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Sociological and Marxist Literary Theory in Colonial Context

Critical engagement with Western scholarship about those parts of the world that were adversely affected by colonialism, and artistic literature from and about those parts of the world have a longer history than is commonly appreciated. Emergent Marxist and Marxist-inflected but more general sociological studies of the question have a particularly rich and complex history that is often elided in mainstream accounts of postcolonial scholarship.

The publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* in 1978 led to a significant reorientation of literary studies in Europe and the United States. Challenges to the established canon of works studied in universities and a new sensitivity to the colonial and racial biases in many established approaches to culture came to the fore. Said's book was largely directed against those intellectuals in US academia who he regarded as complicit in bolstering the ideological case for the state's intervention in the Middle East and how this continued policies that had been established by British and French imperialism. Here Said developed what Timothy Brennan calls a "patented eclectic amalgam in which the concepts of discursive network, hegemony, the homologies of Lucien Goldmann, and cultural materialism all mix" (Brennan 2006, 111). Michel Foucault's notions of discourse and power/knowledge lay alongside Marxist ideas such as Antonio Gramsci's ideas about hegemony and Raymond Williams's ideas about culture as a way of life, as well as Noam Chomsky's libertarian critique of US foreign policy.

While Said became increasingly outspoken in his criticisms of Foucault, and more nuanced in his attitude towards Marxism (about which he had made a number of unsubstantiated criticisms in *Orientalism*), Said's book was adopted by poststructuralist thinkers as legitimizing a type of postcolonial criticism fundamentally based on Foucault's ideas and as such hostile to Marxism, which was generally portrayed as "an extreme form of European Enlightenment thinking" (Kemper 2006, 6) and as a Eurocentric doctrine. As this form of postcolonialism became established throughout Western universities, it achieved the status of what the philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn (1970, 35–42) called "normal science", with PhD theses written and academic careers built by taking Said's alleged "innovation" for granted and concentrating on "puzzle solving" rather than producing phenomenal or theoretical novelties. Textbooks used to train graduate students often present a historical mythology about the origins of postcolonial theory according to what the theorists themselves regarded as their accomplishments. This involved a straw-man image of the Enlightenment, seen as positing

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"an abstract, Eurocentric universalism based on the rationalistic assumption of scientific certainty and on an essentially religious confidence in the inevitability of historical progress" (Callinicos 1995, 736). The highly contested dialogues between the radical, atheistic currents within the Enlightenment, beginning with Spinoza's philosophy, and those moderate *philosophes* determined to reconcile the advance of science with religious prejudices and the established social order on which Jonathan Israel (2006) has written in detail, are largely ignored. The rise of colonialism acted on this field in complex ways (Israel 2006, 590–614). The poststructuralist theory of language relegated considerations of complex historical processes that were refracted through discursive interaction as, at best, of secondary importance.

Said's book overshadowed the publication of another important work on the topic the same year: Bryan S. Turner's *Marx and the End of Orientalism* (1978), in which the author noted that Marx's early work was still insufficiently separated from Hegelian assumptions about the orient, and that these still appeared in certain works by contemporary Marxists. On this issue, as many others, noted Turner, "there is no such thing as a homogenous tradition of Marxist analysis" (Turner 1978, 8). In recent years there has been a considerable amount of scholarship showing the extent to which Marx's own ideas about colonialism, and non-European societies more generally, developed considerably during his long career, particularly in response to anti-colonial uprisings in Ireland, Poland and India. This helped Marx gradually to free his work from the stereotypes embedded in the positivist history he was reading (see, for instance, Habib 2006; Anderson 2010; Achcar 2013). Marx's own musings on literature draw heavily on the European literature he knew well but did not amount to a generalized theoretical perspective. Developing Goethe's ideas, however, Marx sees the development of capitalism facilitating the overcoming of national limitations in culture and the rise of a world literature (Prawer 1978, 138–165). This is a perspective the next generations of Marxists inherited. Such thinkers were often limited by their own familiarity with European rather than other literature as Marxists focused on the development of the labour movement in European states, but they laid the foundations for a more expansive approach to world literature.

