

Introduction

If people don't all experience emotional satisfaction and deprivation in the same way, what claim can there be for equality of need? There was fear and danger in considering this emotional absolute as open in any way; the brain-weighers, the claimants of divine authority to distinguish powers of moral discernment from the degree of frizz in hair and conceptual ability from the relative thickness of lips—they were vigilant to pounce upon anything that could be twisted to give them credence. Yet how was that absolute nature of intimate relationships arrived at? Who decided?

—Nadine Gordimer, *July's People*, 64–65

And now, come home. Bakary told me once that you had no heart, and sometimes I think he is right. I suppose there must be men like you at a time like this—it is very difficult to fight without being able to hate the person you are fighting. I have some time to read now, so try to bring me some books—novels, not too obvious, but not too difficult either—and especially some books about the lives of men in other countries.

—Ousmane Sembene, *God's Bits of Wood*, 226

It is always worth taking note of where one has crossed a border into the territory of the other, and of what one carries over and what one has left behind. It is worth paying attention to what one has crossed when one has crossed a border. A great many Western scholars who have developed a professional interest in the literatures of postcolonial societies fairly recently would do well to keep this advice in mind, for border crossings are threshold phenomena, both desired and dreaded. They mark a gap in

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experience that is crossed and recrossed by machines of power under whose influence fantasy, prejudice, ambivalence, and dispositions of panic and violence thrive. Indeed, the question is not whether such mythic energies will emerge, but which ones are preferable—which ones will lead not deeper into defensive hostilities towards the unknown into which one enters, but into practical knowledges that render those borders negotiable, even as zones to be dwelt in rather than lines to be crossed.

Of course, such a zone is itself a fantasy, specifiable perhaps as a synthetic or co-assimilative ideal, and it is no less questionable than any other construction of wishes concerning the social, cultural, economic, and political lives of people whose experience would seem to be immeasurably removed from the apparatus of the Western academy.¹ Furthermore, there is no justification for the assumption that all boundaries as such must conform to the same abstract rules: a physiological boundary is not the same as a cultural boundary, and neither is the same as the boundary of an athletic field. In many ways, postcolonial theory in the academy takes from this fact a related set of concerns: what is the nature of the postcolonial threshold? What are its rules? Or is the diversity even here, among various postcolonialities, so great that no comprehensive set of rules can be articulated?

The collection of essays that follows is a theoretical inquiry into the complex and problematic relations among postcolonial literatures and theories, the people who teach them at the university level, and the institutions in which they are taught.² Each of the eighteen essays traces its own path through these relations; yet each also comments on the fundamental paradox and contradiction within which these relations operate: that professors of postcolonial literature and theory must engage with the powerful, labyrinthine apparatus of Western cultural hegemony—a set of systematic articulative/interpretative procedures corresponding to, and in the service of, a regime of ideological expectations and its institutional representatives—in order to disengage themselves from its operations. There is no way to teach these relations without entering, oneself, into the entanglements of postcolonial power.

Certainly nowhere in literary scholarship is the program of study so deeply determined by intensely felt political and cultural contestation, which inevitably leads both to wide-ranging particular investigations and to global hypotheses.³ Sometimes critical positions seem determined by whether we are more

distrustful of relativism or of hierarchy. Out of all the noise emanating from the contesting positions of postcolonial theory there repeatedly emerges an insistence on the ways in which some narrations obscure, subvert, misrepresent, or silence others—a politics of silence and alterity, the problematic of the phantom of the subaltern's voice.⁴

One of the problems faced by teachers of postcolonization literatures and theories is that there are a great many ways for this voice to be lost, subverted, obscured, or trivialized. Consider an article that appeared in the 31st May North American edition of *India Today*, a newsmagazine that expatriate Indians read in order to “stay in touch with the homeland” and to supply a cosmetic Indianness to their homes for the benefit of their children growing up in America. In Hiriyaadaka (coastal Karnataka, India), women from various parts of the country come together every spring to take part in a festival, an annual ritual inspired by the life story of a semi-mythic, heroic woman named Siri. The purpose of the ritual, which originates in matrilineal systems that were common among communities living on the coast (p. 75), is to empower women by providing them an opportunity for an indigenous form of group therapy. The women take purifying baths, dress in colorful sarees, enter rooms filled with the fragrance of areca flowers. As intricate shadows fall on the walls, amid pensive flames of oil lamps, they sing the story of Siri and dance to music, “bodies...swaying furiously, the hair awry” (74). The pathos of Siri's story is reflected in the lives of these women. They identify with her sorrow, her defiance of patriarchal codes, her wanderings, her quest for freedom, autonomy, and personal happiness. The decline and fall of Siri's lineage when her two granddaughters' lives end in murder and suicide become emblematic of the politico-historical decline of matrilineal traditions.

