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BENITA PARRY

The institutionalization of postcolonial studies

Beginnings: colonial discourse analysis

Those wanting to understand the beginnings and development of postcolonial studies will readily find numerous Introductions, Readers, Companions, monographs, and journal articles offering a variety of definitions and genealogies, advising further reading, and proposing new objects of study.[1] If the scale of publications testifies to the rapid assimilation of a disparate interdisciplinary undertaking within academic curricula, then the range of analytic strategies suggests a volatile and contested discussion. Yet despite a project in which poststructuralists vie with Marxists, culturalists with materialists, textualists with realists, postcolonial criticism has come to be identified as postmodernist in its orientation – an alignment promoted more or less actively by prominent critics in the field. One consequence of this is that there has been a fluid, polysemic, and ambiguous usage of the term "postcolonial" within and beyond specialist circles. The plenitude of signification is such that "postcolonial" can indicate a historical transition, an achieved epoch, a cultural location, a theoretical stance – indeed, in the spirit of mastery favored by Humpty Dumpty in his dealings with language, whatever an author chooses it to mean.[2] As a result it is not uncommon to find the term used in connection with any discursive contest against oppression or marginalization – such as feminist or queer or disability studies.

Aijaz Ahmad has recalled that "the first major debate on the idea of the postcolonial took place . . . not in cultural studies but in political theory where the object of inquiry was 'the postcolonial state,'" and he notes that because these discussions were conducted in Marxist terms, the categories of colonialism and postcolonialism initially designated "identifiable structural shifts in state and society" (1995a: 5). Such connotations are distinct from the manifestly unsustainable contemporary use of the word "postcolonial" as a temporal category where the "colonial" is understood to have been superseded or left behind and the "postcolonial" establishment of

formally independent regimes is perceived as signalling the end of North/South inequalities. Indeed, some dissenting critics argue that the very term, "postcolonial," mystifies the contemporary situation, which is marked by the *persistence* of an international stratification of labor and resources and would therefore more appropriately be classified as late imperialism (Miyoshi 1993; Dirlik 1997). Still other critics have made a case for defining "the postcolonial domain" in terms of the extent to which peripheral societies continue to be subjected to or are disengaged from metropolitan forces (Coronil 1992: 101) – a provocative usage, but one limited in its application by the constraints on recently constituted and legally sovereign states to detach themselves from a global system in which they are not the major players.

Historicizing colonialism's aftermath has not however been foremost on the agenda of most of the high-profile theorists, who have been preoccupied instead with authoring a suitable "postcolonial positionality." According to one such theorist, postcoloniality involves the assumption of a deconstructive philosophical position towards the logocentrism and identitarian metaphysics underpinning Western knowledge (Spivak 1988b, 1990). Hence the postcolonial critic, who occupies "the heritage of imperialism intimately but deconstructively," is enjoined to intervene in the structure of which s/he is a part and "to change something that . . . [s/he] is obliged to inhabit" by tampering with "the authority of Europe's story-lines . . . reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding" (Spivak 1990: 56). Here the purpose of postcolonial critique is understood as being to dismantle and displace the truth-claims of Eurocentric discourses;[3] while in the words of another eminent critic, the burden of the postcolonial undertaking is "to intervene in and interrupt the Western discourses on modernity" (Bhabha 1994: 241). The location occupied by such criticism has been glossed as "neither inside nor outside the history of western domination but in a tangential relation to it" (Prakash 1993: 16–17) – this double or semi-detached consciousness, it is maintained, facilitating an understanding of colonialism and its legacies different from the narratives handed down either by colonialism or by anticolonialist movements, and thus throwing the claims of both official and dissident historiographies into disarray.

Such intense self-reflection, focused on the critic's obligation to undermine the text of colonial authority as well as to install a distance from the concepts of anticolonialist theory, marked the beginnings of postcolonial studies in the late 1970s and early 1980s in what was then called "colonial discourse analysis." To understand both the achievements and problems of the postcolonial studies project it is helpful to revisit this inaugural moment and to trace its subsequent trajectory. Colonial discourse analysis coincided with the institutionalization in the early 1980s of an extensive

