropology to the voices of the Other is not contested, the question remains on how close such attempts would take us towards understanding and 'representing' the Other. My position is that, these approaches, which attempt to improve the representation of the Other in anthropology through various textual devices, leaves untouched the fundamental issue which anthropology should address: that is, the issue of "differences," which as already mentioned, is the central problematic of anthropology and all other social sciences. It is to discuss the relation between the concept of "differences," "the Other" and "Culture" now we turn.

The Differences of Difference

From it seeming to me — or to everyone — to be so, it does not follow that it is so. What we can ask is whether it can make sense to doubt it... We see the world the way we do not because that is the way it is but because we have these ways of seeing.

Wittgenstein

In an historical inquiry of the different conceptions of difference over the last four centuries, Barnard McGrane (in *Beyond Anthropology, Society and the Other* 1989), following Foucault² pursues the thesis that 'a culture which "discovers" that which is alien to itself also thereby fundamentally reveals that which it is to itself'³ (emphasis added.) Applying Kuhn's concept of paradigm change, McGrane suggests that Western organization of knowledge or the discourse, which constructed its non-Western Other differently under paradigm changes it underwent in different periods of its modern history, reveals a fundamental characteristic about the West: 'conventional positivist impulse and project to objectify our reactions to the Other and the otherness of the Other' (3). He suggests that, empty of such deceitful projections, 'empty of our conceptions', the Other is empty (2-3).

To illustrate how the different conceptions of difference of the Other is constructed, McGrane devotes his essay to deconstruct the Western paradigm of the non-Western Other in different historical periods. In the sixteenth century, in Renaissance cosmography, the non-European Other was constructed as opposed to the dominant discourse Christianity, and hence the Other was the goddess, the pagan, the demonical, the infernal. In the Enlightenment discourse of truth and enlightenment, the non-European Other became the ignorant, the superstitious. In the nineteenth century, a new paradigm came into being, as Johannes Fabian has elaborated in *Time and the Other* (1983), a paradigm of Time, geological, evolutionary, and developmental time accounting for the difference between the European and the Other.

The Other was grounded in some other historical time and place away from the European 'now and here.' Anthropology was born and came along the 'prehistorically fossilized' "primitive" and the modern civilized on the polar opposites of the path of evolutionary development through fixed stages of progressive civilization lit by modern Western science. Following the footsteps of Darwin, Tylor (1871) constructed the primitive culture, and 'non-European Other became the positive form of an evolution,' the exotic and the alien. In the early twentieth century comes the next reigning paradigm, "culture", accounting for the difference of the Other. Under "culture," the alliances of the other is ethnological or anthropologically perceived as 'both fundamentally and cultural different.'

Now, what do these paradigm shifts in the Western construction of the non-Western Other, reveal about the nature of the Western discourse on culture and the relationship between anthropology and its non-Western Other in particular? More importantly, what do they reveal about the current endeavors in anthropology to close the gap between "us" and "the Other."

McGrane (ibid) argues that the history of Western discourse on the Other 'the history of an identity crisis,' 'a history of the different identities we have existed.' The images of the Other produced within these discourses rather than being descriptions of real people, are projections of Western "man's nostalgia and feeling of inadequacy." They reflect 'judgments of himself and 'his history' (2). Similarly, anthropology is taken 'as fundamentally not being "about" anything, not a concrete description of anything, but rather as being "something," a reflection of the 'European self-understanding of the Other as non-European, the alien, the different' (2).

Anthropology as "something," not a Description of Anything. We have only to speak of an object to think that we are being objective. But, because we choose it in the first place, the object reveals more about us than we do about it.

