

BOOK REVIEWS

AFZAL-KHAN, Fawzia and Kalpana SESHADRI-CROOKS (Eds.): *The Pre-occupation of Postcolonial Studies*. Durham & London 2000: Duke University Press. VIII+412 pp. ISBN: 0-8223-2486-5.

The volume under review is another of the list of anthologies of postcolonial theory that started appearing in the 1990s in the United States and Great Britain (*Colonial Discourse and Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York, Columbia University Press, 1993); *Colonial Discourse / Postcolonial Theory*, ed. Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, and Margaret Iversen (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1994); *The Postcolonial Studies Reader* ed. Bill Ashcroft, Garret Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London: Routledge, 1995); *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements*, ed. Gyan Prakash (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995) to name just a few). Postcolonial studies as a field of study has grown rapidly in the past few years, producing its own journals, conferences, book-publishing series, and jobs, but the field itself still remains rather undefined and amorphous in its outlines. The institutionalization of postcolonial theory as the critique of imperialism, its place of speaking (First World), and the doubts about its political significations and agency make it subject to major criticisms and attacks against its very legitimacy and political viability from both outside and from within its own ranks. According to Ella Shohat (see her essay in this anthology) the term itself has become suspect owing to its ambiguous spatiality and temporality. Since the post in *postcolonial* suggests "after" the demise of colonialism, it tends to be associated with Third World countries that gained independence after World War II. However, it also may refer to Third World diasporas in the First World metropolises. In some texts, the term *postcolonial* is expanded to include all English literary productions by societies affected by colonialism. Apart from imprecise spatiality the postcolonial renders a problematic temporality. When exactly does the postcolonial begin? The vague starting point of the postcolonial equates the early independence won by colonial settler states, such as the U.S.A. with that of nation-states whose indigenous population struggled for independence against Europe, but won it, for the most part, only with the twentieth century collapse of European empires. And if the *post* in *postcolonial* is formulated in relation to Third Worldist nationalist struggles of the 1950s and 1960s, then what time frame could include contemporary anticolonial / antiracist struggle carried out by Palestinian writers such as Mahmoud Darwish, who writes contemporaneously with postcolonial writers?

The postcolonial did not emerge to fill an empty space in the language of political and cultural analysis. It largely coincided with the eclipse of an older paradigm, that of the Third World, that gained international currency in both academic and political contexts particularly in reference to anticolonial nationalist movements starting from the 1950s through the 1970s and to the analysis of dependency theory and world system theory. The Third World euphoria, however, was short lived. It was not only the collapse of the Soviet Communist model and the crisis of the existing socialisms, but also the fact that power relations in the Third World itself became contradictory due to struggles between nations, and within nations between dominant and subaltern groups as well as the large immigrations to the First World. This crisis in Third World thinking partly explains the current enthusiasm for the term *postcolonial* and for postcolonial studies as a new field of inquiry. Edward Said's *Orientalism* is considered to be the inaugural text of the new subdiscipline.

The anthology is divided into two sections. The first section deals with institutional and academic issues pertaining to postcolonial studies as a scholarly occupation. The essays of the second section discuss specific thematics of the field.

R. Radhakrishnan in his essay "Postmodernism and the Rest of the World" opens the question of knowledge production in the West and the dominant position of the postmodern paradigm. In the author's view the freedom associated with postmodernism is in fact a surrender to the dominance of

capitalism. In the world polarized into the West and the Rest, the Rest has the responsibility to ensure that postmodernism is denied the mandate of being a universal human condition.

Ali Behdad's essay "Une Pratique Sauvage: Postcolonial Belatedness and Cultural Politics" borrows Althusser's view of Marxist philosophy as a wild practice for a definition of *postcolonialism* as a belated practice that emerges after the period of anticolonialism headed by Fanon, Césaire and others. While these founding figures of postcolonial oppositional discourse provided what can be called *the science of anti-imperialism*, contemporary postcolonial critics are introducing new oppositional possibilities by linking various discourses kept apart by the boundaries of traditional disciplinary research. Through such linkage, in the author's view, they can unravel the complexities of Western cultural hegemony and formulate resistance to it.

