

Postcolonialism: subverting whose empire?

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The extent to which postcolonialism has permeated social theory has led to a situation where it is now necessary and possible to analyse the implications of postcolonial readings in a series of interrelated fields. Various authors such as Gayatri Spivak, Edward Said and Homi Bhabha began this process, in most cases utilising as their philosophical grounding the work of French post-structuralists, respectively Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan. Their work was historical, literary and psychoanalytic (among other things), yet the unifying force was their examination of colonial discourses' impacts upon subjectivity, knowledge and power. While various people practise postcolonial theory and their work can be identified as such (eg Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*)¹ there is a degree of uncertainty and debate that exists as to what makes a particular stance, discourse, work or condition postcolonial.

It is perhaps this last form (condition) that is the most ephemeral and the source of greatest disagreement. Can one speak of a postcolonial condition (in the manner of David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* or Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*)² and is there a set of material forces that can be identified as postcolonial? Should postcolonialism be spoken of as a number of conditions, some interrelated, others wholly divergent? Or rather is postcoloniality a strategy for particular analytic purposes? What does postcolonialism imply: beyond colonialism? within colonialism, but different from? does the emphasis lie with the post- or the colonial? Where should Australia be located within this debate given Aijaz Ahmad's description of Australia as a situation where, 'coloniser, colonised and postcolonial [exist] ... all at once'³ Or should a national form such as 'Australia' even enter the debate, as postcolonial theory has, in some cases, sought to abandon and deconstruct nationalist projects (in both liberal and Marxist senses)?

In this paper I will discuss these issues in the following format: first I will present a (select) genealogy of postcolonial theory showing its importance as a textual tool and its supporters' positions. Second, I will make an assessment of critical positions taken in the context of postcolonial theory. Third, I will utilise these points to examine the usefulness of postcolonial signification with reference to Australia. Occasionally, throughout the paper, I have sought to give hypothetical examples of postcolonial moments; though these are slightly tangential I hope to illustrate some of the forms that postcolonialism could/can

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take. Ultimately, I hope to demonstrate that the theoretical vagaries of much postcolonial analysis require a thorough reworking before postcolonialism can be utilised for radical and progressive projects.

Postcolonial(-ism)(-ity)(-ist)?

The most significant movement that began postcolonial work was (and still is) the subaltern studies group that (re)examined Indian history and historiography. Coming from a Gramscian perspective of the subaltern coupled with the insights of various post-structuralist analyses, writers like Gayatri Spivak, Ranajit Guha and Dipesh Chakraparty sought to transform the ways in which the subaltern was located within discourse, history and philosophy. It was in fact the emergence of subaltern studies that was seen as a signifier of postcolonial criticism and discourse. Its project, as Gyan Prakash elaborates, 'seeks to undo the Eurocentrism produced by the institution of the West's trajectory, its appropriation of the other as History'. These writers sought to go beyond explanations of agency and social change that relied on Eurocentric norms and practices, such as 'a "total history" of China, the history of mentalité in Mexico [or] the making of the working class in India'.⁴ Their projects sought their location in the subaltern at the same time as they divorced themselves from claims to an authentic subalternity. Spivak, for example, through an examination of widow sacrifice in India and its abolition by the British, rather than seeking to interpret the act from the viewpoint of the 'widows', emphasised the various meanings and conclusions that this act provided for commentators, whether British, Indian or Hindi (male and female), while thoroughly rejecting any project to 'speak' for the subaltern.⁵

Another important influence upon postcolonial theory, but of a different character and time period was Edward Said's Orientalism. This work is perhaps the most significant (and successful) reworking of Foucault's discourse analysis. Said examined the way in which the East (the Orient) had been constructed in relation to the West in terms of discursive practices. The whole idea of a binary opposite (ie east/west) was the overarching legacy of Orientalism in Said's eyes, which determined any interaction between the West and the other. Orientalism became, 'an accepted grid for filtering through the Orient into Western consciousness'. As such, the way in which an Orient began to be perceived as the Orient also allowed for Orientalism's, 'flexible positional superiority, which puts the Westerner in a whole series of possible relationships with the Orient without ever losing him the relative upper hand'.⁶ Said concentrated on the intellectual and pedagogical ramifications of imperialism, and while obviously acknowledging the economic and territorial forms, sought to distance their explicit 'interrelatedness' (and in some cases over-determining influence). In terms of postcolonialism, it is Ahmad who has identified Said's lasting contribution, as the first to provide, 'a whole critical apparatus for defining a postmodern kind of anti-colonialism' which, also for the first time, had little (if no) relation to Marxism.⁷

