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PROBLEMS IN CURRENT THEORIES OF COLONIAL DISCOURSE

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THE WORK OF SPIVAK AND BHABHA will be discussed to suggest the productive capacity and limitations of their different deconstructive practices, and to propose that the protocols of their dissimilar methods act to constrain the development of an anti-imperialist critique. It will be argued that the lacunae in Spivak's learned disquisitions issue from a theory assigning an absolute power to the hegemonic discourse in constituting and disarticulating the native. In essays that are to form a study on Master Discourse/Native informant, Spivak inspects 'the absence of a text that can "answer one back" after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project' (Spivak 1985a: 131), and seeks to develop a strategy of reading that will speak to the historically-muted native subject, predominantly inscribed in Spivak's writings as the non-elite or subaltern woman. A refrain, 'One never encounters the testimony of the women's voice-consciousness,' 'There is no space from where the subaltern (sexed) subject can speak,' 'The subaltern as female cannot be heard or read,' 'The subaltern cannot speak' (Spivak 1985b: 122, 129, 130), iterates a theoretical dictum derived from studying the discourse of *Sati* [widow sacrifice], in which the Hindu patriarchal code converged with colonialism's narrativization of Indian culture to efface all traces of woman's voice.

What Spivak uncovers are instances of doubly-oppressed native women who, caught between the dominations of a native patriarchy and a foreign masculinist-imperialist ideology, intervene by 'unemphatic, ad hoc, subaltern rewriting(s) of the social text of *Sati*-suicide' (Spivak 1985b: 129): a nineteenth century Princess who appropriates – 'the dubious place of the free will of the sexed subject as female' (Spivak 1985a: 144) by signaling her intention of being a *Sati* against the edict of the British administration; a young Bengal girl who in 1926 hanged herself under circumstances that deliberately defied Hindu interdicts (Spivak 1985b). From the discourse of *Sati* Spivak derives large, general statements on woman's subject constitution/object formation in which the subaltern woman is conceived as a homogeneous and coherent category, and which culminate in a declaration on the success of her planned disarticulation. Even within the confines of this same discourse, it is significant that Lata Mani does find evidence, albeit mediated, of woman's voice. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty argues in her critique of western feminist writings on 'Third World Women,' discourses of representation should not be confused with material realities. Since the native woman is constructed within multiple social relationships and positioned as the product of different class, caste and cultural specificities, it should be possible to locate traces and testimony of women's voice

on those sites where women inscribed themselves as healers, ascetics, singers of sacred songs, artisans and artists, and by this to modify Spivak's model of the silent subaltern.

If it could appear that Spivak is theorizing the silence of the doubly-oppressed subaltern woman, her theorem on imperialism's epistemic violence extends to posting the native, male and female, as an historically-muted subject. The story of colonialism which she reconstructs is of an interactive process where the European agent in consolidating the imperialist Sovereign Self, induces the native to collude in its own subject(ed) formation as other and voiceless. Thus while protesting at the obliteration of the native's subject position in the text of imperialism, Spivak in her project gives no speaking part to the colonized, effectively writing out the evidence of native agency recorded in India's 200 year struggle against British conquest and the Raj – discourses to which she scathingly refers as hegemonic nativist or reverse ethnocentric narrativization.

The disparaging of nationalist discourses of resistance is matched by the exorbitation of the role allotted to the post-colonial woman intellectual, for it is she who must plot a story, unravel a narrative and give the subaltern a voice in history, by using 'the resources of deconstruction "in the service of reading" to develop a strategy rather than a theory of reading that might be a critique of imperialism' (Spivak 1986: 230). Spivak's 'alternative narrative of colonialism' through a series of brilliant upheavals of texts which expose the fabrications and exclusions in the writing of the archive, is directed at challenging the authority of the received historical record and restoring the effaced signs of native consciousness, and it is on these grounds that her project should be estimated. Her account, it is claimed, disposes of the old story by dispersing the fixed, unitary categories on which this depended. Thus it is argued that for purposes of administration and exploitation of resources, the native was constructed as a programmed, 'nearly-served' other of the European and not as its binary opposite. Furthermore, the cartography that became the 'reality' of India was drawn by agents who were themselves of heterogeneous class origin and social status and whose (necessarily) diversified maps distributed the native into differential positions which worked in the interest of the foreign authority – for example, a fantasmatic race-differentiated historical demography restoring 'rightful' Aryan rulers, and a class discourse effecting the proto-proletarianization of the 'aborigines.'