-Gaston Bachelard

McGrane rejects the approach of treating anthropology as arising out of the need to understand concrete prior existence of other cultures — "primitive cultures." Such an approach is grounded in the positivist belief 'that the criterion of the truth and the historical progress and perfection of our scientific theories lie in their ever closer approximation to an autonomous reality' (4). Illustrating the point, McGrane makes the interesting comparison between science fiction and anthropology.⁴ It is known that there are no independently existing "science fiction" beings available against which the various historical images thereby produced may be compared with for the sake of positivistically evaluating their descriptive accuracy and adequacy — their "truth" (2). Similarly, anthropology does not simply describe its subject matter; it systematically constructs and produces it (4). Similar to the various figures and landscapes of science fiction, which are not discovered

and described, but invented and constructed, as Roy Wagner in *The Invention of Culture* (1975) has elaborated, culture itself is an invention (3). Thus, similar to science fiction which became an extraterrestrial anthropology in maintaining our belief in 'aliens-from-outer-space,' anthropology became a terrestrial science fiction, a discursive practice whose 'systematic administrative function' became, to a large degree, one of maintaining belief in the existence of the alien and the exotic without fusing them with our world (3). Therefore, the historical emergence and course of what we call "anthropology – the theoretical treatment of "primitive cultures" – and the historical emergence and course of what we call "primitive culture" are two ways of looking at the same thing' (4).

Looking at anthropology and invention of culture in this manner, McGrane argues, brings home the point that what matters in understanding cultures is not the fact and nature of the aliens' existence but the fact that they are conceivable; when and under what conditions the "primitive" or "Paleolithic man" was discovered and became conceivable (3). Our ability to understand their existence will depend on the understanding of their conceivability.

Deconstructing the Other

Thus, McGrane argues that, if we 'treat historical versions of "anthropology" as imaginatively possible worlds' and the beings it speaks of as grounded in the historically changing paradigms or forms of anthropological discourse and practice, our ability to understand the Other in its fundamental sense lies in the direction of redissolving and deconstructing, in a historical manner, 'the non-European Other back into the record of the choices made in creating him as a subject for imagination and thought' (4).

McGrane agrees with Fabian (1983 : 165) who suggests putting anthropology back on its feet through a similar strategy:

If we can show out theories of their societies are our praxis – the way in which we produce and reproduce knowledge of the Other for our societies — we may... put anthropology back on its feet. Renewed interests in the history of our discipline and disciplined inquiry into the history of confrontation between anthropology and its Other are therefore... ways to meet the Other on the same ground, in the same Time (5)

Thus, for McGrane, meeting the other in anthropology on the same ground necessarily begins with understanding how anthropology creates its other. For this, it is essential to understand these conditions of anthropology's existence:

'Analytically, the desire of every "rational practice," is to cultivate and make reference to its reasons for its existence' (Blum 1974). Hence, from this perspective, the decisive feature of anthropology

is not the concrete state of affairs it speaks about, but rather the reason for its speech and context, conditions and possibility of its speech. Its interest is itself, its being, and the maintenance of the conditions of its possibility (or, as Marx would say, the reproduction of the conditions of productions). Its subject matter is concretely "primitive cultures," analytically itself. Anthropology as an institution is fundamentally involved in the reproduction of Western society. Anthropology as the organized treatment of an exterior alterity (Levinas 1969) is, I believe, a supreme manifestation of the Western tradition. It manifests and highlights that egocentric tendency of our Western mind to identify itself as separate from what it perceives as external to itself. In its analytic structure, it is concerned with and reveals more about itself and its matrix the western tradition, than any of the concrete "primitive cultures" it concretely studies (5).

Then, what does anthropology reveal about itself through its usage of the concept of culture? McGrane finds the invention of culture in anthropology in the twentieth century, as revealing more about anthropology itself, than the cultures it takes on for studying.