Homi Bhabha has played an important role in changing perspectives on colonial discourse. Bhabha, principally influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis

and Derrida's methods of deconstruction, has sought to emphasise positions of subjectivity in terms of location and psyche, rather than, for example, class. As Bhabha explains:

[m]y shift from the cultural as an epistemological object to culture as an enactive, enunciatory site opens up possibilities for other 'times' of cultural meaning (retroactive, prefigurative) and other narrative spaces (phantasmic, metaphorical). My purpose in specifying the enunciative present in the articulation of culture is to provide a process by which objectified others may be turned into subjects of their history and experience.⁸

This sets Bhabha's project up in contrast to Said's *Orientalism*. Bhabha argues that subjectivities in effect are 'real' as they are, in contrast to Said's emphasis on identities as the result of *Orientalism*. Bhabha recognises the impact of forces such as *Orientalism* but highlights issues of ambivalence and hybridity in order to emphasise the heterogeneity of contemporary subjectivities. This locates Bhabha's work much closer to that of Spivak, and some of the subaltern studies group, with its rejection of 'foundational' narratives (eg class, capitalism, colonialism).⁹ As the above quote reveals, his aim is at the very least to create a situation of multiple subjectivities based on locality rather than on the notion of a universalised authentic origin (eg nation, people, race). In fact, there is an explicit denial of 'origins' within Bhabha as shown by his commitment to hybridity: 'America leads to Africa; the nations of Europe and Asia meet in Australia; the margins of the nation displace the centre; the peoples of the periphery return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis.'¹⁰ Perhaps the final point to raise concerning Bhabha is the importance of migration within his work. Closely linked to hybridity, Bhabha refers to the psychological ramifications of migration—in personal and epistemological terms. This is a condition that he argues is continually (re)occurring which reinforces ambivalence (between what was and what will be) and hybridity (what is).

The work of Frantz Fanon has been a significant influence for these theorists, especially his *Black Skin, White Masks*. That his work should be used by people coming from explicitly post-structuralist positions has created a degree of disagreement among writers, though it is generally accepted that in speaking about the colonial or the other, it is completely remiss not to acknowledge Fanon. Fanon's significance for writers like Bhabha was his identification of the psychological ramifications of colonialism. At times Fanon makes use of Lacan¹¹ and parts of his project are readily adaptable—in Bhabha's eyes—to ideas of hybridity and ambivalence, demonstrating Fanon's significance for Bhabha. Fanon's illustration of a colonially transforming discourse/other, argues Bhabha, '[with] its displacement of time and person, its defilement of culture and territory, refuses the ambition of any "total" theory of colonial oppression'.¹² These ideas are in evidence throughout sections of Fanon's work and the example of the 're'-placed other is useful in this regard: as Fanon argues, 'the fact that the newly returned Negro adopts a language different from that of the group into which he was born is evidence of a dislocation, a separation'.¹³ The emphasis here is on transformation and the inability to retrace an original state. Of course, Fanon represented many other issues and in many cases postcolonial

writers have treated Fanon selectively, most likely in a fairly deliberate (or ambivalent) manner. Their argument, certainly in line with their positions, is that it is impossible to treat Fanon as a singular whole, though this is hardly an exclusively postcolonial position—many Marxists are quite happy admitting the same of Marx. However, it certainly fits the rhetoric of various writers (especially Bhabha) when they claim that their selective use of Fanon is also a part of their methods of hybridity and heterogeneity.

