

Theorizing the Role of the Intermediary in Postcolonial  
(Con)text: Driss Chraïbi's *Une enquête au pays*

Anjali Prabhu  
Wellesley College

Les Français étaient partis, mais demeurèrent les esclaves—portiers, domestiques, secrétaires, petits intermédiaires coincés à jamais entre les nouveaux maîtres du Tiers Monde et le peuple.

—Driss Chraïbi, *Une enquête au pays* 131

The French had gone, but their slaves stayed behind—porters, domestics, intermediaries jammed for good between the new masters of the *Third World* and the people.

—Driss Chraïbi, *Flutes of Death* 91

The entire history of colonialism points to the meeting of at least two cultures which are seen as being distinct and in different positions of power. Usually, the colonial enterprise involves a strong emphasis on the boundaries between these two cultures and an articulation of space which delineates the separation of the dominant from the dominated. Critics have shown how colonial discourse sets about erasing, to the best of its ability, the ambiguities and seepage that occur between these two neatly divided locales: us and them; civilized and uncivilized; white and black.<sup>1</sup> At the same time, it tries to encapsulate the Other, so, its

“mode,” to quote from a recent reflection on the subject, is “proprietary and unifying” (Kadir 18). The colonizer’s need to acquire knowledge of this Other requires translation (of texts and contexts), penetration, and negotiation for the functioning of the colonial machine—as well as for “native” survival.<sup>2</sup>

The postcolonial era explicitly testifies to the fact that these boundaries are (and have been) tenuous. In a situation of postcoloniality, borders and intersections of land become contested spaces, as do the borders and intersections of groups and individuals whose formations were transfigured by the colonial encounter and the processes of oppression, negotiation, and resistance that it engendered.<sup>3</sup> The impact on education, customs, food, clothes, language, ideology—identity in general—of the colonial encounter involves not only a mingling of the colonial and the native, but also a change in the configuration within the native and the colonial cultures respectively. Theoretically, “it is the post and its volatile élan that complicates the otherwise straight and narrow vocations of . . . colony” (Kadir 17). While current imperialism gives continuity to the colonial enterprise, location at privileged intersections during colonialism usually brings privilege after colonialism.<sup>4</sup> It is the location of privilege that the “intermediary” occupies or exemplifies which will be of central interest in this piece. I define the intermediary as an individual or section of society in the postcolonial context having access to more than one space seen as distinct due to birth, education, language and other such factors and their interrelations. The sections between which I posit the intermediary are class based, often ethnically named, and marked primarily by education, language, socialization, and access to material and discursive power by virtue of such an intermediary location in the postcolonial context described. One key factor of the intermediary’s position is the ability to exercise choice, which affords the intermediary a certain mobility in his/her identity politics. Equally important is the change in the terms of power that a change in location implies. Nonetheless, what characterizes the intermediary is the possibility of a certain adjustment of tactics precisely by virtue of his/her location in order to better negotiate the situation at hand.

I propose to study the role of the intermediary in Driss Chraïbi's novel, *Une Enquête au pays* (*Flutes of Death*) in order to bring to the forefront the privileges afforded by such a position and the mobility it permits.<sup>5</sup> While the shadow of the colonizer is ever present in this novel, the struggles that are most striking are those of the various sections within the newly "independent nation." As Martina Michel has noted, numerous recent critical articles bemoan the unifying tendency of "postcolonial studies," the mere choice of the label itself being seen as "invit[ing] neglect of these differences *between and within* the various former colonies, and thus preclud[ing] any accounting for their particularities" (emphasis in original; Michel 84). Or, the other concern is the privileging of colonial history and an undue attention to the colonizer-colonized relationship. Chraïbi's novel concerns itself precisely with the differences *within* the Moroccan nation in a certain synchronic consideration, while the diachronicity of colonial history is obviously implicated. Everyday life in former colonies, from the sewers and roads to birth records and the educational system—especially in the urban setting and in the urban-rural relationship, whether we like it or not, *is*, among other things, the memory of that particular colonial history. In fact, Frantz Fanon has gone so far as to write that "decolonization is quite simply the replacing of a certain 'species' of men by another 'species' of men" (35). This novel by Chraïbi, published in 1982, deals with the hierarchies in postcolonial Moroccan society. The novel captures the different stances adopted by the individual characters but also pushes beyond the wings to locate them within the larger structures of socio-economic class formed by precolonially developed hierarchies interacting with the colonial presence in all its ramifications. It explodes national boundaries, even while mocking nationalist discourse and the (former) colony-metropolis dialectic to implicate the newer forces that mark the relationships amongst different groups within the recognized national sphere.