Instead of recounting a struggle between a monolithic, near-deliberative colonial power and an undifferentiated oppressed mass, this reconstruction displays a process more insidious than naked repression, since here the native is prevailed upon to internalize as self-knowledge, the knowledge concocted by the master: 'He (the European agent) is worlding their own world, which is far from mere uninscribed earth, anew, by obliging them to domesticate the alien as Master,' a process generating the force 'to make the "native" see himself as "other"' (Spivak 1985a: 133). Where military conquest, institutional compulsion and ideological interpellation was, epistemic violence and devious discursive negotiations requiring of the native that he rewrite his position as object of imperialism, is; and in place of recalcitrance and refusal enacted in movements of resistance and articulated in oppositional discourses, a tale is told of the self-consolidating other and the disarticulated subaltern.

This raw and selective summary of what are complex and subtle arguments has tried to draw out the political implications of a theory whose axioms deny to the native the ground from which to utter a reply to imperialism's ideological aggression or to enunciate a different self:

No perspective *critical* of imperialism can turn the Other into a self, because the project of imperialism has always already historically refracted what might have been

the absolutely Other into a domesticated Other that consolidates the imperialist self. . . . A full literary inscription cannot easily flourish in the imperialist fracture or discontinuity, covered over by an alien legal system masquerading as Law as such, an alien ideology established as only truth, and a set of human sciences busy establishing the native 'as self-consolidating Other.'

(Spivak 1985c: 253, 254)

In bringing this thesis to her reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* (Rhys 1968) as *Jane Eyre's* reinscription, Spivak demonstrates the pitfalls of a theory postulating that the Master Discourse preempts the (self) constitution of the historical native subject. When Spivak's notion is juxtaposed to the question Said asks in *Orientalism*, 'how can one study other cultures and peoples from a libertarian, or a non-repressive and non-manipulative perspective?', and Jean Rhys' novel examined for its enunciation (despite much incidental racism) of just such a perspective which facilitates the transformation of the Other into a Self, then it is possible to construct a re-reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* iterating many of Spivak's observations while disputing her founding precepts.

Spivak argues that because the construction of an English cultural identity was inseparable from othering the native as its object, the articulation of the female subject within the emerging norm of feminist individualism during the age of imperialism, necessarily excluded the native female, who was positioned on the boundary between human and animal as the object of imperialism's social-mission or soul-making. In applying this interactive process to her reading of *Wide Sargasso Sea* Spivak assigns to Antoinette/Bertha, daughter of slave-owners and heiress to a post-emancipation fortune, the role of the native female sacrificed in the cause of the subject-constitution of the European female individualist. Although Spivak does acknowledge that *Wide Sargasso Sea* is 'a novel which rewrites a canonical English text within the European novelistic tradition in the interest of the white Creole rather than the native' (Spivak 1985c: 253), and situates Antoinette/Bertha as caught between the English imperialist and the black Jamaican, her discussion does not pursue the text's representations of a Creole culture that is dependent on both yet singular, or its enunciation of a specific settler discourse, distinct from the texts of imperialism. The dislocations of the Creole position are repeatedly spoken by Antoinette, the 'Rochester' figure and Christophine; the nexus of intimacy and hatred between white settler and black servant is written into the text in the mirror imagery of Antoinette and Tia, a trope which for Spivak functions to invoke the other that could not be served:

We had eaten the same food, slept side by side, bathed in the same river. As I ran, I thought, I will live with Tia and I will be like her. . . . When I was close I saw the jagged stone in her hand but I did not see her throw it. . . . I looked at her and I saw her face crumble as she began to cry. We stared at each other, blood on my face, tears on hers. It was as if I saw myself. Like in a looking-glass.

(Rhys 1968: 24)

But while themselves not English, and indeed outcastes, the Creoles are Masters to the blacks, and just as Brontë's book invites the reader via Rochester to see Bertha Mason as situated on the human/animal frontier ('One night I had been awakened by her yells. . . . It was a fierce West Indian night . . . those are the sounds of a bottomless pit,' quoted in Spivak 1985c: 247-8), so does Rhys' novel via Antoinette admit her audience to the regulation settler view of rebellious blacks: 'the same face repeated over and over, eyes gleaming, mouth half-open,' emitting 'a horrible noise . . . like animals howling but worse' (Rhys 1968: 32, 35).