The Invention of Culture

The invention of culture through the recognition and construction of other cultures 'marked a monumental event in the Western tradition' (5)⁵ In the twentieth century, modern anthropological concept of culture, which marks a rupture from its nineteenth-century usage, becomes a 'decisive and inescapable part of' Western discourse. Its distinguishing characteristic is its emphasis on cultural relativity and plurality. Now, for the first time, the difference of the strange and alien Other is seen as culturally different. Culture becomes 'the universal ground and horizon of difference,' (113-4). McGrane argues that 'the experience of difference as cultural difference is contemporary with our historical time. It constitutes the historic element within which we move, within our experience of difference, of the Other,' the totalizing concept of culture is in general, shared by all different schools of contemporary anthropology (114).

Modern anthropological concept of "culture" has made possible the democratization of difference. To see the Other as merely culturally different arises mostly from the late Enlightenment, with 'troubled bourgeois good conscience' insisting that the Other is not inferior but simply different. The bourgeois moralistic view that the Other is not inferior and hence also not superior results in an anti-climax with the great trivialization of the encounter with the Other, when the Other becomes merely different, "only" culturally different. In an interiorization of "time," "history" and "value," as opposed to the hierarchical schema implicit in evolutionary-historicist perspective of the earlier period, 'anthropology now sees the conception of temporal, historical evolution against the broader, universal horizon of "culture" (114). If culture is relative, there is no such thing as a universal culture and therefore, by anthropological definition, culture is cultures and cultures, by anthropological definition, are relative, a democratic

relatively, a perpetually tolerant relatively (117). In the same manner the paradigm of "progress" authorized the transformation of the "different" into the "primitive," the resource the resource of anthropological "culture," authorizes the transformation of "different" into "relativity" (118). What makes possible this awareness of other and different cultures in anthropology, according to the conventional interpretation is travel and exploration.

Seeing is Believing

It is believed that anthropological travel or ethnography has profoundly educated us through exposure to difference. Travel, in fact becomes the 'defining characteristic of our modern sophisticated consciousness.' Exposure to difference makes us different and it becomes the very criteria of our difference, both from our premodern forefathers and from the "primitive cultures"(115). Thus, ethnography gets established as the foundation of and the basic empirical practice and institution essential for practicing anthropology. Modern ethnographic travel, rather than producing an awareness of/and discovering differences, as it is widely believed in anthropology, presupposes an awareness of/and assumes difference (115). Awareness of difference is not the analytic result, but the precondition of the possibility of the concept of travel, the prerequisite of anthropological inquiry (116). Travel, which is intentional undertaking, a methodology systematically used in acquiring knowledge of "man," sees geographical movement as intellectual method. What makes this equation possible is the modernist, scientific, positivist version of a world in which conservation becomes the paradigm of knowing, which takes its ideal of knowing as experiencing. Thus, 'learning requires being present and having visual access,' and therefore travel becomes the method. Such a view of the world sees being stationary as an impediment and 'equates real change with the movement of commanding a view.' (116).

It is the recognition that 'culture is, and culture is relative,' which opened up the field of knowledge we term anthropology, its theory examining other cultures. Hence, McGrane's argument that '(I) n terms of its self-identity as a discipline, anthropology thereby contains within itself the project however remote, of a global and exhaustive ordering, interpretation and explanation of the world, all the items in the world in terms of "culture"(117).

Culture as Re-domestication of Difference

But what after all are man's truths?... they are his irrefutable errors.
Nietzsche

This transformation of "difference" into "relativity," in McGrane's view amounts to 'a paradoxical redomestication and annihilation of difference, for if all creatures are democratically relative, then in this deep respect, none are different' (117). As Paul Roiesman (1972 : &) has pointed out, studying "other cultures" through a relativist approach assumes in advance that "understanding" means

"explanation" in terms of priori categories. As such 'it is a way of making the world feel safer, a way of extending the edge of orders that we can comfortably say that people are fundamentally the same everywhere and that "cultural differences" are merely something like different mental images of the same basic reality.' The notion of a basic humanity common to all mankind, which was only differently manifested in different cultures, which has been repeatedly used against racism has led 'to confuse equality with sameness and inequality with difference. The belief that all people are human leads to a disrespect for other people as they are,' as it implies that 'they could be just as good as we if they tried, or if they adopted different cultural patterns.' 'The belief that all people are human has not saved Western anthropologists from feeling superior to the people they study and write about' (118).

