

nature of contemporary American culture where the resurgence of ethnic identities (and its regressive counter, racism) have made it all the more imperative to see culture "on the border."

The summary account I have offered of Rosaldo's book falls short, of course, of portraying the vibrant and extensive range of its insights. He has quilted together a remarkable array of contemporary social theories in ways that rescue them from academic obscurity and make them available for wider discussions and varied appropriations. In doing so, he has raised the political and ethical stakes of cultural studies, locating the question of culture on the terrain of other struggles over the future direction of American education. Herein lies what I take to be the significance of the book's title. Unlike Matthew Arnold's stark and reductive opposition of "culture" to "anarchy," the "truth" of culture in Rosaldo's writings lies less in its "civilizing" and normalizing effects than in its capacity to bring to bear on our lives what Adrienne Rich calls an "increasing complexity."

VICENTE L. RAFAEL

University of California, San Diego

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Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives, by Marianna Torgovnick. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990. ISBN 0-226-80831-9, xi + 328 pp, illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. US\$24.95.

In her book *Gone Primitive: Savage Intellectuals, Modern Lives*, Marianna

Torgovnick unravels the Western discourse on the "primitive." By examining a number of diverse cases from anthropology, art, art history, literature, and psychology, she outlines the variations of the Western obsession with the "primitive," explores its implications, and discusses its relevance for modernism and postmodernism, because "to study primitivism's manifold presence is to recontextualize modernity" (193). She critically probes the texts of Edgar Rice Burroughs (*Tarzan of the Apes*); of art historians Roger Fry and the Museum of Modern Art's William Rubin; of ethnographers Michel Leiris, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Bronislaw Malinowski, and Margaret Mead; of novelists D. H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad; of Sigmund Freud; of professional adventurers Tobias Schneebaum, Lorne and Lawrence Blair, and Henry M. Stanley ("Dr Livingstone, I presume"). She shows how the authors rely on, and construct, power hierarchies when writing about the "primitive," how their fascination with the "primitive" has to do with their "need to clearly demarcate subject and object even while flirting with other ways of experiencing the universe" (157), and how "gender issues always inhabit Western versions of the primitive" (17). Torgovnick's book is a self-critical analysis of *our* (Western) view of *them*, and a polemical critique of men's representations of non-Western humankind and of women.

The illustrations Torgovnick has chosen for her book supplement the texts she quotes. In much the same manner that she unmasks Western primitivism in novels and ethnographies, she analyzes paintings such as

Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* or Manet's *Olympia*, book covers, the display of Congolese objects at the 1897 Exposition Universelle in Brussels, and the arrangement of pieces of art in Freud's treatment room.

Marianna Torgovnick is a literary critic (she is professor of English at Duke University). Maybe it is her position as an outsider that enables her to disrespectfully take apart icons of anthropology such as *Tristes Tropiques* and *The Sexual Life of Savages*. Her book does not primarily address Westerners writing professionally about other cultures, nor does she expect the reader to be familiar with the literature she analyzes; together with her passionate and lucid style of argument and the lack of fancy jargon, these should be good preconditions for the book to have the wide readership it deserves. I wished, however, she had made more substantial reference to recent pioneering contributions related to her topic, namely Said's *Orientalism* (which she mentions in endnotes only), and Todorov's *The Conquest of America* (which she does not mention at all). To acknowledge an ongoing debate would not have been to deny the originality of *Gone Primitive*.