Driss Chraïbi portrays with humor and poignancy, in *Une enquête au pays*, the character of the Police Inspector, whose role I

read as that of the intermediary, located with a foot in the indigenous and one in the establishment—once colonial, now postcolonial. He constantly shifts his weight depending on the situation at hand, allying with the poor peasants, whom he sees as the sons of the soil, the true people of his country and his ancestors—or with the establishment inherited from the colonizers by the Westernized, educated elite. The space within which the Inspector maneuvers his desire and power is always precarious, yet essential, to the current modes of exploitation and oppression, as well as of resistance. Nonetheless, his desire does not always operate to coincide with his power, and vice-versa, causing him to constantly evaluate his options in a particular situation. As Françoise Lionnet has noted in the context of African and Caribbean art and literature:

it is not assimilation that appears inevitable when Western technology and education are adopted by the colonized, or when migration to the metropole severs some of the migrants' ties to a particular birthplace. Rather, the move forces individuals to stand in relation to the past and the present at the same time, to look for creative means of incorporating useful "Western" tools, techniques, or strategies into their own cosmology or *Weltanschauung*. (11)

Inspector Ali's entry into the urban space of postcoloniality, and specifically into the new national administration, required a departure from his previous ethnically- and class-defined space. The creative reconstruction of his past is strategically accomplished in order to better exploit the present. Details of this change in location and Ali's agency in defining his space are central to the argument presented here.

Chraïbi tells a compelling story of impossible solidarity between the oppressive and the subaltern sections from the space of the intermediary, where the Inspector Ali's tactics are located. Interestingly, Fanon also posits the law enforcer (the policeman and the soldier) as an "intermediary [who] does not lighten the oppression, nor seek to hide the domination; he shows them and puts them into practice with the clear conscience of an upholder of the peace; yet he is the bringer of violence into the home and

into the mind of the native" (38). Chraïbi's intermediary fits the description except for the significant fact that he is at great pains to mask the domination. Fanon's intermediary uses brute force while Chraïbi's is involved in a much more complex endeavor. One might say that the kind of intermediary position to which Fanon refers can only know loyalties to the higher position (colonial power), as the lower positioned "people" are not assumed to provide sufficient incentive for a profitable engagement. On the other hand, in the example we will study, this intermediary position is reclaimed and exploited by an occupant whose politics destabilize what Marx has called a web of practical illusions or the "illusion of the state." In his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, the bureaucracy is set up as a "hierarchy of knowledge" where "the top entrusts the understanding of details to the lower levels, whilst the lower levels credit the top with understanding of the general, and so all are mutually deceived" (Joseph J. O'Malley's translation, provided in Tucker 24). The interaction of the policemen with the villagers in Chraïbi's novel, in a presentation of the disruption of this hierarchy of knowledge through many a comic scene, exposes the illusion of the state.

Borrowing a term from Gyan Prakash, I am proposing a "post-Orientalist" reading for Chraïbi's novel with the basic idea that it "trace[s] third-world identities as relational rather than essential" (Prakash, 399). Chraïbi's novel clearly constructs each of the groups portrayed in relation to one another, and in their relationality to the global, former colonial, and even other national spheres. His project, as it emerges from this reading, resembles that of the subaltern studies group by "resisting colonial and nationalist discursive hegemonies through histories of the subaltern whose identity resides in difference . . ." (Prakash 401). Although Chraïbi does not undertake an actual recounting of the history of the subaltern group with which he engages, the novel veritably forces the consideration of the group (in this case the Berber peasants) and such groups, their histories, and their futures through the forced contact he portrays. For Danielle Marx-Scouras, the "regionalistic tendency" in Chraïbi's later work, to which period *Une enquête au pays* belongs, can be seen as an indi-

cation of the “cross-cultural” preoccupation of the author and his concern “with all peoples who have had to relinquish their land, their history, their voice, and their identity—all the minorities that actually, as Chraïbi reminds us, comprise a vast majority of the world’s population” (142). The continued pertinence of Chraïbi’s ironic, scathing critique of the failure of the state is evident. The shockingly violent reaction by the peasants in this novel is in keeping with Fanon’s analysis of “the starving peasant . . . [for whom] there is no compromise, no possible coming to terms; colonization and decolonization are simply a question of relative strength. The exploited man sees that his liberation implies the use of all means and that of force first and foremost” (Fanon 61).

The role of the intermediary in *Une enquête au pays* is one of dilemma. It is an in-between which constantly demands the making of decisions regarding identity and alliances. Still, his survival is linked to his understanding of the established hierarchy in which he ranks below the Chief. The easiest way to be a “successful” subordiante, however, is to follow the Police Chief’s advice: “Ne pense pas, exécute!” (10) ‘Don’t think. Act!’ (6). Acting would then mean following the orders of the powers above. These are the powers of indigenous as well as colonialist patriarchy operating in unison. “Tu as la loi pour toi, je te soutiendrai, je suis ton chef” (12) ‘The law is on your side. As your boss, I’ll support you,’ the Chief informs the Inspector, who is to be divorced and wants to keep his children. In order to take his place among the privileged, however, he is obliged to be silent: “Alors fais un double nœud à ta langue maudite et garde ta place de privilégié, tête de crocodile” (17) ‘Well, tie your cursed tongue in a double knot and safe-guard your place among the privileged, you crocodile-head,’ (10) the Chief instructs him. For he could “être viré du jour au lendemain pour un oui ou pour un non” (17) ‘be sacked from one day to the next because of a simple yes or no’ (10). The Inspector must at all times maintain his subordinate position vis-à-vis the Chief: “Tu essaies de raisonner comme un chef et c’est cela qui te gâte le caractère. Ça mélange tes idées avec tes paroles” (54) ‘You try to reason things out like a chief, and

that's what spoils your character. That mixes up your thoughts and your words' (37).