Given these various uses and manifestations of colonial theory, how should one speak of the postcolonial? There is certainly a sense of eclecticism among the writers above.¹⁴ Clearly postcolonial has a number of meanings depending on context. Said and Spivak speak of postcolonial projects in the sense of creating a situation beyond colonial discourse; in this way it acts as a strategy. Bhabha comes closer to identifying postcolonialism as postcoloniality, that is as a condition of being—in literary, subjective and epistemological terms. The postcolonial exists along with the colonial (hybridity and ambivalence).¹⁵ All these authors identify their projects as radical (though this is a highly contested issue—see below) in that each implicitly seeks to undermine and transform the dominance of Eurocentrist colonial discourses into discourses that, as Dirlik states, '[will] reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency'.¹⁶ Or as Mohanty argues, the signification of colonisation tends towards, 'a discursive or political suppression of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question'.¹⁷

Therefore, is it possible, I would suggest, to speak of themes within postcolonial work, and certainly the commitment to 'heterogeneity' in its many forms seems to be a particular referent of postcolonial criticism and the postcolonial critic (Spivak consistently identifies herself as postcolonial).¹⁸ The problem of whether postcolonialism is a material condition (as Bhabha implies, though in psychosocial terms only) or a strategy to arrive at a broader postcolonial condition (as Spivak and Said emphasise) or both, is unclear and remains. Shortly, by looking at a number of criticisms (including my own) that have been brought against postcolonial theory I hope to illustrate the theoretical and practical problems associated with this lack of clarity.

A (hypothetical) moment in postcolonialism

If postcolonialism is the result of colonial practices, or at least the interaction of those practices, it seems worth providing an example of a moment in which some of these forces can be detected. A very useful example is the flag raising ceremony of a decolonised country. Many images exist of the final moment of the British or Belgian or French flags descending the flag pole at midnight to be replaced by the new colours of an independent nation, all of this occurring in front of a cheering crowd. This is the moment of national liberation; finally, after many years of struggle, the nation is free of the oppressive rule of the coloniser and may continue on its path of independence and autonomy. That at least was the hope.

However, in postcolonial (discursive) terms one could argue that the greatest act of colonialism was in fact the raising of the new flag—because in some

senses this actually was a success for the colonial state. The issue here is that colonial states (primarily European countries—though not forgetting the USA, Japan and Australia) created new states and nations in places where those forms simply did not exist. As Harvey states, ‘the world’s spaces were deterritorialised, stripped of their preceding significations, and then reterritorialised according to the convenience of colonial and imperial administration’.¹⁹ While one can debate the formation of ‘nation-ness’ within colonising states (as Anderson, Gellner, Hobsbawm and others have)²⁰ it is easy to recognise that the process within colonised areas took on very different forms (colonial state-sanctioned invasion, violence, co-option, etc). As Dirks argues:

Claims about nationality necessitated notions of culture that marked groups off from one another in essential ways, uniting language, race, geography, and history in a single concept. Colonialism encouraged and facilitated new claims of this kind, re-creating Europe and its others through its histories of conquest and rule.²¹

The process of national liberation thus became a struggle on the coloniser’s terms—those seeking independence had to mobilise the nation, or at the very least be seen to do so. In one sense this helps to explain the longevity of so many empires into the late twentieth century. The colonisers (in addition to economic and military advantages—though this was not always the case as Portugal has shown) had created a discursive space in which they were the ultimate arbiters. Fanon gives an example of this kind of bind, when he argues that if European norms of ‘philosophy and intelligence are invoked to proclaim the equality of men, they have also been employed to justify the extermination of men’.²²

As a result of the intricacies of the Cold War, *inter alia*, the Third World was ‘born’. This ‘supra-nation’ offered a persuasive set of anti-colonial discourses.²³ The subsequent immediacy of ‘Third World Liberation’ led many to believe that liberation had in fact occurred (eg the strength of the nonaligned movement) and it would be a short moment before the Third World overtook the First. Yet, the last 10 years have, if anything, demonstrated the failure of those projects of Third World national liberation (eg Vietnam, Nicaragua, Angola). Pockets of the First World now appear in the Third (South Korea, sections of Bombay and Santiago) while the Third World grows in the first (Los Angeles, Brixton and outer Paris).²⁴ The ‘flag raising’ reinforced the new states’ position in the world since their existence as nations (however tenuous) meant that their interactions were formed and adjudicated by the same groups they had just rejected. No amount of ‘international brotherhood and solidarity’ could change the porous nature of their ‘borders’ in terms of ethnicity, capital, migration and the continued intrusion of ‘imperial’ states (eg the USA and USSR).