platform of research initiatives, including gender, feminist, African American, "ethnic," and gay studies. Together these undertakings examined how dominant systems of knowledge had effected the discursive relegation and institutional oppression of subordinated communities and marginalized cultural traditions (JanMohamed and Lloyd 1990). What emerged from these enquiries took on the form of innovative cross-disciplinary exercises that either were belatedly accommodated within existing university departments (English, Anthropology, Music, Art History, for instance) or else generated new ones (Women's Studies, African American Studies, Asian American Studies, Cultural Studies, etc.). The early exponents of colonial discourse analysis were often confronted by considerable resistance from scholars and critics wedded to long-established disciplinary paradigms. Whereas the aversion of mainstream scholars to the disturbance of existing critical norms was typically ideological, it often manifested itself as hostility to the admittedly exorbitant claims of "theory" as the meta-discourse of the emergent scholarship.

At its inception, colonial discourse analysis concentrated on exposing the making, operation, and effects of colonialist ideology; and although contestation of colonialism's authorized version had begun decades previously within the political and intellectual cultures of anticolonial movements, the endeavor presented itself as new-born – and, in the sense that it had recourse to a set of recently devised critical paradigms, it was indeed distinct from the earlier critiques. Thus Spivak proposed that postcolonial criticism could seize the opportunity afforded by Derrida's deconstruction of the discursive apparatus to occidental reason, since his "sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other" could be put to "much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the other" (1988b: 294). For Bhabha (1994) it was the language model that offered the means to explain colonialism's past and the postcolonial present by opening up the enunciative act to the insights of psychoanalytic theory. Of special significance to the new scholarship was the disposal of poststructuralist methodology – even though the political purchase and even the epistemological tenability of this methodology were fiercely questioned from the outset. (For instance, one disbelieving critic wrote that poststructuralism contrived to block the "appeal to any kind of real-world knowledge and experience" and failed "to acknowledge any difference . . . between historical fact and literary or fictive representation" [Norris 1994: 112; 1993: 182]). However, so influential did the poststructuralist modes prove that, although the theoretical practices and trajectories of the pioneering critics (these are invariably cited as Spivak, Bhabha, and Edward W. Said) were very different from one another, their work was appropriated by participants to

license the privileging of "discourse" as the model of social practice, and consequently to promote an incuriosity about enabling socio-economic and political institutions.

Yet if we consider how Said himself appropriated Foucault's notion of knowledge as implicated in relations of power, we see that for him the material and social determinants of discourse are always in place. For Said, the study of colonial discourse was enabled by Foucault's "understanding of how the will to exercise dominant control in society and history, has also discovered a way to clothe, disguise, rarefy, and wrap itself systematically in the language of truth, discipline, rationality, utilitarian value, and knowledge" (Said 1984: 216). According to Peter Hulme, the disciplinary formation known as colonial discourse analysis came into being as a *critique* of the continental theoretical work it enlisted, and it was Said's singular achievement to have brought "the rhetorical power of the textual readings offered by discourse analysis [together . . .] with a 'real' world of domination and exploitation, usually analysed by a Marxism hostile to poststructuralism's epistemological scepticism" (Hulme 1989: 3). Thus although Said recognized "the scrupulously ethnocentric nature" of Foucault's undertaking, Hulme argues that he chose to emphasize the inherent *possibilities* of this work in the interests of extending to a global terrain the concept of discourse with the constant implication of textuality within networks of history, power, knowledge, and society.

In acknowledging a debt simultaneously to poststructuralist theory, Western Marxism, and Anglo-American cultural criticism, Said not only interrogated the privileged inclusions and absences of these modes, observing their massive indifference to colonialism as *constitutive* of metropolitan society and culture; he also called attention to the failure of their authors to recognize that anticolonialist critics such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, C. L. R. James, and George Antonius had confronted the contradictions and hierarchies in the institutionalized thought of the metropoles long before prominent theorists in Europe and North America got around to doing so. Said's own writings, then, can be seen to negotiate an alliance between metropolitan theory and the analyses developed by liberation movements, in the process producing elaborations which were not in either source, while always retaining a usage of colonial discourse as necessarily implying its source and effects in real-world situations (Said 1984, 1993; Brennan 1992; Parry 1992).