In the same manner, the Chief himself can not afford to think subversive thoughts. He must continue to function only within his sphere. He is also a subordinate (and an intermediary) at a different level than the Inspector, and in order to survive, he must abandon all thought. He reminds himself: "[U]n grand malheur, assurément. Voilà ce que c'était de penser, de se comporter en insectuel!" (162) 'A great evil. That's what comes from thinking. From behaving like an *insectual!*' (110). The idea that those who "think" can be eliminated as easily as "insects" becomes very pertinent, given the persecution of intellectuals in the Maghreb in the recent past.

Thought also confuses the Inspector who is at the intersection of opposing currents of desire and power: "Plusieurs éléments contraires catchaient avec des coups bas entre ses sourcils et la naissance de ses cheveux, des forces centrifuges, centripètes et d'autres qualificatifs dont il ignorait le nom qui tintamorraient dans son crâne comme des loubards" (183) 'Various conflicting elements were battling with blows between his eyebrows and his hairline, centrifugal and centripetal forces and forces with other qualifiers which he couldn't name, all creating a racket in his skull like [a group of hooligans] . . .' (124). Here, he is weighing his various options for a course of action. This requires thought, which becomes a complicated, messy business. The unruliness of individual thought and its noisiness that threatens the order of the establishment play themselves out in the intermediary's space.

Decolonization brought upward mobility for both the Chief and the Inspector. Belonging to the upper section during colonial rule, the Chief is now able to gain authority: his father had also been in the service during the colonial period. However, the Inspector's father had been a servant, while he himself is now able to become someone "assuré d'avoir tous les mois un chèque barré garanti par le gouvernement" (21) 'getting an official check every month, guaranteed by the government' (12). He has some delegated power, although less in comparison with the Chief within the hierarchical structure of the Police system. This kind of rela-

tionship and the relative nature of power are constantly underscored to highlight the diverse spaces within this formerly colonized context. Nevertheless, Chraïbi's text provides convincing situations where the power relations are upset due to a shift in location, which is the focus of the following section.

The policemen are to go up into the mountains to conduct an interrogation regarding an escaped criminal who is believed to be hiding amongst the peasants. The Chief's and Inspector's language initially has no signification for the first peasant they meet, Raho. The latter seems to "traduire ces mots en une langue connue de lui seul" (28) "translate these words into a language known to him alone" (18), for, to him, their words "étaient vides de sens" (30) 'were devoid of meaning' (19). Raho's contact with the urban police force compels an interaction: "Ces hommes de la civilisation étaient montés jusqu'à lui, ils le forçaient à s'intéresser à eux et à leur monde, à penser, comprendre, répondre" (31) 'These men from civilization had reached him, forcing him to become involved in their world, to think, respond, understand' (19). The impossibility of isolation for virtually any group is thus posited early in the text to contend with the wistful: "[Raho] était sans âge . . . Immobile . . . l'homme et ses bêtes semblaient pétrifiés dans l'éternité" (27) '[Raho] was ageless . . . Immobile . . . the man and his beasts seemed petrified into eternity . . .' (17). If there is a certain nostalgia for a pure, untouched peasant identity in such instances, the irony of the revelation of Raho's identity (as Commander Filigare, the revolutionary who had not been afraid of killing in the past) undoes this idea.

Hajja, the peasant woman responds to the intrusion of the policemen by probing the Chief's world:

[E]lle avait cueilli de la bouche du chef, en un interrogatoire inoffensif dont pas un instant il ne s'était rendu compte. Elle savait à présent qui il était, son patronymique, ce que faisait son père, les méandres de sa famille, l'essence de bois de son bureau, le village où il était né, la grande ville où il travaillait [...] toute une vie elle avait reconstituée par de petites questions anodines dont elle avait émaillé ses propos au détour d'une phrase . . . (79)

Quite casually she had collected all this data from the chief's own mouth in an inoffensive little interrogation of which he himself had been unaware. She now knew who he was, his patronymic, what his father did, the ins and outs of his family, the quality of the wood in his office, the village where he was born, the city where he worked . . . she had reconstructed a whole life with (innocuous little) questions which she had (slipped in during the course of the conversation). . . . (53).

In this situation, it quickly becomes apparent that Hajja exercises authority and power over the Chief, who finds himself in a decontextualized locale. This is just a hint of the impending and total disruption of the established hierarchies and operation of power produced by the movement of the small unit of the police force out from their urban location to the mountainous region of the Berber village. It is these fraught interactions which the intermediary will take as his cue for assuming a dominant role.