The idiosyncrasies of an account where Antoinette plays the part of 'the woman from the colonies' are consequences of Spivak's decree that imperialism's linguistic aggression obliterates the inscription of a native self: thus a black female who in *Wide Sargasso Sea* is most fully served, must be reduced to the status of a tangential figure, and a white Creole woman (mis)construed as the native female produced by the axiomatics of imperialism, her death interpreted as 'an allegory of the general epistemic violence of imperialism, the construction of a self-immolating subject for the glorification of the social mission of the colonizer' (Spivak 1985c: 251). While allowing that Christophine is both speaking subject and interpreter to whom Rhys designates some crucial functions, Spivak sees her as marking the limits of the text's discourse, and not, as is here argued, disrupting it.

What Spivak's strategy of reading necessarily blots out is Christophine's inscription as the native, female, individual Self who defies the demands of the discriminatory discourses impinging on her person. Although an ex-slave given as a wedding-present to Antoinette's mother and subsequently a caring servant, Christophine subverts the Creole address that would constitute her as a domesticated Other, and asserts herself as articulate antagonist of patriarchal, settler and imperialist law. Natural mother to children and surrogate parent to Antoinette, Christophine scorns patriarchal authority in her personal life by discarding her patronymic and refusing her sons' fathers as husbands; as Antoinette's protector she impugns 'Rochester' for his economic and sexual exploitation of her fortune and person and as female individualist she is eloquently and frequently contemptuous of male conduct, black and white. . . .

Christophine's defiance is not enacted in a small and circumscribed space appropriated within the lines of dominant code, but is a stance from which she delivers a frontal assault against antagonists, and as such constitutes a counter-discourse. Wise to the limits of post-emancipation justice, she is quick to invoke the protection of its law when 'Rochester' threatens her with retribution: 'This is free country and I am free woman' (Rhys 1968: 131) – which is exactly how she functions in the text, her retort to him condensing her role as the black, female individualist: 'Read and write I don't know. *Other things I know*' (Rhys 1968: 133; emphasis added). . . .

Spivak's deliberated deafness to the native voice where it is to be heard, is at variance with her acute hearing of the unsaid in modes of Western feminist criticism which, while dismantling masculist constructions, reproduce and foreclose colonialist structures and imperialist axioms by 'performing the lie of constituting a truth of global sisterhood where the mesmerizing model remains male and female sparring partners of generalizable or universalizable sexuality who are the chief protagonists in that European contest' (Spivak 1986: 226). Demanding of disciplinary standards that 'equal rights of historical, geographical, linguistic specificity' be granted to the 'thoroughly stratified larger theatre of the Third World' (238), Spivak in her own writings severely restricts (eliminates?) the space in which the colonized can be written back into history, even when 'interventionist possibilities' are exploited through the deconstructive strategies devised by the post-colonial intellectual.

Homi Bhabha on the other hand, through recovering how the master discourse was interrogated by the natives in their own accents, produces an autonomous position for the colonial within the confines of the hegemonic discourse, and because of this enunciates a very different 'politics.' The sustained effort of writings which initially concentrated on deconstituting the structure of colonial discourse, and which latterly have engaged with the displacement of this text by the inappropriate utterances of the colonized, has been to contest the notion Bhabha considers to be implicit in Said's *Orientalism*, that 'power and discourse is possessed entirely by the coloniser.' Bhabha reiterates the proposition of anti-colonialist writing that the objective of colonial discourse is to construe the colonized as a racially degenerate population

in order to justify conquest and rule. However because he maintains that relations of power and knowledge function ambivalently, he argues that a discursive system split in enunciation, constitutes a dispersed and variously positioned native who by (mis)appropriating the terms of the dominant ideology, is able to intercede against and resist this mode of construction.

In dissenting from analysis ascribing an intentionality and unidirectionality to colonial power which, in Said's words, enabled Europe to advance unmetaphorically upon the Orient, Bhabha insists that this not only ignores representation as a concept articulating both the historical and the fantasmatic, but unifies the subject of colonial enunciation in a fixed position as the passive object of discursive domination. By revealing the multiple and contradictory articulations in colonialism's address, Bhabha as contemporary critic seeks to demonstrate the limits of its discursive power and to countermand its demand 'that its discourse (be) non-dialogic, its enunciation unitary' (Bhabha 1985a: 100); and by showing the wide range of stereotypes and the shifting subject positions assigned to the colonized in the colonialist text, he sets out to liberate the colonial from its debased inscription as Europe's monolithic and shackled Other, and into an autonomous native 'difference.' However, this reappropriation although effected by the deconstructions of the post-colonial intellectual, is made possible by uncovering how the master-discourse had already been interrogated by the colonized in native accents. For Bhabha, the subaltern has spoken, and his readings of the colonialist text recover a native voice. . . .