Writing as a Westerner, Torgovnick includes herself when asking "Why do we desire the primitive?" "How do we use the primitive to bolster our own ends?" or "How do we project and seduce with versions of the primitive?" (34). Yet *Gone Primitive* is also a personal assault on particular men who produced films, ethnographies, paintings, or novels about, or alluding to, something they termed, or perceived as, "primitive." Never does Torgovnick

hide behind the smokescreen of impartiality when reviewing books like *L'age d'homme* or *The Plumed Serpent*. She asks herself why *she* is repulsed by Leiris and intrigued by Lawrence. In the last chapter, she includes a fantasy on Malinowski's body. A sample: "a narrow chest—pale, with just a few stray hairs and no nipples to speak of. . . . The buttocks lie flat, unwelcoming, with maybe a stray pimple" (232). The subjectivity of her gaze is one of the strengths of her book. In the case of Malinowski it is by means of her subjective response to his writings that she pinpoints the optic nerve of his observation of Trobriand Islanders. Her critique is hardly ever an authoritarian dismissal; it challenges us to (re-)read the texts she discusses, and others, and to question the authors' portrayal of the "primitive" and our response to it. But the personalization of the issue becomes problematic once it invites us to treat primitivism as a matter of no immediate concern to us. We need to question our way of reading Conrad and Malinowski, as well as our accepting the tropes and categories through which we view non-Western societies in everyday life. Torgovnick writes: "It is not easy to identify in any simple way either 'good guys' or 'bad guys' in the history of Western primitivism" (243). Is it a foremost necessity anyway?

The other problem here concerns her criteria for distinguishing between bad guys and not-so-bad guys. Leiris and Malinowski, whom she detests, reported most frankly about their attitudes. Compare Michel Leiris with Claude Lévi-Strauss, who in *Tristes Tropiques* obscures with his sentiment-

tality the racism and sexism she has no difficulty in exposing in *L'Afrique fantôme*. Moreover, the more knowledgeable she is about a given author, the more she is inclined to detect complexities, point out contradictions, and refrain from moralizations.

Torgovnick convincingly argues that the term *primitive*, applied to Iatmul and Yanomami alike, mirrors a construct and levels out the peculiarities of the societies it labels. By the same token she points out that the use of the terms *Western* or *Euro-American* is not to deny the differences between "nationalities, genders, sexual orientations, and social classes" (256 n41). Yet whereas she successfully portrays the Western view on the "primitive" as a wide array of diverse approaches, actually setting out her argument by pointing to the differences between the authors she discusses, throughout her book she implies that after all there are people who can indiscriminately be subsumed under the term "primitive." I am not convinced by her argument that by putting "primitive" in quotation marks, "we in a sense wish away the heritage of the West's exploitation of non-Western peoples or at least wish to demonstrate that we are potentially correct" (20). When writing about "those who live with primitives" (241) or "journey to primitive societies in fact or via imagination" (236), she does not refer to representations but to the people themselves. Maybe in the early 1970s, when Stanley Diamond wrote *In Search of the Primitive*, there was still a chance that the discredited term could be cleansed of its racist and imperialist connotations. But now it has been so deeply corrupted that it should be

avoided when denoting real human beings.

Gone Primitive is an important book that should be a must—not just for anthropologists. It draws attention to issues that ought to be further explored. Marianna Torgovnick concludes her book by announcing that she is investigating writing a study of alternative traditions. This would be an important follow-up to *Gone Primitive*. I regret that Margaret Mead appears in what reads like a postscript. (Searching my mind for my personal collection of good guys, I come up with only a few that, after reading Torgovnick, bear close examination).

Another response to *Gone Primitive* could be to undo the dichotomy between the West and the non-West and look at ways the tropes of Western primitivism seep into discourses in places nowhere near the Museum of Modern Art and Euro-American departments of anthropology. When reading Torgovnick on Burroughs, I kept thinking of a particular Tarzan cartoon (I never read the novels or watched the films). It depicts a white woman tied to a pole in what could be an African village. Black women brandish knives and dance around her. The white woman looks timid, yet manages to contain her horror, while Tarzan observes the scene from afar, determined to rescue her. I saw this cartoon four years ago, a few days after first arriving in Papua New Guinea (and not long after being warned by well-meaning friends to beware of cannibals and savages), as part of a serial in the country's leading daily.

KLAUS NEUMANN

University of Newcastle, NSW