Anthropology, while taking all phenomena to be making reference to relative being of culture, considers itself as somehow exempt from that rule. Rather, anthropology considers itself as 'of the nature of things and the order of truth.' It is unable to perceive itself as part of what it studies. It is this 'protective lack of reflection,' its incapacity to account for itself, what makes possible the discipline (118). This notion of anthropology being above culture and relatively is reflected in the unacknowledged absolute framework within which ethnographic travel operates. Because ethnographic travel is conceived of as a universal methodology, it produces a perspective that is not itself culture-bound (118). Other cultures, which are relative in space and time, become objects for the ethnographer. The anthropological observer, the ethnographic traveller, who is above all cultures, sees the relativity in what is contained in each culture. Thus, he sees himself as essentially independent and hence experiences all others as essentially dependent. Cultural relativity thus, becomes 'a prison theory,' (118-9). The end result is that studying cultures as essentially unrelated leaves the position of Western superiority untouched (120). Western culture by virtue of its knowledge of relativity of cultures and value attached to this knowledge (this knowledge is one of its basic values), assumes superiority while considering the other cultures as inferior due to their ignorance of this relativity (120). As opposed to the West's superior, logical, necessary relativity, the Other becomes imprisoned in custom, way off governed by the psychologically customary absoluteness. This relationship to difference has provided the basis for the Western belief in its "superiority" over centuries (121). Thus, the very capacity of the anthropologist to understand the Other, confirms the former in his superiority. A principle characteristic of the Other, then, is that he is incapable of recognizing others, being unaware of difference, their own relativity, in short, his ignorance (121). Perceiving difference between us and the Other in such universal characteristics exposes anthropology itself to the same criticism which it levels against the Other: belief in universality. Hence the essential indefensibility of any anthropological doctrine of radically and absolutely incompatible 'cultures' (121).

The Missing Dialogue

An essentialist view of differences between cultures makes no genuine dialogue possible between cultures (122). Ethnography as the method for concrete encounter between such a view and members of other cultures becomes the foundation of twentieth century anthropology and legitimization of what is accepted as anthropological knowledge. The basis for ethnographic activity, participation, description and translation is experiencing non-European Other as essentially culturally different (123). Such an approach denies the same historical power relations towards the alien Other to the extent that in so far as "participant observation" is analytically really interested in observing rather than participating; epistemologically, commitment is to the sovereignty of observation and its monologue about the Other, rather than the democracy of genuine participation and its dialogue with the Other (124).

Together with Fabian, McGrane suggests that field work carried out by thousands of anthropologists are 'repetitive confrontations with the Other' which 'may be special instances of the general struggle between the West and its Other,' and 'has been part of a sustained effort to maintain a certain type of relation between the West and the Other as the object of power and/or knowledge' (124).⁶ Despite the appearance that the field ethnologist on a concrete level is engaged in intercourse with the Other, given that his objective is internal comprehension of that alien culture, his is 'an analytic monologue' aimed at continuing in the tradition of anthropology without really doubting the rightness of an authority and auspices of anthropology. He never loses control over his anthropological horizon. His goal is simulated membership, full knowledge of membership without commitment to membership in the alien culture (125). The paradox at the basis of anthropology is revealed in the anthropologist's attempt to experience the culture of the alien. While to become a native alone gives him access to the other's world, if he becomes a native, he can no longer do anthropology, as "anthropology" vanished from the scene, ceases to be and ceases to be conceivable and eliminates the conditions of anthropology's possibility (126).