1 Studying the literature of the 'East'

European study of non-European languages and cultures was given a major boost by the development of British and French colonialism, and was initially embedded in colonial institutions. Interest in the culture of the Indian subcontinent in

particular soon took on a much more generalized form, however, and found a particularly enthusiastic audience in Germany in the nineteenth century, which became a major centre of Oriental Studies. German nationalist intellectuals often sought to legitimize the historical validity of German *Kultur* in distinction to French *Zivilisation*, by tracing the former's ancestry back to the achievements of Sanskrit, while the latter was traceable to the less ancient Latin (for an overview see McGetchin 2009). This often resulted in formulations critical of British and French oriental studies, but received scant attention in Said's seminal work of 1978. Neither did the development of oriental studies in Russia receive due attention, leading to a significant overgeneralization in the characterization of European scholarship about the East.

For the first half of the nineteenth-century Western engagements with the literature of Asia was subordinated to the narratives of Indo-European philology, which sought to establish kinship relations between languages and cultures and trace the origins of European civilization back to a putative Indo-European homeland by means of the so-called comparative method. The diffusion of phonetic elements and narrative motifs were assumed to have accompanied the migration of peoples from their original homelands. This procedure assumed the Biblical narrative of the descent of all peoples from the sons of Noah and the commonly held belief, based on calculations made about the number of generations detailed in the Old Testament, that the world was only six thousand years old. Some scholarship about the Orient challenged the Biblical timeline, but it was the discovery of fossil remains of early man that led to a paradigm shift in the humanities. Assumptions of European superiority now began to be justified less commonly by the Biblical narrative as by directly racial criteria, often supported by the identification of Indo-European cultures with the Aryan race. One manifestation of this was the attempt to present the life of Jesus as a narrative based on the life of Buddha, which served simultaneously to locate European culture within the Indo-European tradition, and to weaken any reliance of European on Semitic cultures. Nietzsche meanwhile, sought to derive European culture from ancient Greece with no debt either to Persia or pharaonic Egypt, and this was later reinforced by, *inter alia*, Heidegger.

Others rejected such reasoning and posited a universal process of cultural evolution according to the dominant positivist schema of the late nineteenth century. The mental development of all societies was here seen as passing through three universal stages: theological, metaphysical and scientific. European societies were generally viewed as the most developed societies and ways of thinking, while non-Europeans were lagging behind in their development. Such reasoning tended to justify colonialism on the basis of a European 'civilizing mission'. Both trends were often eclectically combined with a romantic nationalism, according

to which the rise of national languages and cultures signified the emergence of a shared, national, psychological makeup (*Völkerpsychologie*). This idea was one that also permeated the movements for national independence that emerged in the late nineteenth century.

Ancient, and especially religious texts were the focus of most European study at the time, and contemporary literature from the colonial world was largely ignored. Thus, the Vedas had been subject to much scrutiny in the early nineteenth century, while the Old Testament was subjected to considerable critical analysis towards the end of the century. The German scholar Julius Wellhausen (1899 [1883]), for instance, revealed the text of the Bible to be a palimpsestic text that resulted from the overlay of a number of texts over time. These 'layers' could be correlated with the development of the Middle East through stages of social evolution. The sociological approach to ancient Judaism was further strengthened by the work of Max Weber (1921) and the Marxist Moses Lurje (1927). At this time the Buddhist sutras were also subjected to analysis and correlated to emergent social forms. In most cases, however, it was assumed that the application of European paradigms was necessary to reveal the worldviews embedded in such texts, and that indigenous scholarship was of extremely questionable value. This was despite the fact that most European scholars of Indo-European languages and cultures had been reliant on Hindu scholars (Pandits) who studied the ancient texts but were rarely credited in European studies.