There are two responses one can make to the above examples and it seems that these are a good divider between postcolonial positions and those that are critical of such analysis. For postcolonialists the above demonstrates the failure of nationalist projects and foundational discourses. A multiplicity of voices must be brought to the front in any analysis that seeks to do away with colonialist discourse, or represent the current state of postcoloniality (eg race should not be the only category to which a project of liberation is linked). For those critical of postcolonialism the above demonstrates new forms of capitalism (eg globalism,

transnationalism), which are also beyond the nation—yet structure relations in manners which must still be met with projects of liberation and emancipation, though in quite different forms.

Critical views of the postcolonial

My problems with postcolonialism as theory, strategy and state are manifold and, while some of my criticisms have been enunciated by others, I hope to add a few more insights. By concentrating on each one of these aspects of postcolonial discourse (ie theory, state and strategy) I am perhaps giving more coherence to postcolonial work that actually exists. Of major importance in beginning a critique of these aspects is emphasising the degree of divergence and multiplicity in meaning and usage that postcolonialism has now acquired, to the point at which some have argued it is, ‘becoming mere jargon’.²⁵ While, as I argued above, certain specific themes can be detected, I would tend to agree that when surveying postcolonialism, beyond the confines of the authors cited above, its main use is often to make possible, as McClintock notes, ‘the marketing of a whole new generation of panels, articles, books and courses’, or, in Eley’s words, postcolonialism makes for an, ‘orgy of reflexivity’.²⁶

Postcolonialism has, as a term, become fashionable and, in line with other posts (such as post-industrial or post-feminist), seems to be of particular use in textual studies (as Bhabha, Said and Spivak demonstrate). However, the theory of postcolonialism is at best a mishmash of deeply confusing elements drawn from literary criticism, history and philosophy. The importance of Derrida to postcolonial theory is paramount, though it seems that Bhabha and Spivak (among others) have taken Derrida’s maxim of ‘there is nothing outside of the text’ and converted it to ‘there is nothing but the text’. In this sense all relations (colonial, personal, institutional, etc) only have meaning as textual relations, the result being that, as Parry argues, ‘in the interests of establishing the autarchy of the signifier the narrated event is existentially diminished’.²⁷ Having reached this position of textual ‘autarchy’ it is easy to enunciate that all discourses are heterogeneous, having no foundational backing, simply being the result of numerous other discourses interacting (hybridity). Often postcolonial analysis regards any explanation that seeks a relativity of categorisation (eg gender is more important than class in analyses of contemporary Australia²⁸) as a set of colonial discourses which universalise and homogenise.

It is exceedingly banal to say that social forces, discourses, etc are heterogeneous. Most people (except perhaps strict base–superstructure Marxists) are cogently aware of this phenomenon (even Leninists understood the importance of alliances across and within classes). The point is to incorporate some kind of mechanism that provides a comparative and contextual means to theorise relational power and its impact. Postcolonial theory explicitly avoids this process of historicisation by solely locating analyses at the local (‘subjective’) level, creating an ahistorical eternal present. Gates argues that postcolonial theory has created its own double bind whereby one can choose to:

empower the native discursively ... downplaying the epistemic (and literal) violence of colonialism; or play up the absolute nature of colonial domination, [by] negating

the subjectivity and agency of the colonised, thus textually replicating the repressive operations of colonialism.²⁹

The theoretical implications are that one is left in a constantly ambiguous position as to the impact of colonialism. Even Young, an admirer of postcolonial projects, must still raise the question, 'of what, if anything, is specific to the colonial situation if colonial texts only demonstrate the same properties that can be found in any deconstructive reading of European texts'.³⁰ If the subaltern cannot speak (according to Spivak) and never will, then the situation we are left with is one that half-heartedly acknowledges the social ramifications of colonialism but has no way (or seeks none) of locating them within an historical project outside of 'local' discourses. Ahmad notes the impact of this theoretical turn by arguing that, '[colonialism] thus becomes a transhistorical thing, always present and always in the process of dissolution in one part of the world or another, so that everyone gets the privilege, sooner or later, at one time or another, of being coloniser, colonised and postcolonial'.³¹

We have arrived at a situation where the difference between the coloniser and colonised is not only the result of colonial discourses but in fact can be turned around so that the coloniser is in fact colonised as well. There is no dispute that it is certainly desirable to make a critique of static and universalist categories (black, white, Third World, etc), but by seeking an eternal regress postcolonial theory problematises every category to the point at which it has no usefulness whatsoever. As Dirlik states:

postcolonialism's repudiation of structure and totality in the name of history ironically ends up not in an affirmation of historicity but in a self-referential, universalising historicism that reintroduces through the back door an unexamined totality; it projects globally what are but local experiences.³²

Thus, postcolonial theory could be used, in this sense, to depoliticise the most historically obscene and distant activities (see below).