This opens up a consideration of the often unacknowledged contribution which Marxism made to colonial discourse analysis in providing a model of the reciprocal action between base and superstructure, between material conditions and ideas, thereby recuperating the Marxist formulation of

a socio-economic *formation* within which a nexus of heterogeneous and contradictory determinations interact. The writings of the Italian Marxist, Antonio Gramsci, which made connections between culture and both state and civil institutions, proposed that the inventions of cultural activity kept the ideological world in movement; following his lead, British "cultural materialism" defined culture not in terms of the metaphor of a superstructure "reflecting" an underlying base, but as itself a set of social practices – as a specifically coded process of struggle and negotiation within which subjectivity, cognition, and consciousness are made and remade under determinate historical and political conditions. Particularly significant was Raymond Williams's redeployment of the favored Gramscian concept of hegemony to signify the expedients deployed in order to win the spontaneous consent of the great mass of the population to the intellectual and moral direction imposed on social life by dominant groups. Williams also expanded on the volatility and open structure of social interactions (class or other): theorizing these, he insisted, must accommodate complicity and hegemonically engineered consent, but also – and crucially – resistance, since the maintenance of domination depends on "continuous processes of adjustment, reinterpretation, incorporation, dilution," processes moreover which are conducted in relation to "alternative," "oppositional," "residual," and "emergent" social, cultural, and ideological formations (Williams 1977, 1980).

If some theoretical registers of a Marxist *cultural* criticism were absorbed into colonial discourse analysis, however, the historical materialist analysis of colonialism as inseparable from an expansionist capitalism, to which racial oppression was integral, was typically set aside. For postcolonial critics, as already stated, tended to be more interested in producing an immanent critique of the texts of colonial authority. To say this is not, of course, to overlook the demystification of the colonial archive that was achieved within colonial discourse analysis – a process to which theoretically diverse scholars and critics contributed. Such powerful (and still indispensable) work disclosed how Western writings and disciplines had constructed versions of non-European worlds calculated to underpin the moral and utilitarian ground of the imperial project (Said 1978). These included the study of biomedical texts where the perceived difference of the "normal" African had been pathologized (Vaughan 1991); European representations of Africa's cognitive and cultural traditions as negative categories (Mudimbe 1988); and the spatial and temporal distance devised by Europe to remove the colonized from coevality (Fabian 1983). These early attempts to unmask the making and operation of colonial discourses were at pains to elucidate the contexts of political domination, economic exploitation, and cultural oppression. They thus shared a concern, for all their diversity, with the specific historical

conditions and social purposes of ideological representation. Later work in this idiom, however, has been far less scrupulous in this regard. A consideration of what came to constitute the most influential positions within colonial discourse analysis, and subsequently postcolonial theory, will suggest the distance travelled from the initial conceptions.

Directions in postcolonial studies

When English and Cultural Studies departments took the lead in developing postcolonial criticism, the consequences were both significant and problematic. Whether by direct influence or osmosis the work of postcolonial studies has prompted the wider community of literary critics to recognize that signs of overseas empire, conspicuous or ghostly, were written across the body of both the canonical and popular British literature. This is an area more extensive than the "fictions of empire," a sub-genre for long regarded as the sole repository of colonialism's imprint on British literary consciousness. In the aftermath of decolonization these writings had attracted a singular form of criticism offering retrospects on empire that were sometimes infected by apologetics and often permeated by nostalgia. Notably lacking in skepticism about representation, and in large indifferent to stylistic considerations, the studies assumed these fictions to be a form of apprehending and reproducing already existing realities (Greenberger 1969; Meyers 1973; Mahood 1977).[4] Hence the fabrications were interpreted as transparent accounts of the Western experiences of empire and authoritative depictions of colonial culture. Furthermore the literature's veracity was validated in terms of approximations to the interested scholarship of Orientalists, Africanists, ethnographers, and anthropologists, or – worse – to the tendentious and disingenuous versions of foreign worlds construed by imperial spokesmen, missionaries, and travelers or the do-it-yourself hagiography of colonialism's agents and servants. Postcolonial studies has forced a move here, from a misconceived quest for the truths and degrees of empathy with the colonized offered by fictions of empire to a consideration of their invention, reiteration, or estrangement of colonialist perceptions and misconceptions. This has enabled a discussion of these writings as culturally constrained and ideologically inflected fabrications that were overwhelmingly received in the imperial homeland as authentic renderings of both distant geographical location social forms, and of the colonizer's deportment (Boehmer 1995; Brantlinger 1988; Chrisman 2000; Miller 1985; Parry 1997b, 1998b; Said 1993).