This condescending attitude towards indigenous scholarship was much less pronounced among Russian orientologists who emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. The study of Buddhism in Russia, for instance, began with an engagement with the living traditions of the Buddhist communities in Siberia, and drew respectfully on the work of scholar-monks working in so-called *datsans*, the seminaries of Tibetan-style monasteries. Early Russian Buddhologists and Indologists like Vasilii Vasil'ev (1818–1900) and Ivan Minaev (1840–1890), for instance, studied religious doctrines through an engagement with texts collected and translated by indigenous scholars and they encouraged their students to engage with indigenous forms of knowledge. The school of oriental studies founded by Baron Viktor Rozen (1849–1908) in St. Petersburg followed this trend closely, encouraging a study of 'Russia's own orient' that avoided and indeed combated the simplistic dichotomies of East and West that permeated British and French orientalism in particular (Tolz 2011). The established narratives of European superiority suited Russia's Eurasian empire rather poorly, but the positivist notion of a universal process of cultural evolution drawing various peoples together was enthusiastically received. These scholars were very critical of Tsarist nationality policies, which sought to replace indigenous historical, political and social structures with the general structures of the Empire (Lowe 1992), and espoused the pro-

motion of regional cultures and identities within the common civic space of the Empire which would lead to the emergence of a hybrid pan-Russian identity. This was in essence an early version of multiculturalism according to which formal recognition and cultural autonomy would, it was hoped, undermine separatist sentiments. The right to full national self-determination was not something such scholars were prepared to entertain, however, and the imperial Russian state was not interested in any such programme of promoting local cultures and identity within a shared political space. This was, however, to emerge as a central policy in the USSR in the 1920s, and many of the same specialists participated in its implementation.

In Russian academic studies the 'East' signified the space from "the Caucasus and Central Asia to the Indian Ocean and the countries of the African Lakes, from the borders between Iran and India to Gibraltar; the ancient history of this entire space 'represents a fully finalized whole'" (Bartol'd 2012 [1918], 4–5), while China and Japan were considered the Far East and India as Asia. While heavily repressed, the Russian 'East' was subject to considerable study by academic orientologists, who sought to dispel stereotypes about their cultures and celebrated past achievements while seeking to encourage their peaceful integration into the Russian state. These thinkers developed a critique of French and British studies of the Orient, particularly as embedded in Indo-European philology, on the basis of the colonial ideology that permeated them.

2 Russian Marxism

The development of Marxism in the Russian Empire was accompanied by a rise in the topicality of relations between European and non-European cultures. Tsarist nationality policy imposed imperial forms on subject nationalities and created a rigid hierarchy. Meanwhile, intellectuals from subject nationalities such as Poland, and Russian populist revolutionaries developed sympathetic forms of anthropological study of the peoples of Siberia while in political exile there. With the defeat of the Russian fleet by the Japanese fleet in 1905, and the revolutionary upsurge that followed, the politics of national liberation became more prominent as assumptions of the superiority of European civilization were questioned. Lenin in particular recognized the significance of the 1905 defeat of the Russian state by the ascendant Japanese state, noting that "advancing, progressive Asia has dealt backward and reactionary Europe an irreparable blow" (Lenin 1962 [1905], 48–49). The impact of the defeat across Asia was considerable (see Mishra 2012). The formation of Marxist political organisations across the Empire further raised

the importance of the national and colonial question among Marxists, although this remained subordinate to the formation of a political movement across the Empire until after the October 1917 Revolution and the Civil War that followed.