Much has been made of the term 'postcolonial' to describe a state of being. It has in various uses signified the period of time immediately after independence was granted for colonies, a point at which colonial discourses no longer exist, a subjective state of being, or a type of literature. As a signifier of the period immediately following colonial independence the term postcolonial is highly suspect. The implication that one is beyond colonialism after the achievement of independence would be laughable if it were not for the tragic consequences of contemporary colonialism. Just where do East Timor, Palestine, Tibet and Kurdistan fit in contemporary postcolonialism? Similarly, to treat Australia as postcolonial, 'equates the relations of the colonised white-settlers to the Europeans at the "centre" with that of the colonised indigenous populations to the Europeans ... [W]hite Australians and Aboriginal Australians are placed in the same "periphery" as though they were co-habitants vis-à-vis the centre'. Shohat has also noted the widespread acceptance and preference within conservative academic administration circles for the term 'postcolonial' over terms such as 'neocolonial' or 'imperialism and third worldist critique'.³³

As an expression of being, this is perhaps the most paradoxical. For those claiming status as postcolonial it seems a description remarkably confined to

people in academic institutions (and principally Western ones at that). People can become postcolonial once they have all the benefits of a colonial consumptive culture, their state of being both colonial (enjoying the benefits of their academic status, etc) and postcolonial (rejecting the link between their status and the discursive forms they study). In discussing Bhabha's emphasis on hybridity as a postcolonial subjective form Parry notes the absence of any discussion of the terms creole or mestizo and their clear similarity to the present form Bhabha identifies.³⁴ That this aspect had been discussed long ago by anti-colonial writers (eg C L R James) is also absent from Bhabha's work.

Finally, as a strategy postcolonialism raises a number of problems. Its inaccessible linguistic form, in some instances, has lead Dirlik to chastise Bhabha as a 'master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation'.³⁵ This is ultimately a critique that remains the domain of an intellectual elite. Additionally, Parry has noted that, as a strategy for future historiographic projects, it has tended to universalise the Indian experience of colonialism such that all future projects must seek the hybridity and heterogeneity so emphasised in the Indian experience.³⁶ As strategy, postcolonialism has also reconcentrated academic work on subjectivity and agency. This is a welcome result but, by arguing that this is the 'whole project' (or as far as any project should go), any event is thus suitable for analysis and can be explained in subjective terms. One implication of this position is elaborated below.

A second (hypothetical) moment in postcolonialism

By concentrating on the local in bringing forth an analysis of subjective agency, postcolonial projects risk depoliticising highly political activities. It seems that, while most postcolonial historiography has been associated with radical projects (studies of rebellion, banditry), there is no reason why a project concerning the Oklahoma bombing would not be feasible. But in postcolonial terms all understanding of such an act could only come from those engaged in the act. An analysis of discursive forms would not concentrate on the politics of the movements associated with the bombing—since this could be colonial homogenisation (eg criminals/not criminals)—but rather on why and how the bombing was justified in the minds of the bombers.³⁷ In our hypothetical study the heterogeneity of their practices would be enunciated, their hybridity ('left-wing terrorism', libertarian, militant) would be conflated and their deliberations analysed.

Yet, at no point would postcolonial analysis, from its own logic, be able to treat the event as a crime—since crime in itself is a highly problematic (heterogeneous) discourse. What is important here is the study of study, rather than the study of 'acts', or, more simply, study for the sake of study. Postcolonialism has brought forth a complete and thorough reduction of discursive activity so that all social and cultural forces are denuded of anything but self-referential context and completely depoliticised. We now have no ability whatsoever to speak of the act—only to explain its presence. At the very least postcolonialism's own ambivalence over politics is contradictory, given many of

its proponents' anti-colonial rhetoric. However, at worst this form of postcolonialism open the door to a whole slew of analyses that lessen and depoliticise historical obscenities.