It seems that this ancient festival received coverage in *India Today* partly because an anthropology professor from California State University is at present engaged in extensive research on what the article characterizes as “the phenomenon” (74). Peter J. Claus's research and the funding that went into it make the festival a valid “human interest story” for *India Today*. In post-colonial India, many precolonial practices and customs have no doubt remained untouched by colonial history. Nevertheless, within the framework of the linguistic and perceptual coloniality of “modernized” India, the Siri festival becomes an exoticized artifact, a cultural commodity packaged to suit the tastes of the

elite bourgeois readership of *India Today*, for whom such "customs" have primarily an antiquarian interest. The result is an Indian version of "internal colonialism" related to the metropolitan images of Scottish crofting communities that Martin Padgett examines below in "An Iconography of Difference."

India Today's writer gives the article a title, "Driving away the Demons," which immediately sets up these coastal revelers as a community defined by its superstitions. One of the captions describes the ritual as a "bizarre form of mass therapy," a phrase that any European or American tourist/journalist, American-born Indian, or cosmopolitan, modernized Indian might use. But the actual details of the festival make it clear that the therapeutic process works through an imaginary identification with a figure of mythological dimensions. The women "scream, laugh, or cry, and pour out their problems" (74). In a trancelike state, they give communal voice to the silent pain that has accumulated over the course of the year. It is a therapy grounded in the psycho-ecology of their culture: myth, legend, history. If most of the women who take part in this ritual cannot read or write, they are culturally literate in oral practices of communication that their societies have maintained intact. Oral practices and literatures as intricately codified as written texts prepare these women to respond to the aesthetic form of the ritual. The melodic verses of Siri's story invoke epiphanies capable of releasing personal, domestic pain into a symbolic practice that transcends time, making time-honored traditions part of the present. If at some level the women believe in Siri's power to understand them and protect them, such an attribution of authority to an absent, abstract, all-knowing personhood is not generically different from idealizing the therapist-analyst and investing him or her with such authority. Yet this connection remains unvoiced, and the voices of the women themselves are lost, misrepresented, trivialized.

There is nothing of the occult in what *India Today* describes as a "cult." Nor is there a stereotypically "Eastern" mind at work in this ritualized form of psycho-ecology providing release from social pressures that oppress individual women. An expatriate Indian living in the United States might wish to have access to shared experiences of this kind, grounded in the ancient traditions of the home-culture. And while the conflictual wishes and aspirations of such readers perpetrate their distinctive subversion of any "originality" or "authenticity" that might be sought, the very act of writing about it within the received conventions of academic

discourse exposes this social practice to distortion by the essentializing categories that shape contemporary discussions on cultural difference.

But if the postcolonial voice can be distorted in a process of objectivization, it can as easily be lost through absorption as it is subordinated to the status of symbolic operator in texts ordinarily regarded as strictly, if not canonically, "Western." Here one might consider William Burroughs—a writer mentioned by *none* of the contributors to this volume—whose reputation as cultural "outsider" is marked both by experimentation with subversions of the conventional expectations of Western readers and by a fascination with ethnic, racial, and national otherness. Again and again his challenges to "normalcy"—his fantasies of violent and illicit sexual behaviors, his documentation of drug hallucination, his violations of narrative expectations—involve representations of an imagined postcolonial environment marked by a total disregard for the legitimacy of differences. One senses that for Burroughs the boundaries between sexes, species, nations, planets, syntagmas, and planes of consciousness are all the same, all governed by the same set of abstract rules of permutation. Within the texts, multiple alter egos play both sides, all sides, repudiating order everywhere. In the words of his narcotics agent from *Naked Lunch*, Bradley the Buyer, who is addicted to "contact" with the junkies he pursues: "Fuck 'em all, squares on both sides. I am the only complete man in the industry."

Yet the wish to be "complete" by denying difference and hierarchy, however provocative as ideological divergence from writerly and institutional conventionality, clearly fails to engage with the otherness of the other, the postcolonial insistence on particularities that the forces of assimilative process can only violate. Not only repudiation of hegemony cuts both ways and plays both sides: so does alterity itself. To participate in a contestatory debate about the subversion of boundaries and the infiltrations of alterity is inescapably both an admission of partiality and an act of faith. No one is "complete"; no one is completely different.