However, to understand the imperial imaginary of British literature, enquiry must extend beyond the manifest fictional presence of empire to those works where it impinges in cryptic or oblique or encoded ways. Such

works had hitherto been read as narratives of an English condition sealed from and largely indifferent to the external world, even though it had for long been recognized by students of British history that the making of the domestic economy and state was inseparable from overseas empire, whether in the form of mercantile and plantation colonialism or of territorial rule. By bringing this understanding to the tangible and imaginary presence of empire in the imperial homeland, critics were able to draw attention to its place within everyday existence and to uncover its immanence in both high and popular culture (Arac and Ritvo 1991; Cheyfitz 1991; Coombes 1994; Cooper and Stoler 1997; David 1995; George 1996; Giddings 1991; Hulme 1992; Kabbani 1994; Krebs 1999; McClintock 1995; Mitchell 1991; Richards 1993; Spurr 1993). As part of this project, recent work, not all of it formally produced under the rubric of postcolonial studies but influenced by the discussion, has revealed the covert colonialist registers of such canonical and popular works as *The Tempest*, *Robinson Crusoe*, *Mansfield Park*, *Castle Rackrent*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, *Daniel Deronda*, *Jane Eyre*, *Wuthering Heights*, *The Moonstone*, *The Picture of Dorian Grey*, the Sherlock Holmes stories, *Tono-Bungay*, *Dracula*, and *The Waves* (see, for example, Bivona 1990; Boehmer 1995; Childs 1999; Eagleton, Jameson, and Said 1990; Ferguson 1991; Heller 1992; Heywood 1987; Hulme 1994; Lowe 1991; Meyer 1996; Miller 1985; Parry 1998a; Perera 1991; Plasa 1994; Said 1993; Sharpe 1993; Spivak 1985a; M. Wood 2002).[5]

At the same time as colonialist configurations were being re-viewed, and the traces of empire in the domestic imagination detected, the study of writings from the once-colonized world, as well as of literatures produced in the post-independence diasporas, expanded exponentially. Because proper critical attention was directed at "Third-World" writing through the generation of new reading paradigms, the existing purview of comparative literature was extended. Where older commentaries on "commonwealth" or "new" literatures had attempted to incorporate such texts into a common Anglophone tradition, postcolonial criticism was far more attentive to the politics of English, both as a language and as a corpus of texts (Talib 2002). The concept of "commonwealth literature" had by definition placed Britain and the colonial experience as its conceptual centerpiece (Rushdie 1991: 61–70). Similarly, the idea of "new" literatures had almost inevitably assumed the priority and modularity of the "old" European literatures (Sunder Rajan, 1992). More recent criticism (not necessarily postcolonialist in tenor) has extended the arena to Francophone, Lusophone, Hispanophone, and more localized languages (Bernabé, Chamoiseau, and Confiant 1990; Brathwaite 1993; Ngugi 1986; Osofisan 2001). Whereas previously only a narrow range of writings had been considered, and had been judged by approximation to

the standards of the Western literary canon (Bhabha 1984), more recent criticism has demonstrated that far from being imitations of the dominant Western modes, works written or performed within other cultural contexts, or from the margins of the metropolitan centers, often comprised remarkable innovations. Such works, as scholars working within postcolonial studies have shown, not only incorporate, transgress, and redesign the forms, aesthetic conventions, and cognitive resources of the Western tradition, but also draw on traditional narrative forms and idioms (Irele 1981; Brennan 1989; Lazarus 1990; Boehmer 1995; Quayson 1997; Hallward 2001; Harrison 2003).

However, the new scholarship has not been without its own blindspots. Already a canon of "Postcolonial Literature" is being formed, in which the "marvellous" or "magic" realisms of Latin American, Caribbean, African, and Asian writing (García Márquez, Chamoiseau, Okri, Rushdie, for instance) are given greater prominence than those closer to "realist" modes. At the same time, works written in the local languages of Asia and Africa (some of these with vast readerships and expansive literary histories, of course: Bengali, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, etc.), that are deemed "uncongenial" to metropolitan taste, are seldom translated and largely overlooked within the academies, as are the traditions of testamentary and resistance literature (Harlow 1987; San Juan 1988; Lazarus forthcoming).[6]