Postcolonial Australia?

Given my positions above it is easy to recognise that Australia, in my own view, cannot be seen as postcolonial. Yet this has not stopped a number of writers as identifying Australia as having postcolonial literature³⁸ and postcolonial writers.³⁹ Of course the implication here must be that Australia is in a post-colonial state. This is deeply worrying given that the conditions within Australia, rather than pointing to an eternal present, if anything, give us an eternal past (the continuation of Aboriginal dispossession, environmental degradation, discrimination and sexism). Thus, by examining two uses of postcolonialism within work about Australia, I hope to provide an, albeit limited, understanding of its appropriateness.

I find it rather superficial that Kane (a North American academic) should seek with quasi-jingoism to find in Peter Carey's work 'the possibilities for something we might learn to call truly Australian'. Kane notes that the postcolonial authors who also best represent this 'something' internationally are Patrick White, Thomas Kenneally, Peter Porter, Les Murray and 'a handful of others'. It is unfortunate that Kane uses the phrase 'handful of others' to (possibly) signify people like Sally Morgan, Ruby Langford Ginibi, Jack Davis, Helen Garner and many more. That Kane only names Anglo-European Australian men as representing postcolonial Australia is of course the ultimate irony: those most greatly affected by colonial Australia are probably the least likely to represent the 'true' postcolonial Australia. Kane ends with a piece of mythical nationalism, conflating widely divergent issues: 'thus, in Peter Carey's work the postmodern is the postcolonial, and "Australian literature" comes to occupy a space of its own'.⁴⁰

This does not mean I am completely predisposed to exclude the use of the term postcolonial when speaking of Australia. In Martin's piece examining postcolonial Australian advertising, postcolonial denotes signifiers that seek to remove the colonial presence within Australian history from advertisements.⁴¹ Martin notes a number of forces that enunciate the construction of Aboriginal absence and the naturalness of European ownership. Australia become empty and ready for habitation, though if Aboriginal people are present they are equated with flora, fauna and the landscape, 'as equivalent subjects for the tourist gaze'. Here Martin successfully invokes postcolonialism as a conservative project that reinforces Aboriginal dispossession to the point at which it is no longer required. The colonists have become postcolonial simply because their strategy of dispossession has finally succeeded. While Aboriginal people's physical presence may still remain, as signs of Australia they have been removed from the national psyche. This could lead to a point at which in the near future, just as it is fashionable to claim convict heritage today, claiming (distant) Aboriginal heritage, in a completely depoliticised form, will be a sign of 'Australian-ness'.

These are two uses of postcolonial, yet the term does have a significant role to play in Australia, I would argue. However, its use should be tempered with a degree of historicisation, otherwise its status as academic elitism is reinforced and its potential conservativeness inappropriate for the colonial relations it seeks to break down.

Conclusion

Jameson has spoken that ‘every position on postmodernism in culture—whether apologia or stigmatisation—is also at one and the same time, and necessarily, an implicitly or explicitly political stance on the nature of multinational capitalism today’.⁴² Without wanting to be accused of conflation, postcolonialism works in a similar way. While postcolonial history is a slightly different matter, any contemporary postcolonial analysis that at least does not take into explicit account the single largest global ‘structure’, ie capitalism, is making an explicitly political comment.⁴³ Various historiographies will question the structure and impact of capitalism as a driving force of colonialism—but it is once again difficult not to speak of capitalism unless one’s specific project is a kind of postmodern social Darwinism.

There are clear advantages to postcolonial projects; they promote agency and subjectivity, two forces long missing in prominent academic scholarship on colonialism, and much of their commitment to heterogeneity comes from a progressive (and often radical) stance against the homogenising forces of colonialism. Yet in positing projects of postcolonialism, many writers, as I have argued, have sought to go beyond colonialism and have failed to address adequately which historical influences and conditions remain. The problem it seems is that in the rush to find postcolonial states, subjectivities and conditions, few people have set in process projects of decolonisation.⁴⁴ Decolonisation would come, according to postcolonialists, once postcolonialism had been enunciated and enacted. Yet this is simply question begging. There are some highly ‘colonial’ responses that would solve massive inequities (eg adequate distribution of resources, land, water, food) within the world. These projects of decolonisation, however achieved (though liberal and Marxist projects of nationalism have ‘failed’), would it seems be the first step in the realisation of some hoped for condition of postcolonialism. For instance, community action programmes and non-governmental sponsored projects (among others) are surely projects that lead to greater autonomy and independence, factors vital for decolonisation. That these forms have existed separately from the enunciation of postcolonialism should not be forgotten.