Nor is this partiality identical with the principled ambivalence of deconstructive methodologies; postcolonial authors and theorists repeatedly find themselves not merely immobilized among the paradoxes, but obliged to make choices from among conflicting cultural options. Buchi Emecheta's *Bride Price*, for instance, is not simply a depiction of a culture in conflict with itself; it is a conflictual picture of such a culture. It would be easy

simply to celebrate the claims it makes for communal attention to children—that the community consists, for example, of many mothers. Yet it also insists upon the Ibo proverb that says, “On the day of blood relatives, friends go.” In this another distinction is drawn, another set of criteria is established, another framework of kinship is suggested. The proverb suggests that the claim of communal parenting is too broad, that (as in other cultures) circumstances dictate adults’ responsibilities for care of children. Are we to say, then, that the distinction between Ibo and, say, Belfast Catholic cultures becomes one of degree, not (hierarchical) type? How is this question to be handled in our classrooms?

Early efforts to frame a postcolonial theory, like the enormously valuable *Empire Writes Back*, understandably relied too heavily on a strategy of inversion of values in which a variety of dichotomous structures observed in the relations between (post)-colonized cultures and the metropolitan center—margin/center, order/disorder, reality/unreality, power/impotence, authentic/inauthentic, being/nothingness, and so forth—were reversed in such a way that those values conventionally assigned to the colonized community were now privileged, held to organize and legitimate postcolonized cultural production.

But however radical the gesture of inversion appears, it nevertheless depends upon overdetermined, highly inflexible, and at least partly discredited categories that fail to address the complex, pluralistic energies of postcolonial experience. Indeed, the rigorous mapping of the theories and practices of postcolonial authors undertaken by postcolonial scholars itself seems to reflect the workings of an exclusionary rhetoric that confines, demarcates, constrains. Such classificatory processes are systematically related to those that segregate localities and populations via colonization, and many contributors to this volume see in the production, circulation, and consumption of postcoloniality a reincarnated, recycled colonialism, imperialism, and capitalism. Of course, Western logic will defend itself—will insist that it articulates the terms for distinctions and comparison, not sliding equivalencies, approximations, and metaphoric excess; and that the characteristic intellectual gesture of ideological polemic is the fallacy called slippery slope. Nevertheless, it seems necessary to find ways to speak of the degrees of discomfort that Western interpretative methods can give rise to, especially when they hurl themselves over borders into a world where their authority is admittedly partial.

In many ways, the essays collected here constitute a discourse on, and of, partiality—of the failure of global models, global aspirations, global assumptions, of the necessity to recognize distinctions and the subversion of distinctions, of a new regime of inquiry marked both by passionate intensities and the peculiar demands of multicultural selectivity. What emerges is a post-modern multidiscipline whose analysis of postcolonial pedagogy repeatedly reflects back on its own enmeshed participation in the global exercise of postcolonial power. The diverse approaches reflect the varied intellectual foci and institutional situations that such pedagogy faces: historical analyses of complex traditions of cultural production; reexamination of pedagogy as a set of productive-receptive operations whose terms depend upon—and change their form in relation to—cultural and political specificities that Western pedagogical theory has largely ignored or misrepresented; reconsideration of the forces involved in the construction of processes of reading; inquiries into the ways in which colonial/postcolonial experience intersects with the experience of gender, class, and/or race; challenges to canons; efforts to preserve and/or establish canons; efforts to define the possibilities for constructing a cross-cultural poetics; skeptical challenges to any pluralistic opportunism whatsoever; and repeatedly, from the most varied perspectives, readings of texts by “postcolonial” authors and readings of Western canonical texts in “postcolonial” ways.

These issues circulate, cross, and recross in these essays in as many ways—in more ways—than there are authors. The temptation towards hands-off relativism (simply to present them in random order and without comment) itself crosses, in a gesture that is itself implicated in the entanglements in question, with the desire to provide an order or orders that will at least map out our own interested participation in the interrogation of postcoloniality. We have opted to divide these essays into two broad groups, “theoretical” and “pedagogical,” both of which clearly demonstrate the kinds of partialities, multiplicities, ambivalences, and contestations that inevitably confront scholars attempting to theorize postcoloniality in postmodernity.