Anthropology: An Analytic Monologue

Thus McGrane argues, anthropology, an analytic monologue of reason about the difference of the Other which no longer renders possible a common language, has been established only on the basis of the silence of the Other (126). Institutionally secure in its own position, anthropology is unable to question its own position, to put its rightness in question (127). Hence, McGrane's view that, 'anthropology has been an extremely subtle and spiritual kind of cognitive imperialism, a power-based monologue about alien cultures rather than and in active avoidance of, a dialogue with them in terms of sovereignty, i.e., the untranslatability and irreducibility of one "culture" to the being and language of the other.' Anthropology is simultaneously interested in the Other and

remains totally alien to the Other. 'In the best of cases anthropology speaks well of the Other, but with very few exceptions, anthropology does not speak to the Other.' It is only by speaking to the Other not giving orders but engaging in dialogue that I can acknowledge him as a subject, comparable to what I am myself. 'The sustained, cultivated and epistemologically enforced decay, atrophy of dialogue is the condition of our contemporary anthropological discipline' (127).

In ethnography, the third person marks an Other outside the dialogue between the ethnographer and his dialogic Other, the other anthropologists and the scientific community. 'He or she is not spoken to but posited (predicated) as that which contrasts with openness of the participants in the dialogue' (127). Anthropology instead of listening to the voices of the "alien cultures," learning from them, it studies them, 'makes sense' out of them. In this manner, making a "science" about them has been the modern method of avoiding listening to the other (127). Even in the best of cases, anthropologists who have a genuine concern for the people they study 'almost never think that they are learning about the way the world really is. Rather they conceive of themselves as finding out what other people's conceptions of the world are' (128). 'The Other's empirical presence as the field and subject matter of anthropological discourse is grounded upon his theoretical absence as interlocutor, as dialogic colleague, as audience' (128). Modern anthropology can sustain itself, only by maintaining its monologue about alien cultures and thus keeping those cultures in analytic silence. Allowing alien cultures to speak its language, or a serious contemplation of possibility of the truth and authority of that alien culture, the discourse of the monologue of anthropology bursts.

Now, what can students of anthropology who are keen on meeting the Other on the same ground make out of McGrane's incisive critique of cultural anthropology? It is to a brief discussion of this question now we turn in the following concluding section.

2. How to Meet the Other on the Same Ground

Discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power, but also a hindrance, a stumbling block, a point of resistance and a starting point for an opposing strategy.

Foucault

McGrane's critique of cultural anthropology comes at a time when the latter in its interpretive approaches in particular, is believed to have made great strides in overcoming the previous accusations of anthropology's implication in imperialist agendas. This achievement, it is believed, is made mainly through cultural anthropology's focus on making sense of and describing difference of alien cultures, as they appear to the insiders of such cultures. Ethnography, which has risen to the status of the supreme method of cultural anthropology, is considered the ideal vehicle for meeting and representing the Other. Taking culture as text or narrative as in interpretive approaches popularized through the pioneering work of Geertz and considering ethnography as text of writing culture

as highlighted by the 'postmodern' anthropologists such as James Clifford and George E. Marcus, writing biographies of the Other, poetic approaches to writing ethnographies, all these strategies have no doubt made significant advances from the view of cultural anthropology, in the direction of improving on ethnography in using it as a vehicle to 'understand' and 'represent' the Other.

Yet Ironically, it is the underlying premises of this very belief, that cultural anthropology, as practiced through ethnography in its various forms can be improved within the existing discourse of culture as a means of understanding and representing the Other, which are fundamentally questioned by McGrane's critique.

The crucial question then is, given such far-reaching political implications of the dominant discourse in anthropology in perceiving the Other as simply culturally different, leading to the exclusion of the Other without fusing them with our world, how could one attempt to meet the Other on common ground? That has to come through treating the Other as one of us and fusing the Other with our own world. The only means of achieving this is through dialogue. The basis of such a dialogue should not be our superiority, but our ignorance; not taking the Other as the object of our study, but our dialogue partner, the interlocutor. As McGrane writes:

The only real dialogues are Socratic in nature; they are the most difficult as well as the most dangerous. The cardinal condition of the Socratic dialogue is the ability to actively question and recognize one's own ignorance, the ability to seriously play with the possibility that one is in ignorance. Socrates held to this because he was able to envision, maintain and sustain the commitment to the indefinitely present possibility that he himself was in ignorance (126).