Looking for his roots, the Inspector revels in the company of the peasants and is struck by desire for the two peasant girls. His desire to merge with the "indigenous" is articulated in a sexualized logic:

Avec un pantalon confectionné à Singapour ou même à Oxford street (London, G.-B.), la chose eût été trop visible, forcément. Et sans aucun doute un peu comprimée. Or, par le nom du suprême Créateur, il était en gandoura, vêtement ample s'il en fut. Seul un pan de tissu s'était brusquement soulevé, légèrement ma foi mais sans aucun tabou [...]"(142)

With pants made in Singapore, or even Oxford street (London, G.B.) the thing would have clearly been much too visible. And without a doubt, somewhat constrained. But thanks to the name of Allah he was wearing a gandoura, a rather ample garment. So, simply a fold of cloth had suddenly risen up, with no pride whatsoever . . ." (98)

He wants to become one of the natives after resigning from his position, for "[i]ci l'air n'est pas encore pollué [...]" (144) '[h]ere the air is not yet polluted . . .' (99). He intends to say to the Chief:

En dépit des tonnes d'efforts que tu n'as cessé de déployer afin de me hisser à ton niveau, je suis resté un simple indigène à la date de

ce jour. Quand tu reviendras parmi nous sur cette montagne de primitifs, un de ces jours, *incha Allah*, je te ferai un plat de *hargma* . . . ou de *hhlii* [...] (144)

Despite the enormous efforts that you have continually exerted on my behalf, I am nevertheless nothing but a simple native. When you return among us to this aboriginal mountain, one day, Allah willing, I'll make you a nice plate of *hargma* . . . or *hhlii*. . . (99)

Yet, his desire wanes as soon as he returns to the Chief: "il oublia toutes ses résolutions. Elles étaient pourtant irrévocables, l'expression même de ses *vraies* tendances et de ses *vrais* désirs" (145) 'he instantly forgot all his resolutions. They were nevertheless irrevocable—the true expression of his *real* instincts, his *real* desires' (my emphases in both quotations; 100). If there is some indication of a longing for a pure, true, and "good" identity for the Inspector here, it is also a harsh, ironic comment on the politics of location that become implicated in the intermediary's action, given the choices that are available to him. That is, his "real" self is produced according to the greater benefits accruing from such an identity in a particular situation.

In order for the Chief to assert his authority, he requires his uniform: "Je suis démuni, amoindri, dans cette tenue d'arriéré. Mes chefs ne me reconnaîtraient pas, ma parole d'honneur" (91) 'I'm vulnerable, diminished in these cretin clothes. My superiors wouldn't recognize me' (61-62). Even though his superiors are not present, to belong to that circle, the Chief needs this mark of distinction. His remark is also an indication of the Chief's own provisional position quo Chief within the hierarchy. Further, the use of the term "chefs" for superiors in the French text questions his specific "chiefness," indeed his *name*, within the narrative. We are thus given to understand that he too can become an intermediary in a different situation. In the present context, the Chief, having no access to this area outside the realms of his normal functioning, is unable to exert his authority, for authority "s'était trouvée coincée dans une caverne, traquée dans la pire des impasses: la solitude. L'inemploi, le chômage du pouvoir" (112) 'had found itself holed up in the cavern, run up against the worst of

obstacles: solitude. (Desuetude, the unemployment) of power' (77). Communication is crucial even, or especially for, domination, since there is a requirement of consensus in order for it to operate.

The impossibility of alliance between the Chief and the mountain people plays itself out in a scene that renders the former speechless. Hajja steals his copper buttons and creates a pair of bracelets for herself, causing the Chief to "[t]empêt[er], debout sur le seuil de la caverne et tenant son pantalon à deux mains" (92) '[s]tor[m] about at the entrance of the cavern holding his pants up with both hands,' for he "n'avait plus de mots pour exprimer son indignation, ni en arabe ni en français. Ni de voix" (92) 'had run out of words to express his indignation. Both his French and his Arab vocabularies were exhausted. He was speechless' (62). In a reaction similar to what Bhabha describes in the context of the colonizers, he is "speechless" because "it is not that the voice of authority is at a loss for words. It is, rather, that the [authoritative] discourse has reached that point when, faced with the hybridity of its objects, the *presence* of power is revealed as something other than what its rules of recognition assert" (Bhabha, 173). I have taken the liberty to interpret the term "object" rather literally here. Bhabha, however, refers to the colonized as object of colonialist discourse, or as its discriminated subjects—this reading of Hajja as object of the Chief's authority would, of course, apply. In my more literal reading, the transfer of the buttons from one location to another affects their functioning and their signifying processes, without their altogether losing their "original" identity (i.e., also being recognizable to him as buttons, within Hajja's new bracelets, which do not function any more as he knows them to). Thus, faced with their hybridity, the Chief is forced to come to terms with the perfectly contingent nature of the concept and thing he calls "button," its "deformation," in his view—and hence subsequently, with the contingency of his own identity and authority. The Chief is stripped of his uniform, which functions as the symbol of his power. He is isolated and denied the functioning of the hierarchical relations upon which he depends. He is then forced to acknowledge different signifying processes, which

deform and subvert his authority, all this arising from a process of “dislocation.”