Some issues come up here so frequently that another set of hands might well have used them to establish a more minutely articulated structure for the book: the commodification of alterities, for instance, or the construction of postcolonial subjectivities, or cultural hybridity. The interest of such issues lies, however, not in their distinction but in their interrelationships,

and to treat them as clearly distinguishable would be to lose our intended focus on the relations of postcolonial theory with pedagogical praxis. No doubt the same objection could be raised against our decision to distinguish "Theory" from "Pedagogy." Our rationale is simple, however: the organization of the literary profession in Western academic institutions is such that most scholars interested in the intersections explored herein will *begin* from one of these positions. Their involvement, that is, will likely be motivated and defined in the first instance by the professional segregation of "literary" and "cultural" theory from pedagogical concerns. Our purpose is thus not to lead anyone toward this bipartite division of the "postcolonial," but, by presenting materials with one foot in hegemonic structuration and the other—indeed, many others—afloat in "postcolonial" multiplicity, to lead them away from it towards a more progressive imagination of professional possibility.⁵

The first part, "Theory: New Histories and (Multi)cultural Poetics," attempts to address some of the ways in which historical and formal tendencies overlap in efforts to theorize "postcolonial" discourse. The "new" histories in question are new in quite different ways. Abiola Irele coordinates historical observation and ideological analysis to arrive at a new contextualization of contemporary African discourse. Martin Padget examines a set of British lantern-slide travelogues of the nineteenth century to give a sense of the relations between material conditions in the internal colonies and the ideological fantasy-constructions that underlay their representation and falsification. In so doing he confers historical meaning on communities who had previously served the inscriptive needs of hegemonic self-justification. Poonam Arora examines the mythic/symbolic dynamics of the Indian *tawaif* or courtesan film to historicize a "chasm between history and memory" whose sources extend to the transfer of Muslim and non-Muslim populations between Pakistan and India in 1947 and whose effects continue to resonate in patterns of repression and proscription of desire in contemporary, multicultural India.

Efforts to address the formal parameters of "postcolonial" discourse—to enunciate a poetics of such discourse—exhibit all the crossings, entanglements, and ambivalences noted above. Indeed, whatever their differences of scope, focus, and intent, they share a preoccupation with the central ambivalence of the literature and theory in question, namely, the wish to formulate a

model that permits occupation of the border territories defined by postcolonial thought—a model sufficient to, responsive to, respectful of the complexity of those borders. At issue is the ethical and logical problem of theorizing border crossings whose spatial and conceptual dynamics can hardly be assumed to be commensurable. Hence there appear here a variety of skirmishes and clashes, negotiations and assimilations. And while all of them turn in some way around the focal conflictuality of colonizer and colonized, they are variously informed by the phenomena of other borders—colonial/indigenous (Hogan), cultural center/margin (Lionnet), nationalism/pluralism (Taylor). In addition, Joline Blais investigates a revision of Freudian and Fanonian patriarchal treatments of colonial subjectivity by a gender-sensitive “hystery” as practiced by Marguerite Duras, and Laura Donaldson demonstrates a synthesis of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s “affirmative deconstruction” and Gloria Anzaldúa’s “new *mestiza*.”

The last two voices of the Theory section, those of Teresa Ebert and Amitava Kumar, are distinguished by their (quite different) challenges to many critical assumptions currently vying for prominence in the field. Ebert confronts the postmodern discursive turn particularly as it shapes efforts by Western feminists to identify with and empower the speech of the subaltern, and proposes in its place a practice of materialist critique in the service of the struggle against the global division of labor imposed by late capitalism. Kumar, like Ebert, objects to the trivialization of oppositional thought—its burial under obfuscatory and mystificatory idioms and its straitening under institutional regimes concerned only with maintaining in-house order and hierarchies of professional privilege. Unlike Ebert, however, Kumar leans away from any one overarching model and toward energetic localizations of change. Together they surely indicate that “postcolonial” theory remains an open project, constantly in need of revision and development. And they clearly signal, as well, the theoretical complexities with which teachers of postcolonial texts and issues must contend.

The second part, “Pedagogy: Terminologies, Problematics, Readings,” combines essays concerned with supplying analysis and definition for a number of terms and notions that are frequently contested both in general scholarship and within these covers and essays focused more directly on ways of introducing and elucidating “postcolonial” texts. No doubt all teachers ought to be attentive to the relationship between their larger project of

teaching and the texts they use to realize it. But for postcolonial scholars, this relationship is a matter of intense concern. As Rajeswari Mohan explains, "Whether texts serve an agenda of commodity fetishism or radical critique...would depend on the discourses that mediate them into the classroom." The nature of such mediation is the principal topic of her essay, which reflects upon and contextualizes a number of "Questions for Postcolonial Pedagogy" that undergo a variety of transformations and exemplifications in the essays that follow. Some of these questions might be explicitly stated as follows: What definitions are critical for scholarly clarification of postcolonial complexity? What relations inhere between postmodernism and postcolonialism? How are postcolonial challenges to conventional canonicity affected by institutional structures in the academy? How should we handle comparisons between American or European modernist writers and postcolonial or Third-World writers? How do questions of race, gender, and economics figure in the pursuit of a postcolonial pedagogy? How might an emergent and oppositional postcolonial pedagogy relate to an assimilationist multicultural project in Western academic institutions? Above all, where and how can we prepare a space in the ideological configuration of academic institutions for antihegemonic resistance to find a foothold?