Where Spivak in inspecting the absence of a text that can answer back after the planned epistemic violence of the imperialist project, finds pockets of non-co-operation in the dubious place of the 'free will of the (female) sexed subject' (Spivak 1985a: 144), Bhabha produces for scrutiny a discursive situation making for recurrent instances of transgression performed by the native from within and against colonial discourse. Here the autocolonization of the native who meets the requirements of colonialist address, is co-extensive with the evasions and 'sly civility' through which the native refuses to satisfy the demand of the colonizer's narrative. This concept of mimicry has since been further developed in the postulate of 'hybridity' as the problematic of colonial discourse.

Bhabha contends that when re-articulated by the native, the colonialist desire for a reformed, recognizable, nearly-similar other, is enacted as parody, a dramatization to be distinguished from the 'exercise of dependent colonial relations through narcissistic identification.' For in the 'hybrid moment' what the native rewrites is not a copy of the colonialist original, but a qualitatively different thing-in-itself, where misreadings and incongruities expose the uncertainties and ambivalences of the colonialist text and deny it an authorizing presence. Thus a textual insurrection against the discourse of colonial authority is located in the natives' interrogation of the English book within the terms of their own system of cultural meanings, a displacement which is read back from the record written by colonialism's agents and ambassadors:

Through the natives' strange questions it is possible to see, with historical hindsight, what they resisted in questioning the presence of the English – as religious mediation and as cultural and linguistic medium. . . . To the extent to which discourse is a form of defensive warfare, then mimicry marks those moments of civil disobedience within the discipline of civility: signs of spectacular resistance. When the words of the master become the site of hybridity – the warlike sign of the native – then we may not only read between the lines, but even seek to change the often coercive reality that they so lucidly contain.

(Bhabha 1985a: 101, 104)

Despite a flagrantly ambivalent presentation which leaves it vulnerable to innocent misconstruction, Bhabha's theorizing succeeds in making visible those moments when colonial discourse already disturbed at its source by a doubleness of enunciation, is further subverted by the object of its address; when the scenario written by colonialism is given a performance by the native that estranges and undermines the colonialist script. The argument is not that the colonized possesses colonial power, but that its fracturing of the colonialist text by re-articulating it in broken English, perverts the meaning and message of the English book ('insignia of colonial authority and signifier of colonial desire and discipline,' 1985a: 89), and therefore makes an absolute exercise of power impossible.

A narrative which delivers the colonized from its discursive status as the illegitimate and refractory foil to Europe, into a position of 'hybridity' from which it is able to circumvent, challenge and refuse colonial authority, has no place for a totalizing notion of epistemic violence. Nor does the conflictual economy of the colonialist text allow for the unimpeded operation of discursive aggression: 'What is articulated in the doubleness of colonial discourse is not the violence of one powerful nation writing out another [but] a mode of contradictory utterance that ambivalently re-inscribes both coloniser and colonised.' The effect of this thesis is to displace the traditional anti-colonialist representation of antagonistic forces locked in struggle, with a configuration of discursive transactions: 'The place of difference and otherness, or the space of the adversarial, within such a system of "disposal" as I've proposed, is never entirely on the outside or implacably oppositional' (95).

Those who have been or are still engaged in colonial struggles against contemporary forms of imperialism could well read the theorizing of discourse analysts with considerable disbelief at the construction this puts on the situation they are fighting against and the contest in which they are engaged. This is not a charge against the difficulty of the analyses but an observation that these alternative narratives of colonialism obscure the 'murderous and decisive struggle between two protagonists' (Fanon [1965b]: 30), and discount or write out the counter-discourses which every liberation movement records. The significant differences in the critical practices of Spivak and Bhabha are submerged in a shared programme marked by the exorbitation of discourse and a related incuriosity about the enabling socioeconomic and political institutions and other forms of social praxis. Furthermore, because their theses admit of no point outside of discourse from which opposition can be engendered, their project is concerned to place incendiary devices within the dominant structures of representation and not to confront these with another knowledge. For Spivak, imperialism's epistemic bellicosity decimated the old culture and left the colonized without the ground from which they could utter confrontational words; for Bhabha, the stratagems and subterfuges to which the native resorted, destabilized the effectivity of the English book but did not write an alternative text – with whose constitution Bhabha declines to engage, maintaining that an anti-colonialist discourse 'requires an alternative set of questions, techniques and strategies in order to construct it' (Bhabha 1983a: 198).