The privileging of novelistic styles which animate a postcolonial identity as fissured, unstable, and multiply located can be related to the manifest preference in the postcolonial discussion for mestizo or creolized formations, the corollary of which is a tendency to scant the intelligibility, mutability, and inventiveness of the indigenous (Brennan 1997). Moreover, the rapt interest of Western academics in migration or exile has led to a neglect of developments and realities in post-independence nation-states, since, as has been argued, "diaspora" has swelled "to demarcate the entire experience of postcoloniality," and "the subject-position of the 'hybrid' is routinely expanded as the only political-conceptual space for revisionist enunciation" (Loomba and Kaul 1994: 4, 13, 14). The use of "diaspora" as a synonym for a new kind of cosmopolitanism is certainly relevant to émigré writers, artists, academics, intellectuals, and professionals; but it can entail forgetfulness about that other, economically enforced dispersal of the poor from Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Caribbean – the vast numbers of contract workers, casual laborers, or domestic servants in Europe, North America, and the Gulf States, undocumented immigrants, refugees, asylum seekers, and victims of ethnic cleansing – whose passage is largely coerced and who encounter punitive barriers hindering the movement of populations from South and East to North and West (Cohen 1987, 1997; Smith, in this volume). This would

suggest that the time has come for postcolonial studies both to promote empirical investigations of economic migrants, and to begin to attend to the substantive and experiential situations of the majoritarian settled populations of the nation-states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Due attention ought to be paid to the millions of people whose mobility is constrained; who are not part of the reservoir of cheap labor in either the home cities, the Gulf States, or the old and new metropolitan centers; who still engage in subsistence farming, or in extracting raw materials and producing goods for world-markets, often under pre-capitalist conditions; or who are economically redundant and constitute an underclass. The absence of such enquiries is an index of an insufficient engagement with the conditions and practices of actually existing imperialism.

Consequences of the linguistic turn in postcolonial studies

Having observed the new areas of enquiry enabled by postcolonial studies and indicated some attendant problems, I will now suggest that the location of the discussion within English and Cultural Studies faculties has had the effect of promoting an indifference to social explanation. The institutionalization of postcolonial studies took place at a time when the linguistic turn was in the ascendant within philosophy and literary theory, and at the moment when cultural studies was in the process of turning its back on its materialist beginnings, operating increasingly with "an essentially textualist account of culture" (Sparks 1996: 97–98). The stage was then set for the reign of theoretical tendencies which Edward Said, among others, has deplored for permitting intellectuals "an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history" (1993: 366–67). In the realm of postcolonial studies, where premises affording analytical priority to formations of discourse and signifying processes were already to the fore, discussion of the internal structures of texts, enunciations, and sign systems became detached from a concurrent examination of social and experiential contexts, situations, and circumstances.

A theoretical position wholly neglectful of political economy (see Dirlik 1994; Miyoshi 1993) has had the effect of disengaging colonialism from historical capitalism and re-presenting it for study as a cultural event. As the Marxist analysis of colonialism and imperialism was set aside, the economic impulses underlying territorial expansion, the military appropriation of geographical space and physical resources, the exploitation of human labor and institutional repression, all receded from view. The British historian, Eric Hobsbawn, once wrote that "[a]ll attempts to divorce the explanation of imperialism from the specific developments of capitalism in the late nineteenth century must be regarded as ideological exercises, though often learned and sometimes acute" (1987: 73). Hobsbawm's censure was directed against those established scholars who resolutely excluded discussion of capitalism from their narratives of the colonial project. However, there are many postcolonial critics who are susceptible to the same charge. For the effect of scholars' one-sided concern with the constitution of "otherness"/alterity/difference, or with the production of silenced subject positions, has been to cause matters of discourse undeniably to take precedence over the material and social conditions prevailing during colonialism and in the post-independence era.

The postcolonialist shift away from historical processes has meant that discursive or "epistemic" violence has tended to take precedence in analysis over the *institutional* practices of the violent social system of colonialism. Similarly, cultural resistance has been privileged in analysis over diverse oppositional political expressions, while the intrinsically *antagonistic* colonial encounter has been reconfigured as one of *ambivalence* and *negotiation*. In this context consider Sara Suleri, who interprets the texts written by English and Indian writers during the Raj as performing a *dialogue* across cultural boundaries, infers that this demonstrates the *complicity* linking colonized with colonizer, and urges therefore that "the critical field would be better served if it sought to break down the fixity of the dividing line between domination and subordination," since both were beset by anxiety (Suleri 1992a: 4). Nor is Suleri alone in using her interpretation of texts to assert that "a psychic disempowerment *underlay* 'the colonial *system of control*'" (115, my emphasis). Thus Gyan Prakash, espying the inner contradictions and vicissitudes in the *discourses* of colonialism, proposes that such *linguistic* uncertainties testify to insecurity in the exercise of colonial power (Prakash 1996: 199) – a move that deduces the substance of political practices from a theoretically informed reading of discursive equivocation, while ignoring textual evidence pertaining to the drafting and implementation of repressive laws and policies.