I am also hesitant to accept that any process of decolonisation simply begins in the ‘text’. Postcolonial critics, it seems, have guaranteed themselves the position of armchair decolonisers, with the primacy of a textual role being the most prominent in anti-colonial struggles. Dirlik asks ‘not whether this [post-colonial] global intelligentsia can (or should) return to national loyalties but whether ... it can generate a thorough-going criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product’.⁴⁵

For such a project of radical decolonisation and anti-colonialism I would

emphasise the need for new sets of ideas to be developed about the relationships between discourses and social orders. These are of course not simply separable and their interrelationships are exceedingly complex. In some cases postcolonial theory has contributed to formulating new sets of ideas, but until there is a greater incorporation of the 'material' (whether real or hybrid) as a social force affected by and affecting discourses, rather than simply reducing all forms to textual discourses, much postcolonialism is doomed to an eternal present; a vicious circle that tells us 'how' something is, but contains deeply contradictory strategies of change since all dominating referents are self-determined.

Perhaps it is better not simply to seek an either/or position in postcolonialism, but rather to work for projects of decolonisation that include self-reflexivity not based solely on discursive terms, but which occur with an acknowledgment that while, for example, colonialism can be a discursive form, discursive forms are also influenced by classes, genders and ethnicities, which despite their heterogeneous constructions and histories can still have force as structures and institutions. In this way postcolonialism can be read as a project of decolonisation that is informed by analyses of the relationships between discourses and social orders and thus acts as an anti-colonial force rather than a potentially ambivalent conservative project.

Notes

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- ¹ S Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*, London: Picador, 1982.
- ² D Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990; and J-F Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986.
- ³ A Ahmad, 'The politics of literary postcoloniality', *Race & Class*, 36(3), 1995, p 9.
- ⁴ G Prakash, 'Subaltern studies as postcolonial criticism', *American Historical Review*, December 1994, pp 1475, 1484.
- ⁵ G C Spivak, 'Can the subaltern speak?', in C Nelson & L Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988, pp 271–304.
- ⁶ E Said, *Orientalism*, Ringwood: Penguin, 1991, pp 6–7.
- ⁷ A Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures*, London: Verso, 1992, p 222.
- ⁸ H K Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, London: Routledge, 1994, p 178.
- ⁹ A Dirlirk, 'The postcolonial aura: Third World criticism in the age of global capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20(2), 1994, p 334.
- ¹⁰ H K Bhabha, 'Introduction: narrating the nation', in H K Bhabha (ed), *Nation and Narration*, London: Routledge, 1990, p 6.
- ¹¹ H L Gates, 'Critical Fanonism', *Critical Inquiry*, 17(3), 1991, p 461.
- ¹² H K Bhabha, 'Foreword: Remembering Fanon', in F Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1991, p x.
- ¹³ F Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, London: Pluto Press, 1991, p 25.
- ¹⁴ While one may speak of postcolonial critics' post-structuralism it is important to remember that, of my three main examples, each author's main influence is an incredibly diverse and complicated writer (Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault and Jacques Lacan respectively) whose work, in some cases, defies conflation.
- ¹⁵ In Gyan Prakash's words, postcoloniality is 'a new beginning, one in which certain old modes of domination may persist and acquire new forms of sustenance but one that marks the end of an era'. G Prakash, 'Introduction', in G Prakash (ed) *After Colonialism*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995, p 5.

