



Transforming Postcolonial Theory to revive Postcolonization

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Abstract

Although claims are being made that Postcolonialism is dead, it continues to live, and its presence continues to disturb and provoke anxiety. Over a period of time, with the changes in social and political situations, Postcolonialism has revived itself by adapting itself to the changed surroundings and is in the process of transforming itself to revive the postcolonization in the truest sense of the term.

Keywords- Postcolonialism, resistance, psychological category.

In 2007, Patricia Yaeger published what Sunil Agnani, Fernando Coronil, Gaurav Desai, Mamadou Diouf, Simon Gikandi, Susie Tharu, and Jennifer Wenzel discussed in the 2006 Modern Language Association of America annual convention round table "The End of Postcolonial Theory?" The participants' objective was to figure out the meaning of what many addressed as the "end of postcolonial theory." Their conclusion can be summed up as the need to open the field rather than focus on established and standard perceptions of what postcolonial studies would be (638). Some scholars believe that postcolonial studies is being eclipsed by globalization studies and others advocate for inter-discursive and interdisciplinary approaches so as to go "beyond a certain kind of postcolonial studies" (Lomba et al 7). Revathi Krishnaswamy and J.C. Hawly conclude that "to be global is first and foremost to be postcolonial and to be postcolonial is always already to be global" (3). It is true that postcolonial studies has moved away from areas of regional studies to fields such as the social sciences or media studies, among others and all in the pursuit of new configurations and re-routings of knowledge where dynamism, critical theory, and relevance must always be present.

It is clear that power now takes a different form in the new global Empire and is increasingly diffuse and slippery, necessitating new forms of resistance and organization. Hence, it is important to create and maintain a place for the postcolonial in the national practices of political and cultural engagement. The term 'postcolonial' is not intended to convey a temporal distance now subsumed by political forms. Rather, the term is used to usefully describe a qualitative difference in practices defining social construction, self-concept and attitudes of being, relating and belonging. While power most certainly takes new forms, we also continue to act within, against and according to a lasting legacy of colonial sociality. Globally, the continuing "internal colonization" of indigenous people upon their own territories attests to this

legacy. In order to address adequately and transform the global historical legacy of European imperialism, we require a political concept of the postcolonial that will provoke new concepts and understandings about the practice of postcolonial theory, the problems and goals that shape it, and the forms of agency, selfhood and co-operative enterprise that might more successfully underwrite its performance. In this case, the provocative practice is the global phenomenon of postcolonisation in formerly colonized societies which occurs in piecemeal and locally distinct ways through various processes of reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous communities. Here, 'postcolonisation' implies a critique and rejection of colonial forms of sociality; it also, however, gestures beyond critique and a move towards constructivism in so far as it properly emphasizes a positive task: the conceptual creation of 'a new horizon' describing new forms of non-imperial mutuality, and thus genuinely *postcolonial* society.

The difference between a conceptualization of power as authority and power as activity is reflected in the instruments with which power is believed to work. Scholars who have focused on colonial authority, in the wake of Said, have understood authority primarily as something that is produced through identity constructions. More specifically, it is identity as a binary relation, between Self and Other that has repeatedly been pinpointed as the key mechanism of colonial authority. The conceptualization of power as activity, by contrast, can take into account the instruments upon which rationales of power rely to effect a restructuring of society, irrespective of whether these instruments are textual or material.

But the striking thing about colonial experience is that after colonization, postcolonial societies *did* very often develop in ways which sometimes revealed a remarkable capacity for change and adaptation. A common view of colonization, which represents it as an unmitigated

cultural disaster, disregards the often quite extraordinary ways in which colonized societies engaged and utilized imperial culture for their own purposes.

A common strategy of post-colonial self-assertion has been the attempt to rediscover some authentic pre-colonial cultural reality in order to redress the impact of European imperialism. Invariably such attempts misconceive the link between culture and identity. Culture describes the myriad ways in which a group of people makes sense of, represents and inhabits this world, and as such can never be destroyed, whatever happens to its various forms of expression. The imaginative and the creative are integral aspects of that process by which identity itself has come into being. Cultural identity does not exist outside representation. But the transformative nature of cultural identity leads directly to the transformation of those strategies by which it is represented. These strategies have invariably been the very ones used by the colonizer to position the colonized as marginal and inferior, but their appropriation has been ubiquitous in the struggle by colonized people to empower themselves.