From this time two trends in Soviet oriental studies appeared, one based in the institutions of the Academy of Sciences in Petrograd-Leningrad and dominated by figures who led pre-Revolutionary oriental studies, and a 'new', Moscow-based trend dominated by mainly young Marxist scholars who focused on the contemporary East and foregrounded the study of political and socio-economic formations. They also sought to recast the notion of the 'East' as something based on economic rather than cultural geography. As Mikhail Pavlovich-Vel'tman, head of the new All-Russian Scientific Association of Oriental Studies (VNAV), put it, the task of the association was to study "the entire world on whose exploitation the power of the capitalist society in Europe and the United States rests" (Pavlovich 1922, 9). Oriental philologists nevertheless continued to operate on the basis of the established cultural geography. Indeed, pre-Revolutionary philologists remained oriented on ancient texts and were largely concentrated in the Leningrad institutions, while Moscow oriental studies focused on contemporary economics and politics. There are, however, significant exceptions. One such was the work of Solomon Vel'tman, brother of Mikhail Pavlovich-Vel'tman. In a series of articles in the VNAV journal *Novyi Vostok* (*The New East*), which were subsequently combined into a monograph *Vostok v khudozhestvennoi literature* (*The East in Artistic Literature*, [Vel'tman 1928]), Vel'tman discussed the ways in which literature had become one of the means through which European imperial powers presented ideologically motivated representations of the East that justified their colonial enterprises. While perceptive observations lie throughout these articles, Vel't-man was less able to appreciate the importance of the work of writers resisting colonialism such as the 1913 Nobel Laureate, the Bengali polymath Rabindranath Tagore, who he presented as a mystic or an enigma for the Russian reader. Here Vel'tman treated Tagore's work solely in its relationship to the struggle against British imperialism, locating Tagore alongside Mahatma Gandhi, as characterized (negatively) by the Bengali communist M. N. Roy. Similar to Vel'tman, but more positively, Commissar of Enlightenment Anatolii Lunacharskii connected Tagore to Gandhi, who he called the Indian Tolstoi (Lunacharsky 1923). Another prominent Marxist critic of the time, Aleksandr Voronskii (1918), noted that Tagore is not simply a poet but a "a prophet and the greatest teacher of life", a revolutionary contribution to the Indian struggle for independence. While sensitive to the subtle forms of Tagore's poetry, Voronskii's work remained a piece of journalism and his more systematic literary scholarship remained focused on Russia and Europe. More sustained and academic work on Indian literature can be found in the work of Rozaliia Shor, a trained specialist in Sanskrit who worked at a number

of Moscow institutions, written simultaneously with her work on language and society. Shor's focus remained the literature of the ancient world, however.

In general, Marxist engagement with the literature of the East was limited by the availability of translations and the specialisms of Marxists themselves. Nevertheless, the Vsemirnaia literatura (World Literature) publishing house was established by Maksim Gor'kii as early as 1918, with widespread official support. In its earliest years the publishing house concentrated on making the classics from Western Europe available in cheap editions to a wide audience, but nevertheless managed to publish a two-volume anthology *Literature of the East* in 1919–1920 with critical material provided by the most important specialists of the period, most of whom were representatives of the 'old' oriental studies based in Petrograd-Leningrad.

The division between the two branches of oriental studies began to be eroded once the policy of *korenizatsiia* (nativization or indigenization) was established. A process of cross-fertilization of ideas now took place. New institutions were established to standardize and codify the languages of the former colonies of the empire, to study and raise awareness of their cultural heritage, and to develop an indigenous press, theatre, education system and administrative structure. The promotion of the literature and folklore of the former colonies of the Empire led to a significant amount of research as new specialists were trained in the oriental languages of the USSR. Engaged in collective projects and dealing specifically with the institutional aspects of cultures, the younger generation of researchers imbibed Marxism while developing new specialisms and certain older scholars adapted their approach to certain Marxist ideas to various degrees.

3 Questions of method

In literary studies the pre-Revolutionary substratum of nascent comparative literature, developed by the Neophilological Society of St. Petersburg University under the leadership of Aleksandr Veselovskii, exerted a strong and formative influence. Veselovskii had broken away from the then dominant type of Indo-European philology, which sought to trace forms of language, motifs and narratives back to a putative Indo-European homeland, and posited the idea that there was a single process of literary development in which all cultures participate. The rise of specific literary genres, poetic metaphors and plots could be correlated to stages in the psychic development of societies from a primordial syncretism to fully articulated linguistic and literary forms. While similar but individual semantic units arose independently, they entered into combinations, embodying

the convergence of ways of life and of thinking. All languages and cultures were thus rendered to some extent hybrids, and that was particularly true of the Eurasian Russian Empire where a multitude of ethnic and language groups coexisted within a single state. Prominent specialists in oriental studies, such as the Indologist Sergei Ol′denburg and the archaeologist and Caucasian philologist Nikolai Marr, were also involved in the Neophilological society and sought to develop a study of the cultures of 'Russia's own Orient' in connection with those of the Indian and Semitic cultural spheres.