Within another critical mode which also rejects totalizing abstracts of power as falsifying situations of domination and subordination, the notion of hegemony is inseparable from that of a counter-hegemony. In this theory of power and contest, the process of procuring the consent of the oppressed and the marginalized to the existing structure of relationships through ideological inducements, necessarily generates dissent and resistance, since the subject is conceived as being constituted by means of incommensurable solicitations and heterogeneous social practices. The outcome of this agonistic exchange, in which those addressed challenge their interlocutors, is that the hegemonic discourse is ultimately abandoned as scorched earth when a different discourse, forged in the process of disobedience and combat, occupying

new, never-colonized and 'utopian' territory, and prefiguring other relationships, values and aspirations, is enunciated. At a time when dialectical thinking is not the rage amongst colonial discourse theorists, it is instructive to recall how Fanon's dialogical interrogation of European power and native insurrection reconstructs a process of cultural resistance and cultural disruption, participates in writing a text that can answer colonialism back, and anticipates another condition beyond imperialism:

Face to face with the white man, the Negro has a past to legitimate, a vengeance to extract. . . . In no way should I dedicate myself to the revival of an unjustly unrecognized Negro civilization. I will not make myself a man of the past. . . . I am not a prisoner of history; it is only by going beyond the historical, instrumental hypothesis that I will initiate the cycle of my freedom.

(Fanon [1967a]: 225–6, 229, 231)

The enabling conditions for Fanon's analysis are that an oppositional discourse born in political struggle, and at the outset invoking the past in protest against capitulating to the colonizer's denigrations, supersedes a commitment to archaic native traditions at the same time as it rejects colonialism's system of knowledge:

The colonialist bourgeoisie had in fact deeply implanted in the minds of the colonised intellectual that the essential qualities remain eternal in spite of all the blunders men may make: the essential qualities of the West, of course. The native intellectual accepted the cogency of these ideas and deep down in his brain you could always find a vigilant sentinel ready to defend the Greco-Latin pedestal. Now it so happens that during the struggle for liberation, at the moment that the native intellectual comes into touch again with his people, this artificial sentinel is turned into dust. All the Mediterranean values, – the triumph of the human individual of clarity and of beauty – become lifeless, colourless knick-knacks. All those speeches seem like collections of dead words; those values which seemed to uplift the soul are revealed as worthless, simply because they have nothing to do with the concrete conflict in which the people is engaged.

(Fanon [1965b]: 37–8)

While conceding the necessity of defending the past in a move away from unqualified assimilation of the occupying power's culture, Fanon recognizes the limitations on the writer and intellectual who utilize 'techniques and language which are borrowed from the stranger in his country.' Such transitional writing reinterpreting old legends 'in the light of a borrowed aestheticism and of a conception of the world which was discovered under other skies,' is for Fanon but a prelude to a literature of combat which 'will disrupt literary styles and themes . . . create a completely new public' and mould the national consciousness, 'giving it form and contours and flinging open before it new and boundless horizons.' Fanon's theory projects a development inseparable from a community's engagement in combative social action, during which a native contest initially enunciated in the invaders' language, culminates in a rejection of imperialism's signifying system. This is a move which colonial discourse theory has not taken on board, and for such a process to be investigated, a cartography of imperialist ideology more extensive than its address in the colonialist space, as well as a conception of the native as historical subject and agent of an oppositional discourse is needed.

STEPHEN SLEMON

THE SCRAMBLE FOR POST-COLONIALISM

From 'The Scramble for Post-colonialism' in Chris Tiffin and Alan Lawson (eds) *De-Scribing Empire: Post-colonialism and Textuality* London: Routledge, 1994.

'POST-COLONIALISM', AS IT IS now used in its various fields, de-scribes a remarkably heterogeneous set of subject positions, professional fields, and critical enterprises. It has been used as a way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both post-modernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-independence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a third-world intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and – and this was my first encounter with the term – as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies. The obvious tendency, in the face of this heterogeneity, is to understand 'post-colonialism' mostly as an object of desire for critical practice: as a shimmering talisman that in itself has the power to confer political legitimacy onto specific forms of institutionalised labour, especially on ones that are troubled by their mediated position within the apparatus of institutional power. I think, however, that this heterogeneity in the concept of the 'post-colonial' – and here I mean within the university institution – comes about for much more pragmatic reasons, and these have to do with a very real problem in securing the concept of 'colonialism' itself, as Western theories of subjectification and its resistances continue to develop in sophistication and complexity.

The nature of colonialism as an economic and political structure of cross-cultural domination has of course occasioned a set of debates, but it is not really on this level that the 'question' of European colonialism has troubled the various post-colonial fields of study. The problem, rather, is with the concept of colonialism as an ideological or discursive formation: that is, with the ways in which colonialism is viewed as an apparatus for constituting subject positions through the field of representation. In a way – and of course this is an extreme oversimplification – the debate over a description of colonialism's multiple strategies for regulating Europe's others can be expressed diagrammatically (see Figure 7.1).