In other words, the basis for a genuine dialogue comes from realizing our ignorance, a highest form of self-reflexivity. Understood in this manner, in anthropology, the dialogue could begin by attempting to understand how we have treated the Other as the object of our study, or as Fabian (1983 : 165) suggests, through an 'inquiry into the history of confrontation between anthropology and its Other.' Or as McGrane attempts in his essay, by deconstructing 'the non-European Other back into the record of the choices made in creating him as a subject of imagination and thought.' Such attempts at deconstruction may hopefully pave the way for the construction of a paradigm of culture which would interpret the Other as one of us and which would enable us to fuse the Other into our own community so that the dialogue between us and the Other, all human beings, could begin in earnest once again. If deconstructions can lead to such fruitful constructions they will neither be in vain nor simply for their academic excitement.

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Notes

- 1 In the following section, numbers within parenthesis refer to Whittaker's paper, unless otherwise stated.
- 2 McGrane writes: "This essay, under the haunting spectre of Foucault's question (Does man really exist?), is a small attempt at an 'archaeology' using, for the most part, the methods devised by him in the 'archaeology of knowledge,' together with the methods and concerns of 'ethnomethodology' as originated by Harold Garfinkel and developed by Alan Blum (ibid : 1).
- 3 In the following section, the numbers in parenthesis refer to McGrane (ibid).
- 4 McGrane (ibid : 4), following Cassirer and Lovejoy, describes how science fiction beings were invented and constructed during different historical periods in a manner similar to those of anthropological constructions of the terrestrial alien, the non-Western Other. 'during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, in a specifically hierarchic cosmos. These figures and landscapes were versions of and variations on "angels" and "demons": during the Enlightenment, in an astonishingly uniform and profoundly homogenous universe... they became versions of and variations on "men" and "civilised being" and in the nineteenth and twentieth-centuries they became, in accordance with a biological, deeply Darwinian universe, "Martians" and alien life forms.'
- 5 As Wagner (1975) reminds us 'the idea that man invents his own realities is not a new one... and perhaps has always been known to man. However, the concept of the invention of culture has not been easily accepted into the dominant tendencies in social sciences, including anthropology. Nevertheless, pitting culture against nature in a binary imposition and corresponding equation of male-female division has been challenged by feminists who see the move as a 'construct of culture' which contribute to the perpetuation of male dominance in human world (Ortner, 1972; Haraway, 1989, 1991). McGrane (ibid : 4) notes how in the discourse of culture in the twentieth century, 'the very use of "him" as a pronoun for the Other is itself reflective of historical choices - perhaps the sort of subconscious symbolic annihilation of women, a grammatical-discursive gendercide.' While many feminists would support the deconstruction of the binarism nature-culture, as Whittaker (1992 : 112) points out, some feminist schools may oppose the deconstruction of the male-female binarism due to the belief that it has 'considerable political importance in empowering feminist theory to work critically in a dominant' male discourse. A possible counter-argument to the latter position, in my view, would be that using an essentialist notion of the female as a means of empowering women against male domination would, if at all, result in female domination in place of the male dominance, not necessarily a non-dominant discourse.
- 6 A key aspect of this relationship of power/knowledge between the anthropologist and its Other is illustrated in 'a profound ethnological paradox' experienced by ethnographers in their attempts to recover histories of various people such as native people in America: the contamination of such histories by the culture of the ethnographer in rendering the story for his own white audience. Most such stories lose its own mode (poetic, repetitious, symbolic, nonsequential) which is unacceptable to or incomprehensible to whites (125).