One of the most inspiring texts in the volume is Walter Dignolo's essay: "(Post) Occidentalism, (Post)Coloniality, and (Post)Subaltern Rationality". Considering the historical developments in Latin America, the author proposes post-Occidentalism as the term germane to Latin American discourse on colonialism. In his essay Dignolo develops the concept of *subaltern reason* as a mode of critique characterized by its locus of enunciation at the margins of hegemonic knowledges. *Subaltern reason* has its origins in different types of colonial legacies that share the historical process of "Western expansion identified as modernity". This enables Dignolo to see both postcoloniality and postmodernity as moves challenging the expansionist process of modernity, although from different sites. (It is interesting to compare Dignolo and Radhakrishnan above). For Dignolo "As a border gnosis (postcoloniality / post-Occidentalism) is a way of thinking from and beyond disciplines and the geopolitics of knowledge imbedded in Occidentalism, Orientalism, and area studies; from and beyond colonial legacies; from and beyond gender divide and sexual prescriptions; and from and beyond ethnic identities and racial conflicts . . . I . . . suggest that, there are two fundamental ways of critiquing modernity: one, from colonial histories and legacies (postcolonialism, post-Occidentalism, post-Orientalism); the other, the postmodern, from the limits of the hegemonic narratives of Western history."

Ngugi Wa Thiong'o's "Borders and Bridges: Seeking connections between Things" represents a surprising turn from his previous writings. (Ngugi is well known for his radical opposition to using colonial languages in postcolonial Africa). In accordance with Walter Dignolo he suggests that knowledge of culture and society must be produced about, in, and at the borders that seemingly separate, but at the same time connect cultures. Challenging the notion of cultural purity as a Western concept the author suggests that we learn to see the connections between cultures and their mutual interdependency as the function of their identity.

The next group of essays takes up the issue of the status of postcolonial studies in the academy. Both Ella Shohat's "Notes on the 'Post-Colonial'" and Neil Larsen's "Determination: Postcolonialism, Poststructuralism, and the Problem of Ideology" are critical about the terminology and political pretensions of the field. Shohat's Notes are widely quoted

especially in connection with her warning against the problematic spatiality and temporality of the postcolonial (see above). In this connection she also criticizes the negative attitude of postcolonial theory to the search for communitarian origins and its emphasis on hybridity.

Larsen's attitude is that of a hard-line Marxist, taking on forcefully the question of class and ideology and the failure of postcolonial theory to analyze these issues. The class-blindness of postcolonial theorists, in his view, is due to their adherence to poststructuralism. This affinity is only natural, given that these scholars, as a class, represent the bourgeoisie of the formerly colonized countries and are now firmly established in the metropolitan institutions.

The last essay in this section, Bruce Robbin's "Secularism, Elitism, Progress, and Other Transgressions: on Edward Said's 'Voyage in'", may be read as a reaction to Larsen's. Against those who view postcolonial theorists as self-serving academicians, Robbins claims that postcolonial theory and its Third World practitioners have enriched and transformed the centre of the metropolis. This means, at the same time, redefinition of authority and redistribution of cultural capital.

The second part of the volume contains essays examining the postcolonial thematics in a more historically and culturally grounded manner. The first of them, "Street theater in Pakistani Punjab: The Case of Ajoka, Lok Rehs, and the (so-called) Woman question", presented by Fawzia Afzal-Khan, and the second, Rajeswari Sunder Rajan's "Beyond the Hysterectomies Scandal: Women, the Institution, the Family, and State in India" cover the area most favoured by postcolonial studies – South Asia.

Afzal-Khan looks at particular cultural practices in a postcolonial nation-state and questions the coercive processes at work in creating authentic subjects of such states. While street theatre activists in Pakistani Punjab see the need for moving away from colonial cultural influences, they feel it is more important to question present repressive state policies.

State policies are under scrutiny in Sunder Rajan's carefully researched essay as well. She interrogates the relation of the postcolonial welfare state to its needy citizens, the complicity of the family with the state and the inadequacy of the postcolonial theory with the antimodernity position it sometimes adopts. In her essay Sunder Rajan takes up a major preoccupation of postcolonial studies, namely the gender aspect of the power relations and the role of sexuality in determining the situation of marginal women to show that such themes can be discussed only with attention to local histories.

Two essays in this section take up a highly complex case of colonial/postcolonial situation, namely the establishment of the Jewish state based on the ideology of Zionism.

In his essay "The Colonial Drag: Zionism, Gender, and Mimicry" Daniel Boyarin reconstructs the peculiar ideology of Zionism, tracing its *emergence* in the reformist impulses of contemporary Jewish leaders who had internalized many of the anti-Semitic representations of Jews from the dominant culture. Boyarin's characterization of the establishment of the Jewish state is neither simply colonialist nor anticolonialist and poses a new problematic for the scholars interested in colonialism and neocolonialism. Acknowledging the role postcolonial theory can have in the analysis of the Jewish Question (frequent references to Homi Bhabha in the text), the author believes Jewish studies may also have something to offer the postcolonial theory.