The general understanding that colonialism works on a left-to-right order of domination, with line 'A' representing various theories of how colonialism oppresses through direct political and economic control, and lines 'BC' and 'DE' representing differing concepts of the

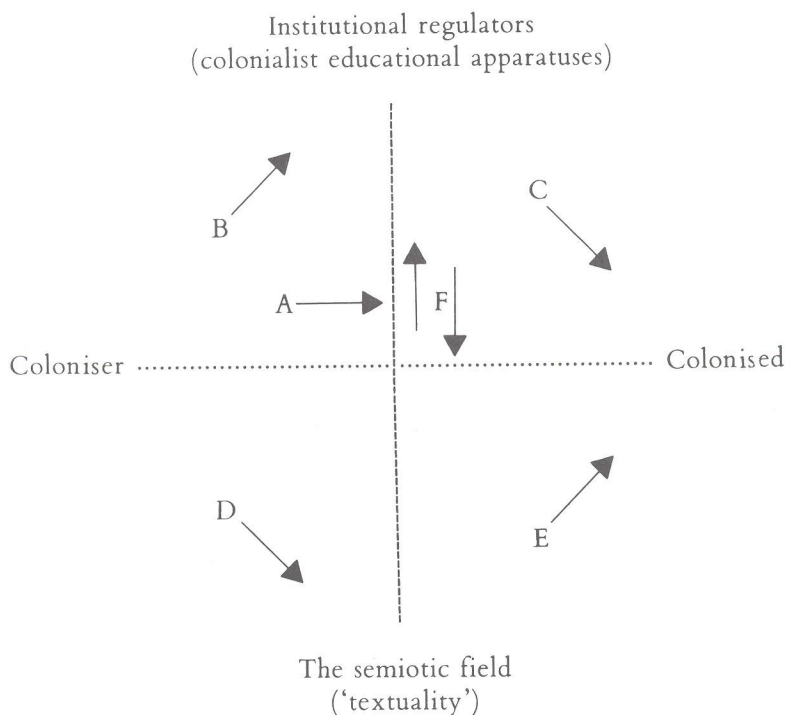


Figure 7.1 Diagram representing the debate over the nature of colonialism

ideological regulation of colonial subjects, of subordination through the manufacture of consent. Theories that recognise an efficacy to colonialism that proceeds along line ‘A’ are in essence ‘brute force’ or ‘direct political’ theories of colonialist oppression: that is, they reject the basic thesis that power manages social contradiction partly through the strategic production of specific ideas of the ‘self’ – which subordinated groups then internalise as being ‘real’. Theories, however, that examine the trajectory of colonialist power primarily along line ‘BC’ – a line representing an ideological flanking for the economic colonialism running along line ‘A’ – focus on the constitutive power of state apparatuses like education, and the constitutive power of professional fields of knowledge within those apparatuses, in the production of colonialist relations. Along this line, Edward Said (1978) examines the political efficacy of ‘orientalism’ within colonialism; Talal Asad (1973) and many others examine the role of anthropology in reproducing colonial relations; Alan Bishop (1990) examines the deployment of Western concepts of ‘mathematics’ against African school-children, Timothy Mitchell (1988) examines how the professional field of ‘political science’ came into being through a European colonialist engagement with the cultures of Egypt; Gauri Viswanathan (1989) examines the foundations of ‘English’ literary studies within a structure of colonialist management in India. This work keeps coming in, and the list of radically compromised professional fields within the Western syllabus of ‘humanities’ options grows daily longer. Theories that focus primarily on line ‘DE’ in this diagram examine the ways in which ideology reproduces colonialist relations through the strategic deployment of a vast semiotic field of representations – in literary works, in advertising, in sculpture, in travelogues, in exploration documents, in maps, in pornography, and so on.