The most tenacious aspect of colonial control has been its capacity to bind the colonized into a binary myth. Underlying all colonial discourse is a binary of colonizer/colonized, civilized/uncivilized, white/black, which works to justify the civilizing mission and perpetuate a cultural distinction which is essential to the 'business' of economic and political exploitation. The ideas that 'counterforce' is the best response to the colonialist myth of force, or to the myth of nurture, both of which underlie this civilizing mission, binds the colonized into the myth. This has often implicated colonized groups and individuals in a strategy of resistance which has been unable to resist 'absorption' into the myth of power, whatever the outcome of their political opposition. Dependency theorists who re-write the story of Europe as 'developer' into the story

of Europe as ‘exploiter’ remain caught in the binary of Europe and its others. The subject of the new history is still Europe. Ironically, the concept of ‘difference’ itself may often be unable to extricate itself from this binary and thus become disabling to the post-colonial subject. This derives from the unreflexively held postcolonial axiom, derived from Edward Said, that Eurocentrism/Orientalism reifies the West by granting it exclusive agency in the world while denying the existence of Eastern agency pretty much outright. Moreover, it is assumed that Eurocentrism dictates that imperialism is the only means by which the inferior races can and must be brought into civilized modernity. However, on much closer inspection it turns out that Eurocentric international theory offers a wide spectrum of positions in these matters, ranging from awarding Eastern people/ societies very low level of agency to moderate and even high or very high levels, all of which are framed within different normative conceptions of imperialism and anti-imperialism. Accordingly, this means that we need to be much more careful when treating Eastern agency as the antidote to Eurocentrism. This is not to say that Eastern agency is unimportant. But it is to say that we need to be much more precise when conceptualizing its place within non-Eurocentric theory. Hence the *paradox of Eastern agency*: that the perceived postcolonial/non-Eurocentric antidote to Eurocentrism/Orientalism is to “bring Eastern agency in” when it turns out that it was there in some form or another within international theory all along.

This more nuanced reading of Eurocentrism emerges when we unpack Said’s highly reductive and monolithic conception of Orientalism, to counter which I begin by breaking down his concept of Orientalism into two component parts - scientific racism and Eurocentric institutionalism- and then sub-dividing these categories into their imperialist and anti-imperialist components.

In essence, Eurocentric institutionalism locates difference to the degree of rationality found within a society's institutions and culture. The West is proclaimed superior because it has supposedly rational institutions, while the East's inferiority is presented as a function of its alleged irrational institutions. Thus while the West has for the last three centuries allegedly enjoyed *civilized* democracy/ liberalism/individualism/science, conversely, the East is said to have endured or suffered *barbaric* Oriental despotism, or simply the *savage* state of nature alongside authoritarianism/ collectivism/mysticism. By contrast, scientific racism places a strong degree of emphasis on genetics and biology as elements underpinning difference while often emphasizing the role of climate and physical environment. For some, the causal pendulum of race behavior swings towards the climatic/environmental pole, whereas for others it swings more towards the genetic pole. This multivalent archipelago of discourses was far more heterogeneous than Eurocentric institutionalism and was fractured into all sorts of sub-discourses, including Social Darwinism, Eugenics, Weismann's germ plasm theory, Mendelianism and, not least, Lamarckianism, some of which were complementary while others conflicted.

A preoccupation with resistance is a defining feature of postcolonial literature. In postcolonial perspectives, hybridity is intimately connected to resistance, in that it signifies the creativity and adaptability of the subaltern in the face of power, and demonstrate that the colonial encounter as well as contemporary North-South relations cannot be understood in terms a one way relationship of domination and power. The understanding of power of post-colonialism as productive and ubiquitous has clear implication for the investigation of resistance (Abrahamsen 1). This question lies at the forefront because the concept has always dwelt at the heart of the struggle between imperial power and post-colonial identity. The problem with resistance is that

to see it as a simple oppositionality locks it into the very binary which Europe established to define its others. Very often, political struggle is contrary to the modes of adaptation and appropriation most often engaged by post-colonial societies. This discussion reveals that 'resistance' if conceived as something much more subtle than a binary opposition, has always operated in a wide range of processes to which post-colonial societies have subjected imperial power. The most sustained far-reaching and effective interpretation of post-colonial resistance has been the 'resistance to absorption', the appropriation and transformation of dominant technologies for the purpose of re-inscribing and representing post-colonial cultural identity.