- ¹⁶ Dirlik, 'The postcolonial aura', p 329.
- ¹⁷ C T Mohanty, 'Under Western eyes: feminist scholarship and colonial discourses', in P Williams & L Chrisman (eds) *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993, p 196.
- ¹⁸ See Spivak's self-referential 'Post-Colonial Critic'. Here her own practice equates postcolonial with a state of being. G C Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic*, New York: Routledge, 1990.
- ¹⁹ D Harvey quoted in B Parry, 'Signs of our times', *Third Text*, 28/29, 1994, p 19.
- ²⁰ See B Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso, 1991; E Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1983; and E J Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1780*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.
- ²¹ N B Dirks, 'Introduction', in N B Dirks (ed), *Colonialism and Culture*, Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1992, p 3.
- ²² Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, p 29
- ²³ Both modernisation theory and dependency theory perhaps being the most pervasive responses to this situation. For important initial examples of this see W Rostow, *The Stages of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1960; and A G Frank, *Capitalism and Underdevelopment in Latin America*, New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967.
- ²⁴ M Berger, 'The end of the Third World', *Third World Quarterly*, 15(2), 1994, pp 267–268.
- ²⁵ Ahmad, 'The politics of literary postcoloniality', p 7.
- ²⁶ A McClintock, 'The angel of progress: pitfalls of the term post-colonialism', *Social Text*, 31/32, 1992, p 93; and G Eley quoted in Dirks, *Colonialism and Culture*, p 13.
- ²⁷ Parry, 'Signs of our times', p 8.
- ²⁸ Obviously this is not meant as a truism. I use this example only to problematise the *reductio ad absurdum* of much postcolonial theory with its calls for heterogeneity.
- ²⁹ Gates, 'Critical Fanonism', p 462.
- ³⁰ R Young, *White Mythologies: Writing, History and the West*, London: Routledge, 1990, p 153. Young is using the term colonial in an all-encompassing sense rather than, for example, a colonial 'document' sense.
- ³¹ Ahmad, 'The politics of literary postcoloniality', p 9.
- ³² Dirlik, 'The postcolonial aura', p 345.
- ³³ E Shohat, 'Notes on the post-colonial', *Social Text*, 31/32, 1992, pp 99, 102. One must of course note the role of elites within various colonial states (eg the Philippines or India) whose positions in many cases facilitated the incorporation of regions into various empires.
- ³⁴ Parry, 'Signs of our times', p 13.
- ³⁵ Dirlik, 'The postcolonial aura', p 333.
- ³⁶ Parry, 'Signs of our times', p 18.
- ³⁷ This is in fact how most 'analytical' media coverage concerning the bombing occurred, ie a heavy emphasis on the bomber's alienation from the army with light coverage concerning his philosophies of militant libertarianism. The coverage that did examine the 'militias' tended, however, to fetishise and mock what is a heavily armed and violent group by depicting them as overweight middle-aged men.
- ³⁸ B Ashcroft et al, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, London: Routledge, 1989, pp 16–17.
- ³⁹ P Kane, 'Postcolonial/postmodern: Australian literature and Peter Carey' *World Literature Today*, 63(3), 1993, pp 519–522.
- ⁴⁰ Ibid.
- ⁴¹ S K Martin, 'White coffee: colonial discourse in (postcolonial) Australian advertising', *Meanjin*, 52(3), 1993, pp 509–511.
- ⁴² F Jameson, 'Postmodernism, or the cultural logic of late capitalism', *New Left Review*, 146, p 55.
- ⁴³ As Ahmad ('The politics of literary postcoloniality', p 12) argues in orthodox Marxist terms, 'the structural dialectic of imperialism includes ... the deepening penetration of all available global spaces by the working of capital and intensification of the nation-state form simultaneously. This dialectic produces contradictory effects in the realms of culture and ideology. The same Arab magnates and Irani mullahs who chase petrodollars across the globe—those same saffron yuppies who are opening up the Bombay Stock Exchange and the computer industry of Bangalore for foreign capital—organise their own lives around the fetishism of commodities bequeathed to them by advanced capital but are also the ones most vociferous in propagating the discourse of authenticity and cultural differentialism in the name of Islam in one space, Hinduism in another, in order to forge profascist nationalisms for the working masses of their own nations, so as to wean them away from the progressive projects of socialism and anti-imperialist nationalisms. Within this context, speaking with virtually mindless pleasure of transnational cultural hybridity, and of politics of contingency, amounts, in effect, to endorsing the claims of transnational capital itself.' (original emphasis).
- ⁴⁴ Nor in many cases have writers been willing to identify cases of *recolonisation*.
- ⁴⁵ Dirlik, 'The postcolonial aura', p 356.