It is, as expected, the Inspector who “se transform[e] en médiateur diplomatique” ‘transform[s] himself into a diplomatic negotiator’ (62) and brings about some form of reconciliation for the functioning of the establishment’s all-important interrogation. The Chief is reduced to “l’homme sans boutons” (92) ‘the man without buttons’ (62). The intermediary is able to maneuver between the differential forces interacting in the space created through the forced contact between the peasants and the establishment. He coaxes Hajja into returning the buttons in exchange for different bracelets: his handcuffs! In this and numerous other incidents Chraïbi provides compelling cases for reflection on the different and incommensurable “languages” and “contexts” not just between the colonizer and the colonized, but coexisting within the formerly colonized regions. The intermediary’s crucial, if often unscrupulous, role is engendered as part of the process of the interaction of these disparate contexts.

The Chief’s interrogation can not proceed according to his conception. Although the following exchange between the Chief and a peasant can be read as exemplifying resistance by the peasants to the Chief’s authority, it also points to the Chief’s impossibility to establish meaningful dialogue:

- Nom, prénom et plus vite que ça!
  - Eh?
  - Comment tu t’appelles?
  - Ah! Monsieur, pas besoin de crier. Mon nom est ton frère.
  - Je n’ai pas de frère! Quel est ton nom?
  - Eh bien, monsieur, réponds à ma place et ta réponse sera la bonne. Sûrement.
  - Ladin babek!* Maudit soit ton père! Tu sais qui je suis? Hein? Hein? [...]
  - Oh! Oui, monsieur, répondit-il. Tu es un homme qui crie et qui insulte tes hôtes”
- (118-19)

“Name, first name, on the double.”

“What?”

“What is your name?”

"Oh, sir, no need to shout. My name is your brother's."

"I have no brother. What is your name?"

"Well sir, put yourself in my place, and your answer will be fine. Surely.

"*Ladin Babek!* Curse your father. Do you know who I am? Well?"

"Oh yes, sir, he replied. You are a man who shouts and insults your hosts." (83-84)<sup>6</sup>

The Chief's only language, that of desperation, is violence: he uses his gun. It is once again up to the intermediary to bring some order into the picture. It is the intermediary (Inspector) and not the presumed wielder of authority (Chief) who orchestrates meaning. He performs splendidly for both sides, winking in complicity at the villager and cursing him at the same time to appease the Chief (120-30) (85-91).

Moreover, the Chief himself is not incapable of negotiation. Still, he can only negotiate with someone who has contact with his own level, i.e., the Inspector, since he can concede no basis for contact with the peasants. He even goes so far as to say to the Inspector: "nous nous sommes démocratisés . . . nous serons tous égaux" (166) '... you and I have become democratized . . . (we will all) be complete equals . . .' (113). Now, the wily Inspector, aware of the Chief's dependence on him for the information regarding the "dangereux subversif" (167) 'dangerous subversive' (114) Moroccan in hiding, "décline" (169) "declines" (115) his offer of equality. Next, the Chief tries to order him, without any success, and finally takes to begging. Once again, this foregrounds the relationality of power and the incident presents another illustration of the changing power relations between groups and individuals, with varying locations. The Chief has to finally accept his exclusion from the transaction and is forced to hand over complete authority to the Inspector for the investigation, after having attested to this in writing!

The initial conversation between Raho and the policemen points to the crucial role, however insidious it may be, of the intermediary. Although it is not clearly stated, the conversation occurs in Arabic. Suddenly the Chief is unable to continue, flying into a rage, because, although the actual language is compre-

hensible, there is no coincidence in signification (see 35, 22). The Inspector intervenes to prevent him from killing the peasant, speaking to him in “la langue de Voltaire” (36) ‘Voltaire’s language’ (23) and scorning the peasant and his lack of civilization. He appeases the Chief by saying that he must resort to barbaric (medieval) means in order to talk to this uncivilized creature from the Middle Ages: “*Ji vais li causer à ci coriace di Moyen Age avec diploumatie di Moyen Age*” (36) ‘I’ll talk to this Medieval artifact with medieval diplomacy’ (23). The irony is, of course, that the Inspector’s language is not close at all to “Voltaire’s,” and the French text communicates this through the use of italics and a deformation of the “standard” French.

Simultaneously, the Inspector’s equally important task is to reassure the peasant into cooperation by speaking *his* language—in a form comprehensible to him, illustrating the *same* lack of civilization in the Chief, but in *different terms*: “La chaleur du Sahara et du Soudan qui a fait bouillir son sang, la *kouriyya*, comme on disait autrefois [...] a tout mélangé, tout cuit: boyaux, cervelle, rate. Un peu plus et il retournait au Moyen Age” (37) ‘The heat of the Sahara and the Sudan caused his [the Chief’s] blood to boil, The *kouriya* [heat demon] as they used to say . . . cooked the works: his bowels, his brain, his spleen. A little more, and he’d have been back in the Middle Ages’ (24). I suggest here that we think of this repetition of the concept of “Middle Ages” first for the peasant and subsequently for the Chief, as destabilizing to a definitive object of reference. That is, backwardness (articulated as belonging to the medieval ages) has been attributed from this intermediary space both to the peasant for the benefit of the Chief and to the Chief for the benefit of the peasants. This complicity can only be created through an adequate language that the intermediary has been able to develop from his in-between space. Here, the ideas of civilization, of progress inherited from the “Enlightenment,” and of Voltaire himself, all become dubious.