In yet another instance, the proposal that the colonial archive be re-read in ways which are attentive to "the more complex cultural and political boundaries that exist on the cusp of [the] . . . often opposed political spheres" of the colonizers and the colonized is directed at disrupting the customary epistemological and ideological divisions between colonizer and colonized so as to reveal colonialism as "a mode of authority that is agonistic (rather than antagonistic)" (Bhabha 1994: 173, 108). Significantly, "agonistic" relates to ancient Greek athletic contests, "agon" being derived from the word for "a gathering" and denoting "[a] public celebration of games, a contest for the prize at games," whereas "antagonistic" specifies "[t]he mutual resistance

of two opposing forces, physical or mental; active opposition to a force" (*Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*). Thus is the conflictual nature of the colonial encounter occluded.

The theoretical ground of these revisions has been rehearsed by Stuart Hall in an essay in which he attempts to surmount the binary forms of representation evoked in anticolonial struggles by advocating a move "from one conception of difference to another . . . from difference to différance." Such a shift, he contends, is precisely what the serialized or staggered transition to the "postcolonial" marks, and it does so, moreover, not only in a "then" and "now" way but by obliging us "to re-read the very binary forms in which the colonial encounter has for so long itself been represented . . . as forms of transculturation, of cultural translation, destined to trouble the antagonistic model of colonialism for ever" (Hall 1996: 247).

In this late-breaking, revisionary narrative of empire, a historical project of invasion, expropriation, and exploitation has been reconstituted as a symbiotic encounter; the contradictory, volatile, but all the same *structural* positions occupied in analysis by the oppositional conceptual categories of colonizer and colonized have been displaced by categories of complicity, mutuality, and reciprocity; and the conflicting interests and aspirations immanent to colonial situations have been dissolved into a consensus. As Simon During has suggested, postcolonial thought, which "fused postcolonialism with postmodernism in [its] rejection of resistance along with any form of binarism, hierarchy or telos . . . came to signify something remote from self-determination and autonomy. By deploying categories such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence . . . all of which laced colonised into colonising cultures, postcolonialism effectively became a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anticolonialist category" (1998: 31–32).

The vaporizing of conflict in colonial situations by those preoccupied with uncovering agonistic relations rather than antagonistic ones has had little to do with acknowledging the necessary and often coerced "intimacies" between ruler and ruled, or with understanding the discrepant experiences of the parties as constituting one history. It has had everything to do with the dissemination of emollient retrospects, lacking in conceptual credibility and amenable to neither intertextual confirmation nor empirical validation. If the purpose of the revisionist endeavor is to construe colonialism as a complicated, overlapping, and entangled event, then this should not imply that its operations are to be understood as being conducted in an in-between space, or on middle ground.[7] The understanding that both interconnection and division are innate to the colonial encounter is addressed in the work of Nicholas Thomas (1991, 1994). When Thomas acknowledges that the sway of colonialism's power is never total, he attributes this to the fact that

colonial discourse and rule always exist in unacknowledged traffic with native dissension and discontent; and are brought to crisis by virtue of challenges from without, and not only on the basis of their own internal contradictions. Because the history of colonialism is, for Thomas, shaped by resistance on the part of the colonized, and not just by accommodation, he dissociates himself from those paradigms within "the anthropology of exchange" which he considers to be "myopically liberal in their models of reciprocity and assumptions of consent" (1991: xi).