While Veselovskii's work was an unstable mixture of romanticism, positivism and psychologism, the next generation of scholars, many of whom had been his students, sought to bring a greater theoretical rigor to specific aspects of his work. The Petrograd formalists (Viktor Shklovskii, Boris Ėikhenbaum, Lev Iakubinskii and others), who established the Society for the Study of Poetic Language (OPOIaZ), sought to delineate the object of the sphere of literary studies as such, 'literariness' (*literaturnost'*), a quality which transcended the products of any given culture or tradition. Others sought to develop the historical elements of Veselovskii's theory by grounding them in a systematic sociology of the type advocated by Nikolai Bukharin in his 1921 textbook of Marxism, *Teoriia istoricheskogo materializma (populiarnyi uchebnik marksistskoi sotsiologii)* (*The Theory of Historical Materialism: A Popular Manual of Marxist Sociology*, translated as Bukharin 1926). This book, which was severely criticized by Marxists such as Antonio Gramsci and Georg Lukács, as well as by Lenin himself, became required reading at Soviet universities and research institutes in the 1920s, and proposed such ideas as language is part of the superstructure and that ideology is the crystallization of social psychology. It also built on ideas, earlier advanced by Georgii Plekhanov (1953 [1899–1900]) in his *Pis'ma bez adresa* (*Letters Without Address)* and by Aleksandr Bogdanov in a number of publications, that language and reason arose from cries aimed at coordinating collective labour and developed according to the organization of collective labour (a proposition that had originated in the work of Ludwig Noiré) and that the rhythm of labour exerted a defining influence on forms of art and of thinking (which had originated in the work of Karl Bücher). On this basis the evolution of literary forms could be regarded not as the achievement of any particular ethnic group or culture but as expressions of a universal process of ways of thinking rooted in the development of socio-economic formations and collective human labour.

Although Marxist terminology was ubiquitous in these theories, they might best be characterized as forms of materialist anthropology, ontology of labour, materialistic monism, economic determinism or sociological positivism. They allowed a rather eclectic sociology to emerge that allowed various compromise formations between certain trends in pre-Revolutionary orientalism, philology

and literary criticism on the one hand and Marxism on the other. Typical representatives were Vladimir Friche, Valerian Perevertsev and Pavel Sakulin, who wrote extensively about the history of Russian and Western literature from a sociological perspective. In Leningrad a more sustained and sophisticated sociological approach to verbal culture began to emerge with the development of a type of sociological poetics that treated social factors as internal to the work itself rather than simply an external, conditioning influence. Stylistic features were understood to embody socially specific worldviews, which changed historically and combined in various ways. In the novel, such worldviews intersected as representatives of different social groups engaged in different acts of communication on the basis of a shared national language. Some of these projects are discussed in the article on ILIaZV. Crucially, however, the study of literary forms and verbal culture became more fully comparative, being limited neither to national cultures, nor to assumptions of ethnic and linguistic kinship. Instead of seeking to determine the ethnic or geographical origin of European cultural phenomena, comparison should lead to a reconsideration of all assumptions about the privileged position of Europe. The Indologist Mikhail Tubianskii set out the rationale well:

> Nobody has yet written a history of European culture through comparisons with that of the far East or India. Nobody has carried out these comparisons, though it is quite evident that much, very much, in European culture would appear to us in a completely different light if we were able to juxtapose one to the other. This task is inescapable, for the comparative method is the categorical imperative of science. We cannot with any surety pass judgment on any phenomenon of European culture while it appears to us as only one of a kind, with which there is nothing to compare, just as it is impossible to judge a language if one knows only one language – one's own. (Tubianskii 1990 [1927], 176)

One of the first major products was Nikolai Konrad's publication of a number of translated extracts from Japanese literature with detailed introductions relating the extracts to their sociohistorical contexts. Seeking to popularize Japanese literature and to combat Eurocentric assumptions, Konrad (1927, 522–535) brought the narrative forms of Japanese literature under the nomenclature of European scholarship. The *monogatari* (extended prose narrative tale) Konrad identified with the *povest-gunki monogatari* (literally 'war tales') he related to the epic and *yomihon* (literally 'reading books') he designated the novel. These were all forms written in high style but coexisted with so-called *gisaku* texts, verse or prose works often accompanied by graphic art, that Konrad terms the literature of the grotesque. Such works were comic and humorous, but often also parodic, satirical, pornographic in the form of short verses, bawdy stories, anecdotes and the like. Such literature served the cause of realistic portrayal, especially as the barriers between the two types of literature began to break down, with the social

changes that accompanied the rise of trade and the beginnings of capitalist development.