As Danielle Marx-Scouras has pointed out in the context of Chraïbi’s work, specifically in discussing *Le Passé simple*, “[c]ivilized being exists only insofar as there are barbarians.

Eliminate this dichotomy and you dismantle the ideological basis for the dehumanizing reality that results from colonization” (133). Yet, Chraïbi goes beyond this easy dichotomy through the intermediary’s tactics, which are very often inscribed in language. The intermediary’s position is such that his access to these different spaces that he categorizes as “medieval” in different ways allows him to appropriate sufficiently from each of them in order to reinstate his claims to legitimacy. It does not matter that the French he uses with the Chief is indeed not “Voltaire’s”-here, it functions as such, through the implicit comparison that we will shortly discuss.

The absolute impossibility of connection between the indigenous people and the establishment inherited from the French, as represented by the Chief, is emphasized by the Chief’s falling apart during the dramatic meeting between the Inspector and Hajja. Journeying up to the village on Raho’s donkey, the Chief’s uniform, “en serge américaine garantie d’origine, venu tout droit des States tout comme l’armement de la police et le mode d’emploi: maculé, chiffonné trempé de sueur aigre, griffé par les épines et les ronces, foutu, quoi!” (42) ‘made of guaranteed American wool, straight from the States like all police gear and their instruction manuals, well, it was stained, wrinkled, soaked in sour sweat, ripped by thorns and brambles, ruined!’ (30). This deformation of his identity and his inability to even approach a semblance of authority escalate with the Chief’s ineffectualness in adjusting his relations with the peasants. The Chief is furious that the villagers are laughing at them, but the Inspector has to mollify him telling him that it is due to “fear.” While the Inspector, who plays the role of the prodigal son, ceremoniously greets Hajja with nostalgia for his ancestral past, the Chief loses control when faced with a total departure from decorum and protocol as he knows them. He is exasperated at the lack of respect for his position.

The intermediary, on the other hand, despite his ambiguous position, at times experiences a genuine connection with the indigenous people. It is, at first, through memory that the Inspector is able to establish a relationship with Raho. He appeals to same

sense of hospitality that he had seen in his now-deceased father when some poorer person knocked at the door, saying, "I am God's guest." He repeats these words to Raho. This equivalent of an "Open Sesame," from the intermediary allows the policemen initial access to this culture. Raho's reaction is to move toward him, kiss him, and welcome them to the village.

Surrounded by the peasants, the Chief is reduced to an entity without an authentic, comprehensible language. With the villagers around him:

. . . le chef de police lançait ses bras en des moulinets saccadés et vociférait dans toutes les langues connues de lui seul: dans sa langue maternelle, en français, en anglais, en américain de poker, en allemand de taverne, en wolof, soit dans toutes les langues civilisées dont il avait parfaitement assimilé les injures. Ce faisant, il se comportait en homme du Tiers Monde qui, outre les déchets de la culture ou à peu près, avait reçu de l'Occident les détritres de ses valeurs, les armes en plus. (46)

. . . the Chief flailed his arms like an epileptic windmill and babbled in all the languages known to him: in his mother tongue, in French, in English, in poker-game American, beerhall German, in Wolof, in all the civilized languages in whose tongues he'd ever been abused. He was like the Third World man who, aside from some cultural refuse, had absorbed from the West all the detritus of its values and gotten some armaments in the deal. (32)

Since the Chief can know no alliances with these people, his focus must be on the Western ideas of progress, modernity, and civilization. Or, conversely, and perhaps more accurately, since he only accepts these Western ideas, he can allow himself no connection with the peasants: they are everything he was in the evolutionary narrative he accepts from the colonizers. Such an image of himself is reprehensible. Nathalie Melas suggests that incommensurability "becomes a *product* of colonial comparisons" (277). Discussing *Black Skin, White Masks*, she writes regarding Fanon's Antillean: ". . . he can not enter into comparison directly with the white standard, he can only measure himself by it in comparison with others like him, other blacks. Similarity such as it emerges here is construed as difference from difference" (278). While this statement comes directly from Fanon's discussion of Antillean

society, it clearly speaks to the relationship of virtually all postcolonial societies caught up in Europe's modernity and inevitably left behind in the race to modernize. Thus, the Chief and other nationalists, in striving to "reach" the standards of the former colonizer, compare themselves favorably with other groups of colonized people, often their less privileged compatriots, for attaining a "closer," and therefore to their minds more favorable, relationship to the colonizer. This is an interesting analysis, from within a postcolonial location, of the notion of incommensurability that arises from comparison and as "difference from difference." Difference, here, is contingent upon the logic of the incommensurability of these spaces. Melas' remarks serve as a reminder of the necessity to push the categorization of contexts as incommensurable through an investigation into the underlying desire for, and stake in, difference.