One of the key features of this transformative process has been the entry, aggressive or benign, of post-colonial acts and modes of representation into the dominant discourse itself, and interpolation which not only interjects and interrupts that discourse but challenges it in subtle ways. This term 'interpolation' ironically reverses Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' by ascribing to the colonial subject, and consequently, to the colonial society, a capacity for agency which is affected within relationships that are radically unequal. Interpolation recasts our perception of the trajectory of power operating in colonization. Rather than being swallowed up by the hegemony of the empire, the apparently dominated culture, and the 'interpellated' subjects within it, are quite able to interpolate the various modes of imperial discourse to use it for different purposes, to counter its effects by transforming them for 'development', seen as an intervention or a series of sustained interventions in certain social situations or realities with the explicit aim of improving these situations qualitatively.

Development has been the organising and guiding principle of economic, social and even political policies of most underdeveloped and developing nations in the post-war era during which most of the formerly colonized nations were liberated. However, over the past three

decades, the entire development enterprise has increasingly been the object of much criticism and rebuttals. Indeed, the very notion of development has been recurrently challenged and put into question. A social dimension of the backlash against development consisted in the increasing inability of the enterprise itself to fulfill its promises, coupled with the rise of movements that questioned its rationality. This social aspect went hand in hand with a renewed intellectual criticism due to the availability of new analytical tools, chiefly post-structuralism. In particular, during the 1990s, post-structuralist critiques succeeded in casting serious doubt not only on the feasibility but also on the desirability of development. Going beyond most previous critiques, development was shown to be a pervasive cultural discourse with profound consequences for the production of social reality in the Third World.

A key defining characteristic of postcolonial studies is its emphasis on revealing the interests behind the production of knowledge and introducing an oppositional criticism that draws attention to, and thereby attempts to retrieve, the wide range of illegitimate, disqualified or 'subjugated knowledges' (Foucault 1980, p. 82) of the decolonized peoples. In doing so, it seeks to investigate the structural relations of domination and discrimination that are expressed, manifested, constituted, and legitimized in and by discourses. In its discursive analysis of ideological domination, postcolonial studies focus particularly on hegemony, which is achieved not only by physical force but also through consensual submission (consent) of the dominated (Gramsci 268) and perpetuated by the active implication of the plurality of the "Ideological State Apparatuses" (Althusser 144) including education, religion, law, media, etc.

Within the context of this critique of the epistemological hegemony of European systems of knowledge, many postcolonial critics centered their analyses on the Western modern project

and its link to the history and practice of colonialism. Development, as a discourse and practice, was the offspring of this project with European colonialism being an instrumental tool in propagating its ideals. Moreover, since there is no modernity without colonialism (Escobar 184), there is a need to recognize that Europe's acquisition of the adjective *modern* for itself is a piece of global history of which an integral part is the story of European imperialism (Chakrabarty 352).

The fundamental question now is the following: is it possible to engage in a critique of this kind from a space outside the discursive space delimited by the Western modern project of which development discourse is an integral part? Many seem to agree that it is difficult to do this, given that there are neither privileged terrains nor original or un-colonized spaces from which to present the discourse, including postcolonial theory itself (Venn 51). Moreover, as Ashis Nandy (xi) argues, colonialism has particularly helped to transform the concept of the modern West from a geographical and temporal entity into a psychological category. In his view, "the West is now everywhere, within the West and outside, in structures and in minds" (xi).

The time has come for postcolonial scholars to rethink the category of the other according to Levinas's later positions, or according to the arguments of Jean-Luc Nancy, Giorgio Agamben, and others that alterity is not something produced as a form of exclusion but fundamental to being itself, which must always involve "being singular plural" from the very first. Until people rethink the idea of the other in this way, the most useful thing that Postcolonial Studies could do to achieve its aim of mutual understanding and universal equality would be to abandon the category of "the other" altogether. Not all—if indeed any—forms of difference require the absoluteness of the category of "the other," unless that otherness is chosen by the subject him or herself to describe a situation of historical discrimination which requires

challenge, change, and transformation. No one is so different that their very difference makes them unknowable. Othering was a colonial strategy of exclusion: for the postcolonial, there are only other human beings.

In summary, as a project of cultural analysis, the postcolonial critique seeks to investigate the role of cultural forms and systems of knowledge in legitimizing and sustaining asymmetrical power relations and the associated processes of exclusion and domination. The foregoing reflections are thus aimed at problematising and calling into question the established concepts and interpretations of development, and critically reviewing our habits and ways of thinking and acting with regard to its discourses and practices, in light of the many forms of violence that development has generated in the lives of its putative targeted societies. However, one has to recognize that the simple production of a critical and counter-discourse of development is necessary but not sufficient. That is why this deconstructive enterprise should always be coupled with a commitment to opening new possibilities for remedial alternatives and innovative ways of thinking and transforming the social world.

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