Joseph Massad's "The 'Post-Colonial' Colony: Time, Space and Bodies in Palestine/ Israel" focuses on the fact that, through the formation of the state of Israel, Zionism constructed a space-time continuum called *postcoloniality* that designated freedom for Ashkenazic Jews, while simultaneously rendering the *same* space-time inhabited by Palestinians discursively and materially colonial. The situation is even more problematic for Sephardic or Mizrahic Jews owing to their dual status of being colonized in relation to the Ashkenazim with colonizer privileges in relation to the Palestinians.

Hamid Naficy's essay "Self-Othering: A Postcolonial Discourse on Cinematic First Contacts" takes up a classical theme of postcolonial theory, that of "the Other". According to Naficy, *self-othering* refers to a process whereby a subject as spectator is continued primarily through identification with an other – in this case the West – seen as superior in every way.

Self-othering, however, as postcolonial analysis tells us, is neither monolithic nor unidirectional and can lead to an acknowledgment of difference that need not mean conflict. In present-day postcolonial, post-Revolution Iran the resurgence of the cinema shows that binary thinking stressing absolute difference between Islam and the West has, in reality, given way to a more accommodationist view that prefers to indigenize and Islamize the cinema.

The main task Saree Makdisi's contribution "Postcolonial Literature in a Neocolonial World: Modern Arabic Culture and the End of Modernity" seeks to perform is to seriously undermine our understanding of modernity, rooted in the unilinear concept of history as the product of the European Enlightenment. Faced with what they perceived to be the overwhelming superiority of the European empires, Arab thinkers of the nineteenth century saw themselves trapped between the residual cultural formations represented by the great Arab classical heritage on one side and the appeals to modernity that European institutions seemed to offer on the other. Some of these thinkers held the possibility of revitalization of the classical heritage, while others, including the founders of a movement that came to be called the *Nahda*, insisted that the only way out was the way forward, in the direction of progress and modernization, that means Europe. By the time of the Arab nationalist movements in the early 20th century the adherents of a *Nahda* (or cultural and scientific renaissance) were in ascendancy and many of the central ideological and conceptual categories that emerged from the *Nahda* are still valid today. Modernity itself, however, according to Makdisi, remains, as it has been from the beginning, a perpetually deferred future status rather than ever being an immediately present one. Stressing that the questions of Palestine and Lebanon are the central crises confronting the Arabs today, Makdisi holds that the postcolonial state of affairs can come to pass only if the temporality of Western – derived nationalist thought, used by *Nahda*, is discarded in favour of new conceptual categories. In some modern literary texts, the author believes he sees a tendency that he calls *Arab modernism*. This new modernism, as defined by Makdisi, insists on the "immediacy and historicity of an inescapable present and points to the need to map this present through the invention and creation of new and at least conceptually postcolonial systems and structures".

Timothy Powell in "Postcolonial Theory in an American Context: A Reading of Martin Delany's *Blake*" argues for the viability of postcolonial theory as a tool for demonstrating the "role of empire in forming America's national identity and the psychological anguish of the internally colonized". Most Americans see the United States as a former colony that came into being as a nation through an act of revolution and are reluctant to admit their own colonizing treatment of different groups within the United States as well as the colonizing role of America abroad. It is "this anxiety and the ability to

conceal imperialist impulses in the guise of a commitment to anticolonial democratic freedom” that Powell delineates as a fundamental aspect of “the self-cloaking mechanism of American colonialist discourse”. It is this self-cloaking Powell wants to unmask by his postcolonial reading of an African American text. Indeed, the tension between self-cloaking and unmasking remains one of the most productive sites of inquiry in postcolonial studies today.

Closing the anthology is an insightful interview with one of the most prominent representatives of postcolonial theory, Homi Bhabha, in which he discusses the current problematics of postcolonial studies as well as his own work.

The *Pre-Occupation of Postcolonial Studies* contains essays by both leading figures and younger scholars engaged in the field. In the reader the editors have created a dynamic forum for contributors from a variety of theoretical and disciplinary vantage points. Including contributions analyzing such complicated issues as Zionism and the politics of Israel/Palestine has to be specially appreciated, as well as Walter Dignolo's presentation of the Latin American perspectives.

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