The most dramatic dilemma, then, is that of the Inspector. He has to decide, as the Chief indicates: "es-tu avec moi, je veux dire pour l'ordre, la discipline et le devoir? Ou bien serais-tu par hasard avec ces paysans galeux" (56) 'Are you with me? I mean, for order, discipline and duty? Or are you perhaps on the side of these scabrous peasants . . .' (38). The ambiguity reflected in the mumbling of the Inspector is intolerable to the Chief. Yet, the Inspector's ambiguity is drawn out by the contrasting ways in which he is perceived by the Chief. On the one hand: "Le regardant manger comme un arriéré gouverné par ses instincts primitifs, le chef de police ne pouvait s'empêcher d'élargir sa pensée aux dimensions du Tiers Monde" (66) 'Watching him eat like a retarded person, governed purely by instinct, the chief of police could not help expanding his concept of what the Third World was all about' (45); but also the more magnanimous: "Voilà un homme dont les parents et les ancêtres avaient été colonisés, dominés, écrasés . . . et, de par la grâce du gouvernement libre, souverain et démocratique, cet homme était devenu son second, à lui, le chef" (51) '(Here) was a man whose parents and forefathers had been colonized, dominated, crushed...this man had become his, the chief's own second deputy in command' (35). The first quote (from p. 66, 45) lumps the Inspector with the peasants and thus

separates the Chief from them all. The Chief's difference from Ali is crucial in order for him to preserve a semblance of power and superiority, and, consequently, to be closer to the "First World" of the former colonizers. The latter quote treats the Inspector as an *évolué* having attained entry into the Chief's sphere by the process of decolonization. In both cases, the Chief is the unchanging, higher, civilized model closest to the colonial one. It is the desire to allow for this identity that forestalls any connection between the Chief and the peasants. Essential to the fulfillment of this desire is the positing of his difference from the peasants. The Inspector serves as the Chief's scale that records this "difference from difference."

The Inspector as intermediary tries to make calculating bonds with the indigenous people, as when he attempts to extract information from Raho (see 138, 95). He wants to set up an indigenous "we" in which he would be included: "[Le chef] n'a plus rien d'un indigène comme toi et moi" (176) 'There's nothing indigenous in him [the Chief] (anymore), as there is in you and me' (119), he remarks to Hajja. However, as in the case of his desire for the indigenous girls ("je te demande, je vous demande à tous l'hospitalité pour toujours. Pour toujours" [181] 'I ask you, I ask all of you for your hospitality forever. Ever and ever' [122]), it is fleeting, and even romantic. And he thus obviously chooses, in the final analysis, to place himself on the more powerful side, conveniently obliterating from his memory all traces of the indigenous stirrings he felt.

From a post-Orientalist stance, to use Prakash's term again, Chraïbi writes ironically from the point of view of the Chief: "La nation était maintenant maîtresse de son destin. Elle était représentée à l'ONU, à l'OUA . . . à l'intérieur, *le peuple* était massmédiatisé partout par la télévision. La culture pour tous, démocratiquement" (160) 'The [modern] era . . . marked the dawn of national consciousness. The country was now master of its own destiny. It was represented in the O.A.U., the U.N. . . . And at home (on the domestic front) people were everywhere mass-mediatized by the television. Culture for everyone! Democracy! . . .' (109). Many nationalist versions of history buy into the West-

ern notions of progress and go about proving comparable achievements for the colonized country. The Chief epitomizes such thinking. Chraïbi's imaginative and ironic penetration into the indigenous peoples' reality at the dawn of nationalism is an invitation to consider how decolonization, now coupled with other global changes, necessitates attention to the reconfigurations within the structures of regions which are now "new" nations. It begs the question: whose modernity are we chasing, and at what cost?

The narrator postulates that Inspector Ali, in being unable to stand up to the Chief, "était devenu sans identité réelle" (200) 'had lost all true identity' (133). There is once again a suggestion, despite irony at other times, that there is a true identity for Ali, which would imply solidarity with the indigenous—a going back to the truths of his father. Ali, in my view however, does have a "true" identity. Only, it is one of intermediacy, with a wider range of choices in alliances than those available to the indigenous people, or even the Chief in this situation. The peasants, who find themselves in a position of subalternity and are greatly exploited, have nothing to gain in cooperating with the higher levels of administration who definitely will not give them "tax breaks." Their only choice, in a way, is resistance, keeping in mind survival, for, "... the peasants alone are revolutionary for they have nothing to lose and everything to gain" (Fanon 61).<sup>7</sup> The murder of the Chief is that desperate, revolutionary move in this story. The intermediary's choices usually prompt him to seize positions of greater power and authority while exploiting his knowledge of the weaker sections to consolidate his advantage, despite any romantic notions of loyalty he might have toward the peasants.