Konrad published a second volume of translations of Japanese literature with commentaries in 1935, by which time he was drawing explicit parallels between stages in the development of Japanese, Chinese and European literatures. He now found the epic, chivalric novel, intimate lyric and religious drama to be among the forms common to each society. While conceding one cannot find Chinese or Japanese analogues for Dante or Rabelais, Konrad asserted that there is nothing in European literature to rival a developed realist novel like the eleventh-century *Genji monogatari* (*The Tale of Genji)* (Konrad 1935, 9–10). In the USSR, he noted, "there is no place for bourgeois limitations, that doesn't want to see anything apart from the West and the ancient world". The great works of the East, just like those of the West, needed to be "critically assimilated" (Konrad 1935, 12). Konrad here was following the rather rigid scheme of social development through a series of socioeconomic formations that came to dominate Soviet Marxism in the 1930s.

4 Influence

Studies of other non-European literature also became more common at this time. The literary and critical works of Tagore began to be published in translations from the original Bengali, by Tubianskii and others. Tagore himself visited the USSR in 1930, where he was warmly received, consolidating a trend that was to have significant effects on the formation of postcolonial thought. In the 1930s, and particularly following the rise to power of the Nazis in Germany, the Stalin regime presented itself as the champion of humanistic values, aiming to lead a popular front of progressive politics and culture across the world. Following behind Tagore, a number of influential figures from the cultural sphere visited the USSR at the time including the black US poet Langston Hughes in 1932, the black US actor and singer Paul Robeson in 1934, the Chinese actor Mei Lanfang in 1935 and the Indian Indologist and novelist Rahul Sankrityayan in 1937–1938 and 1947–1948. Hughes travelled to Soviet Central Asia and wrote about the sharp differences between the condition of non-Russians in the USSR and the systematic discrimination faced by African Americans (Hughes 1934). This built upon the connections between the Soviet regime and the various anti-colonial movements that were developed after the Revolution, with the growth of Communist Parties in various parts of the world, coordinated by the Communist International (Comintern), and the education of foreign revolutionaries at institutes like the Communist University of the Toilers of the East (KUTV) in Moscow. Such institutions and channels spread the

early Soviet critique of Western scholarship about the 'East', but with the rise of the Stalin regime and the transformation of the Comintern into an instrument of foreign policy, according to which all struggles would be subordinated to the security of the USSR, many intellectuals became alienated from the Communist Parties. Representative of this trend was the Pan-Africanist George Padmore and the Bengali revolutionary M. N. Roy, who broke with the communist movement entirely, while many others remained critical fellow travellers of the USSR.

After World War II and the commencement of the Cold War culture re-emerged as an important dimension of the struggle for hegemony between the USA and USSR as victorious national liberation movements often turned to the latter as both a model of state-led economic development and as a trading partner to reduce dependence on the structures established by the imperial powers. Important landmarks were the victory of the Communist Party in the Chinese Civil War in 1950, followed by the April 1955 Bandung Conference which eventually led, in 1961, to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. As the USSR attempted to utilise decolonisation for its own ends, the critique of 'bourgeois orientalism' continued to be taught to generations of intellectuals from the decolonizing parts of the word at institutes like as the Patrice Lumumba Peoples Friendship University in Moscow, founded in 1960, the same year that the USSR hosted the 25th International Congress of Orientalists. At the opening of the congress senior Politburo member Anastas Mikoian (1960) declared that henceforth the peoples of the East would be transformed from the objects to the creators of their own history, culture and economy. The intellectual loosening in the USSR after Stalin's death did allow some significant theoretical engagements with non-European cultures. One prominent example was Konrad's collection of essays from the 1950s and 1960s (Konrad 1966), an abridged version of which was published in English translation as *East-West: Inseparable Twain* in 1967. Testifying to the continuing vitality of Soviet literary studies and developing his earlier work, Konrad here drew many, and controversial, parallels between Western literature and that of China and Japan with explanations based on sociological criteria. Nevertheless, the practice of Moscow-oriented Communist Parties alienated many, and heterodox intellectual formations that selectively drew upon the heritage of Soviet thought became dominant in the field of literary and cultural studies outside academic life in the West. Particularly influential were figures like the Martiniquais-French Hegelian Marxist and pan-Africanist Franz Fanon and the Egyptian-French pan-Arabist and Marxist Anouar Abdel Malek who foregrounded cultural, linguistic or civilizational considerations in their hybrid analyses. Both these figures exerted a significant influence on Edward Said, whose 1978 book *Orientalism* brought such concerns into the heart of US academic life while taking the eclecticism of the approach to new levels by drawing selectively on both Foucault and humanists.