For what is relegated as mere external contingency, Thomas argues, is that this interchange took place in the "context of [the] illiberal domination" that was colonialism; and what is overlooked is that the centrality of exchange in everyday practice does not encompass "the larger field of power relations that constitutes the circumstances of colonized populations" (1991: xi, 8). This suggests the constraints on recovering accord within a coercive colonialism and hence the need to devise terms other than "dialogue" to describe transactions where the native was necessarily a participant, but rarely – and only in very special circumstances – an interlocutor recognized as an agent of knowledge. It is an irony that the story of mutuality now being composed by some postcolonial critics makes an inadvertent return to the narrative of benign colonialism once disseminated by British imperial historiography, and which in the metropolis continues to have a purchase on the official and popular memory of empire, especially of the Indian Raj.

The relationship of postcolonial studies to anticolonial theory

If the expectation of an interested student is to encounter discussion of colonial histories, of colonialism's socio-economic forms and institutions, of colonial resistance, and of the class alignments, international alliances, and ideological retreats of postcolonial regimes, s/he will soon learn that such enquiries are, in the main, not being conducted in the field of "postcolonial studies," but elsewhere, in specialist domains within the social sciences. Moreover, such a notional student will soon discover that the prevalent modes of postcolonial theory are not the progeny of Marxist-inspired anticolonialist thought, since postcolonial criticism typically evinces a hostility both to Marxism and to movements for national liberation. This standpoint both stems from an aversion to all nationalism, at all times (with nationalism being viewed as a tainted form of oppositional consciousness and with the site of the nation being viewed as a futile arena of resistance struggle), and rests on a misreading of anticolonialism as always nativist, essentialist, atavistic, and wedded to pre-modern ideologies.

One critic has disavowed struggles against colonialism as constituting "an anti-imperialist or black nationalist tradition 'in itself'" (Bhabha 1994: 241); another has attributed "the failure of decolonization" to "the ignoring of the subaltern" (Spivak 1995b: 146); while yet another has charged that when an anticolonial movement did incorporate "modern science and polity," these were represented "as the return of the indigenous and the archaic" (Prakash 1996: 194–95). There undoubtedly were movements against colonialism guilty of some or all of these defects. All the same the ringing assertions cited above signally fail to address the far-reaching political dimensions of many of the struggles against imperial domination. They also fail to attend to the differences between moderate nationalist movements for independence that aspired only to inherit the colonial state, and revolutionary programs animated by socialist goals. These matters are now increasingly engaging in the postcolonial discussion participants who are necessarily considering how the different postcolonial conditions came into being, the class compositions of the newer nation-states, and their places within the present global structure of late imperialism (see, for example, Ahmad 1992; Brennan 1997, 2002b; Chrisman 1995; Lazarus 1999a; Parry 1994, 2002; San Juan 1998, 2002; Sivanandan, in this volume; Sprinker 1993).

Amongst the numerous retrospects on the beginnings of postcolonial studies, and against the predominant trend, Robert Young's recent volume, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (2001) is noteworthy. Young situates postcolonial criticism "within the historical legacy of Marxist critique on which it continues to draw but which it simultaneously transforms according to the precedents of the greatest tricontinental anticolonial intellectual politicians" (6). His designation of postcolonial criticism as "a form of activist writing that looks back to the political commitment of the anticolonial liberation movements and draws its inspiration from them" (10), is still a rare statement in an intellectual environment where so many scholars are disposed either to ignore, relegate, or misconstrue this body of theory. However, Young goes on to modulate his account of the field's genesis by introducing poststructuralism as another and metropolitan begetter, contending that "the structure to which [poststructuralism] . . . is 'post' is the colonial apparatus, the imperial machine": the poststructuralist "deconstruction of the idea of totality," he avers, "was born out of the experience of, and forms of resistance to, the totalizing regimes of the late colonial state, particularly French Algeria" (415). According to Young, it was Derrida, the Algerian-born Jew, "neither French nor Algerian, always anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan, critical of western ethnocentrism from *Of Grammatology*'s very first page, preoccupied with justice and injustice, [who] developed

deconstruction as a procedure for intellectual and cultural decolonization within the metropolis" (416).