This pattern, as I've laid it out so far, does not seem especially controversial or problematic, but the difficulties arise at the moment of conceptualising the *relation* between colonialist professional fields and institutions (at the top of the diagram) and the whole field of representation (at the bottom of the diagram) – the field of 'textuality' and its investment in reproducing and naturalising the structures of power. To take up one example of this paradigmatically: in Edward Said's work on Orientalism, colonialist power is seen to operate through a complex relationship between apparatuses placed on line 'F', where in the first instance a scholarly educational apparatus called 'Orientalism' – at the top of the line – appropriates textual representations of 'the Orient' in order to consolidate itself as a discipline and to reproduce 'the Orient' as a deployable unit of knowledge. So, in the first instance, colonialist power in Said's argument runs not just through the middle ground of this chart but through a complex set of relations happening along line 'F'; and since Said's thesis is that a function at the top of this line is employing those representations created at the bottom of the line in order to make up 'knowledges' that have an ideological function, you can say that the vector of motion along line F is an upward one, and that this upward motion is part of the whole complex, discursive structure whereby 'Orientalism' manufactures the 'Orient' and thus helps to regulate colonialist relations. That is Said's first position – that under Orientalism the vector of line 'F' is upward. But in Said's analysis, colonialist power also runs through line F in a downward movement, where the scholarly apparatus of Orientalism is understood to be at work in the production of a purely fantastic and entirely projected idea of the 'Orient'. The point is that in the process of understanding the multivalent nature of colonialist discourse in terms of the historical specific of 'Orientalism', Said's model becomes structurally ambivalent – under 'Orientalism', the 'Orient' turns out to be something produced both as an object of scholarly knowledge and as a location for psychic projection – and I've tried to graph this ambivalence as a double movement or vector along line 'F'. For Said, the mechanism that produces this 'Orient', then, has to be understood as something capable of deploying an ambivalent structure of relations along line 'F', and deploying that structure towards a unified end. And so Said (and here I'm following Robert Young's (1990) analysis of the problem) ends up referring the whole structure of colonialist discourse back to a single and monolithic originating intention within colonialism, the intention of colonialist power to possess the terrain of its Others. That assumption of intention is basically where Said's theory has proven to be most controversial.

Said's text is an important one here, for as Robert Young has shown, Said's work stands at the headwaters of colonial discourse theory, and this ambivalence in Said's model may in fact initiate a *foundational* ambivalence in the critical work which comes out of this field. This ambivalence sets the terms for what are now the two central debates within colonial discourse theory: the debate over historical specificity, and the debate over agency.

The first debate – the debate over the problem of historical specificity in the model – concerns the inconclusive relation between actual historical moments in the colonialist enterprise and the larger, possibly trans-historical discursive formation that colonial discourse theory posits in its attempt to understand the multivalent strategies at work in colonialist power. Can you look at 'colonial discourse' only by examining what are taken to be paradigmatic moments within colonialist history?

If so, can you extrapolate a modality of 'colonialism' from one historical moment to the next? Does discursive colonialism always look structurally the same, or do the specifics of its textual or semiotic or representational manoeuvres shift registers at different historical times and in different kinds of colonial encounters? And what would it mean to think of colonial discourse as a set of exchanges that function in similar ways for all sorts of colonialist

strategies in a vastly different set of cultural locations? These questions of historical specificity, though always a problem for social theory, are especially difficult ones for colonialist discourse theory, and the reason for this is that this theory quite appropriately refuses to articulate a simplistic structure of social causality in the relation between colonialist institutions and the field of representations. In other words, colonial discourse theory recognises a radical ambivalence at work in colonialist power, and that is the ambivalence I have attempted to show in Figure 7.1 as a double moment in vector at the level of line 'F'.

To clarify this I want to make use of Gauri Viswanathan's important work on Britain's ideological control of colonised people through the deployment of colonialist educational strategies in nineteenth-century India. Obviously, the question of what happens along line 'F' can only be addressed by specific reference to immediate historical conditions, and every piece of archaeological work on colonialist power will want to formulate the vector of action here with particular sensitivity to the local conditions under analysis. Viswanathan researches this part of the puzzle with exemplary attention to history, and at heart her argument is that colonialist education in India (which would stand in as the ideological apparatus at the top of the diagram) strategically and intentionally deployed the vast field of canonical English 'literature' (the field of representations at the bottom of the diagram) in order to construct a cadre of 'native' mediators between the British Raj and the actual producers of wealth. The point here is that Viswanathan's analysis employs a purely upward vector of motion to characterise the specifics of how power is at work along line 'F' in the diagram, and what secures this vector is Viswanathan's scrupulous attention to the immediate conditions that apply within British and Indian colonial relations.