5 Postcolonial Studies

In the context of the defeat of US imperialism in Vietnam and the introduction of new multicultural hiring policies in US universities achieved by the Civil Rights movement, Said's book led to a widespread critique of the evident biases of the literary canon that was studied. The new postcolonial studies that arose were however, quite unlike the engaged scholarship that Said had envisaged since they were firmly rooted in the poststructuralist theory of language, the 'postmodern' spurning of meta-narratives and in Foucault's paradigm discussed above, and often replaced engagement in the struggles of the time with a textually-based analysis of the construction of identity as reflected in literary texts. As Said noted, some thinkers had employed the ideas of Foucault "to justify political quietism with sophisticated intellectualism, at the same time wishing to appear realistic, in touch with the world of power and reality" (Said 1983, 245). Rejecting the Marxist account of imperialism, and often withdrawing into academic debates, many postcolonial theorists perceived power to be fluid and ever-present rather than rooted in socioeconomic structures. Engagement with that power came to be diffuse and unfocused, so interventions in historical struggles and politically charged social dialogues were often dissolved into discussions of textual ambiguity and paradox. One particularly clear example of this would be Homi Bhabha's influential work on hybridity, according to which postcolonial texts exhibit the instability of the structure of signification (understood in a poststructuralist fashion) and identity in conditions of globalization. While widely received in the 1990s, this has been subject to criticism for overgeneralizing the experience of the privileged cosmopolitan intellectual to a general account of postcolonial identity formation.

One of the most significant recent engagements has been the emergence of a more engaged form of postcolonial theory among Indian writers under the label of subaltern studies. Borrowing selectively from Marxism (especially a debatable interpretation of Gramsci's ideas about hegemony), poststructuralism and third-worldist politics, this trend has led to work spanning historical, cultural and literary studies. While focusing attention on the important role of non-elite (subaltern) social groups in the struggle against colonialism (especially, but not exclusively) in India, the subalternists illustrated important, previously understudied aspects of the formation of contemporary India. Analyses of the discourses and rhetoric of emerging political and social movements, rather than limiting attention to the most visible forms of collective action, proved of significant interest. In recent years, however, the trend has been subject to some searching critiques by scholars who have questioned the caricatured image of Marxism to be found in the work of practitioners of subaltern studies such as Ranajit Guha, Dipesh Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee. In particular, Marxists have raised the danger of their

tendency sharply to counterpose the social consciousness of Indian and European workers as leading to a restatement of the orientalist stereotype of the religious East versus the rational West (Chibber 2013; Kaiwar 2014). In literary studies Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, whose work combines Jacques Derrida's deconstructive method with postcolonial, Marxist and feminist elements, is perhaps the most prominent representative. While widely received and praised by some critics such as the Marxist Terry Eagleton (1999) among others, Spivak has been criticized for participating in a "Brahminization of theory" (Figueira 2008) according to which a certain privileged stratum of South Asian intellectuals have entered US universities as part of a quota system originally designed to address African-American educational failings. Alluding to Spivak's well-known 1988 essay, Figueira argues this group has proceeded to presume to speak *for* the subaltern masses, just as members of the Brahmin caste traditionally presumed to produce authoritative interpretations of religious scripture and popular religious practices.

Critical scholarship placing literary and cultural studies with the context of the history of imperialism and colonialism thus remains a vibrant and vigorous field of debate. Important discussions between Marxists themselves, between Marxists and exponents of competing approaches, and between scholars with a more general sociopolitical perspective are ongoing. It is, however, crucial to view these discussions in a historical perspective that moves beyond the assumptions of contemporary 'normal science'.

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