If Young is not displacing Marxism with deconstruction in accounting for the ancestry of the postcolonial critique, then perhaps he is placing deconstruction among the tricontinental anticolonial intellectual traditions in terms of which the Marxist legacy was transformed within postcolonial studies – a reading supported by his description of his own work as an attempt to translate deconstruction's philosophical and literary strategies "into the more painful framework of colonial and postcolonial history" (412). Although he is sanguine about bringing the distinctive theoretical projects of poststructuralism, Marxism, and anticolonialism into alignment within postcolonial studies, the unambiguous rejection by so many poststructuralist thinkers of the Marxist categories that underpin leftist anticolonial thinking – the capitalist system, imperialism, class struggle, combined and uneven development, nationalism, an emancipatory narrative, universalism, for instance – suggests that the discrepancy between the informing premises cannot so readily be negotiated. This is a problem observed by Timothy Brennan when accounting for the paradoxical position of Marxism within a field where prominent theoretical tendencies have sought to suppress a parentage in anticolonial liberation movements: "If in the postcolonial discussion an undifferentiated Marxism has played a frequent role, it has done so usually as an example of how a certain brand of Eurocentrism promoted technological or disciplinary modernity, and therefore, by definition was antagonistic to non-Western forms of emergence" (Brennan 2002b: 188).

As histories of the field of postcolonial studies are being written, the various versions of its ancestry register the tensions between different methodologies and spheres of interest. Keya Ganguly has proposed the need for a project that will rescue the postcolonial critique "from being locked in an endless embrace of ideals of difference, deferral, and constitutive paraphrases that inform myriad readings in the literature about hybridity, liminality, mimicry, and so on." "If the time has come to move postcolonial scholarship beyond the now two-decade-old preoccupation with poststructuralist and deconstructive derivations of Freudian, Saussurean and Nietzchean ideas," she observes, "it may be worth casting another analytic look at the concepts and objects that were swept to the wayside on the march to 'self-reflexivity' by restoring the untranscendable horizon of truth and reality" (2002: 245). Only then will it be possible to examine the state apparatus, economic organization, social relationships, and cultural forms of different post-independence regimes and to understand that the "globalized" world order is structured such that the centers of economic, political, and

cultural power remain entrenched in a small number of capitalist nation-states. The task facing postcolonial studies today is not, of course, to abandon the theoretical sophistication that has marked its engagement with Orientalist discourse, Eurocentrism, and the exegetics of representation, but to link such meta-critical speculations with studies of actually existing political, economic, and cultural conditions, past and present.

NOTES

1 The best-known Readers and Companions include Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 1995; Castle 2001; Mongia 1996; Schwarz and Ray 2000; and Patrick Williams and Chrisman 1993. See also the inaugural issue of the journal, *Interventions* (1.1 [1998]), with its theme, "Ideologies of the Postcolonial."

2 Consider this statement, drawn from the editorial to the first issue of *Postcolonial Studies*, one of a number of dedicated journals in the field to have emerged since the mid-1990s: "Postcolonialism is what we employ to excavate the marginal, the magical, the erotic and the everyday . . . 'our' postcolonialism offers a new promiscuity which not only heads 'downmarket,' but . . . breaks through the cordon that separates the anthropological-based cultural studies practised in relation to non-western societies from the popular culture schools that focus on the popular in the West" (Seth, Gandhi, and Dutton 1998: 10)

3 Spivak maintains further that the task of postcolonial work is neither to recover signs of self-representation, of "the disenfranchised speaking for themselves," nor to address victimhood "by assertion of identity" (1990: 56).

4 An exception to this earlier criticism is Raskin 1971; see also Parry 1983, 1998c.

5 Whereas many of these readings situate the importation of colonial topoi to configure metropolitan dominations as paratactic – that is without narrative co-ordinates – they go on to re-articulate the *unsecured linkages* in the texts as constituting a critique of "the systematic operation of sexism and imperialism"; or as critically inscribing gender, race and class as intertwined or mutually reinforcing sub-sets (Ferguson 1991 on *Mansfield Park* and Heller 1992 on *The Moonstone*); or as demonstrating a historical alliance between the ideology of male domination and the ideology of colonial domination (Meyer 1996 on *Jane Eyre*).

6 An exception is the transcribed testament *I, Rigoberta Menchú: An Indian Woman in Guatemala* (Menchú 1984), which was a best-seller in the West.

7 Colonialism's histories are of course differential, because of which opportunities for discovering a "middle-ground" are greater, for example, in nineteenth century India than in the plantation colonies of the Caribbean, the genocidal settler regimes of Southern Africa, the Americas, and Australia, or the territorial expropriations in North and sub-Saharan Africa. However, even in the case of India it should be noted that the political and cultural traffic which occurred was between the rulers and India's regional and national élites, and not its overwhelmingly peasant populations.

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THE SHAPE OF THE FIELD