The problem, though – and here I mean the problem for colonial discourse theory – is that the foundational ambivalence or double movement that Said's work inserts into the model of colonialist discourse analysis always seems to return to the field; and it does so through critical work that on its own terms suggests a counter-flow along line 'F' at the same moment of colonialist history. That is, the residual ambivalence in the vector of line 'F' within colonial discourse theory seems to invite the fusion of Viswanathan's kind of analysis with critical readings that would articulate a downward movement at this place in the diagram; and one of the areas such work is now entering is the analysis of how English literary activity of the period (at the bottom of line 'F') suddenly turned to the *representation* of educational processes (at the top of the line), and why this literature should so immediately concern itself with the investments of educational representations in the colonialist scene. In examining the place of English literary activity within this moment of colonialist history, that is, a critic such as Patrick Brantlinger would want to argue for the valency of texts such as *Jane Eyre* or *Tom Brown's School Days* within colonialist discursive power, and colonialist discourse theory would want to understand how both kinds of discursive regulation, both vectors of movement along line 'F', are at work in a specific historical moment of colonialist relations. Because of Said's ambivalence in charting out the complex of Orientalism along line 'F', I am arguing, the field of colonialist discourse theory carries that sense of ambivalence forward, and looks to an extraordinary valency of movement within its articulation of colonialist power. The ambivalence makes our understanding of colonial operations a great deal clearer for historical periods but it also upsets the positivism of highly specific analyses of colonialist power going on *within* a period.

The basic project of colonial discourse theory is to push out from line 'A', and try to define colonialism both as a set of political relations and as a signifying system, one with ambivalent structural relations. It is remarkably clarifying in its articulation of the productive relations between seemingly disparate moments in colonialist power (the structure of literary education in India, the literary practice of representing educational control in Britain), but

because it recognises an ambivalence in colonialist power, colonial discourse theory results in a concept of colonialism that cannot be historicised modally, and that ends up being tilted towards a description of all kinds of social oppression and discursive control. For some critics, this ambivalence bankrupts the field. But for others, the concept of 'colonialism' – like the concept of 'patriarchy' for feminism, which shares this structure of transhistoricality and lack of specificity – remains an indispensable conceptual category of critical analysis, and an indispensable tool in securing our understanding of ideological domination under colonialism to the level of political economy.

The first big debate going on within colonialist discourse theory, then, is a debate over what happens when a model of 'colonial discourse' is carried beyond its scattered moments of archaeological research and is taken up as a general structure of oppression. I want now to turn to the second big debate going on between theorists of colonialist discourse; and that is the debate over the question of *agency* under colonialist power. Basically, the question of agency can be restated as a question of who or what acts oppositionally, when ideology or discourse or psychic processes of some kind construct human subjects, and the question of specifying agency is becoming an extremely complex one in all forms of critical theory at present. Again, however, this debate has especial urgency within colonial discourse theory, and, again, that is because this theory recognises foundationally that the vector of line 'F' in Figure 7.1 remains ambivalent at every moment of colonialist discursive control. . . .

I want to stress the presuppositional location of this post-colonial scramble – I want to articulate its foundations within the problematic of colonial discourse theory and within an unresolved debate within the Western humanities institution – because I suspect that at times workers in various orders of post-colonial analysis are made to feel a disempowering energy at work in their field – a disempowerment which stems from their sense that these debates ought to be resolved within post-colonial studies itself. And I also raise the question of an effect to these debates, not because I want to suggest they are anything other than crucial ones for the field, but because I think the terrain of post-colonial studies remains in danger of becoming colonised by competing academic methodologies, and being reparcelled into institutional pursuits that have no abiding interest in the specifics of either colonialist history or post-colonial agency. One of the most exciting research projects now going on in colonial discourse analysis, for example, is Homi Bhabha's theorising of colonialist ambivalence, and his attempt to carry that analysis forward to a wholesale critique of Western modernity. It is possibly instructive, therefore, that in the process of expressing admiration for his work, the post-structuralist critic Robert Young inserts Bhabha's project into a narrative of unpackaging whose terms of reference are entirely European in origin: the radical restructuring of European historiography, and the allocation of alterity to the theatre of the European postmodern.

Along parallel lines, it is also instructive that Henry Louis Gates Jr. notes in Spivak's deconstructive brilliance a remarkable conflation between colonial discourse and Derrida's concept of writing itself – an argument, that is, that there is '*nothing* outside of (the discourse of) colonialism', and that all discourse must be nothing other than colonial discourse itself. Gates warns of a hidden consequence in this elevation in ascendancy of the colonial paradigm by questioning what happens when we elide, for example, 'the distance between political repression and individual neurosis: the *positional* distance between Steve Biko and, say, Woody Allen?' (Gates 1991: 466). His argument is that academic interest in this history and the discourse of colonialism bids fair to become the last bastion for the project of global theory and for European universalism itself, and he asks us whether we really need to choose between oppositional critics whose articulations of the post-colonial institutionalise themselves as agonistic struggles over a thoroughly disciplined terrain.