It is through his advantage in language that Ali saves himself. It is through language (and knowledge and culture) that he is able to function as an intermediary, serving as an interpreter/manipulator. The Chief has been killed by the peasants, their only possible reaction Fanon would say, and it is now time for them to take care of Ali who is also part of the establishment. Language, which he produces endlessly through the night much like Sheherazade does in the *Arabian Nights*, saves his life. He weaves

a masterpiece of a text, always sensitive in adapting it as the listeners react—adjusting, negotiating, and modulating his discourse. He is able to convince the peasants of his loyalty toward them and is allowed to go back to the city.

How one reads the end of the story could differ. When Ali, the Inspector-turned-Chief, returns to the mountains with his own Inspector, there is not a soul in sight. The mountain people are no longer there; the place is deserted. My reading is based on the intermediary's role and his obvious failure, in the end, to establish any meaningful alliances with the subaltern section of the population in this text.<sup>8</sup> The ultimate disappearance of what is considered the indigenous (as portrayed by Chraïbi) is an inevitable result of the global realities of the postcolonial era. The novel presents the impossibility of sustaining an autonomous socio-economic organization that predates colonization. Outside or global forces coupled with and sanctioned by the national administration penetrate, in various ways, into the very centers of such spaces that we have come to term "indigenous." Concurrently, the indigenous people's inability to participate in these larger national or global structures due to their subaltern position, as well as an inability to form coalitions—whether these be economic, social, political or even emotional—with the other (oppressive) sections renders their location precarious, at the very least. The problem then, as it is posed, relates not so much to a nostalgically motivated preservation of older means of existence, but the insertion of such modes into the larger sphere of which they necessarily form a part, and the probable antagonism that such insertion engenders.

I hope to have shown that in studying intermediacy, one can scrutinize shifting locations, moving boundaries, and conflicts of interest within specific postcolonial contexts: what Said has called, with reference to the Subaltern Studies project of rewriting history, "a demystifying exposure of what material interests are at stake, what ideology and method are employed, what parties advanced, which deferred, displaced, defeated" (Said vii). The consideration of the intermediary's location also forces an evaluation of a local nature, bringing to the forefront diverse groups

with complex interactions which are often overlooked, given a certain tendency to homogenize locations as “Third World” or “postcolonial,” for example. The recognition of intermediacy could fruitfully contribute, for instance, to recent discussions regarding the role of the postcolonial academic within the Western academy.<sup>9</sup> Aspects of choice, class, difference, and power, as well as the impact of changing locations explicated in this study warrant further attention in this debate. The question, however, exceeds the range of this piece. In a more general scope, intermediacy could provide one position from which local realities can be traced in their resistance to, as well as complicity with, larger structures. If we are to pay closer attention to the various capacities in which local entities engage with, and transform, global forces in sometimes unexpected ways, intermediacy provides a useful position from which to account for local agency as well as larger outside forces.

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### Notes

1. Homi K. Bhabha’s writing on hybridity and ambiguity seeks to challenge this separation.
2. Although the term “native” is currently seen as negative owing to the devaluation of the groups of people to whom it refers in colonial

discourse, I retain its use and employ it interchangeably with “indigenous” to mean that which stems from the colonized people’s land, culture, religion or context. Also, despite increased awareness that these divisions of colonizer/colonized are hardly as clear-cut as one would have them, for the purpose of this paper, which deals with intersections, it is essential to establish a provisional terminology to refer to such divisions, since they are part of the vocabulary and world-view common to (formerly) colonized as well as colonial peoples and posited as such in this novel.

3. Of course, I am not suggesting the possibility of neatly dividing a colonial and a postcolonial era. The problems with the term “postcolonial” have been discussed from various angles. See notably Appiah, McClintock, Shohat and Stam (especially 37-46), and Bahri. In the context of Chraïbi’s novel, “postcolonial” refers to the period following official independence when the new Moroccan nation struggles to establish a “national” identity. As with many new nationalisms, after the official end of colonialism, a large part of the functioning of this national entity is inherited from the colonial state.

Regarding the term “formation,” I invoke the French meanings of the word: structure and formation, as well as education and molding of character.

4. This is not to say that there have not been new sections coming to power after colonialism, or that former privileges have not been lost. However, it is the exception rather than the rule that sections privileged during colonialism become part of an oppressed and subaltern group in the postcolonial period.

5. All translations of Chraïbi’s novel are Robin Roosevelt’s. Any parts where the translation is modified by me are indicated by parentheses.

6. Benchama provides an interesting study of Driss Chraïbi’s work and how it figures in the Francophone literature of Morocco along with analyses of some aspects of his specific works. For a presentation of the use of Arabic and translations from Arabic to French in addition to other aspects of language such as the figuring of verses from the Koran, see Benchama, especially 201-38.

7. It might be argued that what they have to lose is their “way of life.” However, the call for the preservation of a way of life (here explicitly linked to a mode of production) that is not feasible in isolation (because of the impossibility of establishing adequate/appropriate rela-

tions of production) due to other deep structural changes in the economy and environment becomes an oppressive rather than a progressive stance. See Victor Li for academic discussions of the position of indigenous peoples within national spheres.

8. One might conversely see the emptiness of the village as an indication that the mountain people are able to relocate before Ali's return as Chief.

9. See notably Dirlik and Ahmad, especially 73-94.

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