This last question, especially, is vigorously scrutinized by Stephen Slemon and Allen Cary-Webb. Slemon theorizes a postcolonial pedagogy that turns historical and institutional conflictuality to its best advantage to create a pedagogical space conducive to social change. And Carey-Webb, despite his warning against a "superficial multiculturalism that actually legitimates a monocultural perspective" and "simplistic and goodwill incorporation of difference," focuses in the last half of his essay on an integrative pedagogy that challenges both conventional canonicity and conventional teaching. He distrusts pluralism because "it offers acceptance of the presumedly 'Other' on the terms of the 'Self' and in a way legitimates the 'Self' as contained and independent," but in his conclusion, he argues on behalf of postcolonial pedagogical structures that allow two or more systems to encounter each other and reconstitute frames of cultural reference to question established institutional structures and habits of perception.

The "Readings" that close out this part might be expected to be both more concrete in their pedagogical concerns and more "Western," more colonizing or assimilative in their interpretative

approach. For as professors of literature, we might too easily agree with Nadine Gordimer's Maureen about the fundamental reality and necessity of "the humane creed":

[it] depended on validities staked on a belief in the absolute nature of intimate relationships between human beings. If people don't all experience emotional satisfaction and deprivation in the same way, what claim can there be for equality of need? (*July's People*, 64–65)

Yet these readings differ from conventional professional interpretative responses to canonical texts. On one hand (and despite being self-consciously informed by theory of several sorts), they are often more like meditations on processes of production and response than like instructions for processing or maps of analysis. Aware of the distinctively contestatory spaces of pedagogical reading (one of the few venues available for self-reflexive exploration of what it means to enter into shared contexts of imaginal experience), and of their various ambivalences of orientation with regard to students, institutions (of learning, publication, political authority), and language(s), the authors who concentrate on reading particular texts (and all the authors, to the extent that they involve themselves with such readings) are clearly caught up in a predicament of complex partialities defined in such a way that no one avenue of escape or transcendence avails itself without at the same time subverting its own assumptions.

On the other hand, these are readers with a purpose, and that purpose must be understood to comprehend a repudiation of oppression, and of all violations of subjectivity, community, property, tradition, and spirit, particularly those global miseries deriving from the systemic injustices of Western hegemony. These are all readings projected out of an awareness of the threatened vitality of cultures under duress. Yet if *Order and Partialities* resonates with a shared determination to disable the inequities of the order that has prevailed, it indicates not a distinct unity setting itself up in opposition to the old unity of Western cultural dominance, but a decisive energy of differences exploring new possibilities of selection and combination of the intellectual, political, and cultural materials of the postmodern world, a kind of bricolage without a bricoleur. Against the old world order is not a new world order, but a new understanding of partiality leading to radical options of self-conscious self-reconstruction. And if our partialities are cast up against a countervailing order that seemingly knows no limit and does not care, so that for every

instance in which another hegemonic "absolute" rears its head we must demand, like Gordimer, "Who decided?," we still are partial in that other way that accepts the risk of partial knowledge because it knows the risk of complete ignorance, and that trusts, even as it doubts, the desire it shares with the great Sembene: for books, however difficult, that will help make the men and women of the world real to one another.

NOTES

1. Edward Said has shown, however, that the penetration of Western power into the lives of postcolonial people has employed academic/scientific collaborators as vanguard agents (see "Representing the Colonized").

2. Perhaps the context of these essays—the institutions that generate them and to which their claims might be applicable—should be further specified as Western; but such a generalization ought to be argued, not assumed.

3. That it also leads, or ought to lead, to specific kinds of *actions* beyond the scope of traditional Western scholarship is a point taken up by a number of writers in this collection. See especially the essays by Gardner and Kumar in this volume.

4. In his introduction to *Culture and Imperialism*, Said writes, "The power to narrate and to block other narratives from forming and emerging is very important to culture and imperialism, and constitutes one of the main connections among them" (xiii). Concern for control over the voice is evident among many of the authors most frequently cited in these essays, such as Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, Homi Bhaba, and Gayatri Spivak.

5. No doubt many would wish to see here a third category designating those whose interest derives from an immersion in political praxis rather than theory or teaching. See note 3 above, and the essays by Ebert, Gardner, and Kumar.

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