

**POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES**  
A MATERIALIST CRITIQUE

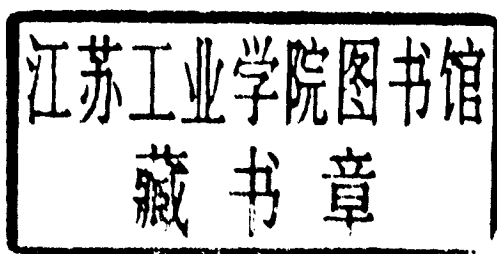
BENITA PARRY

Colonial Literatures

# Postcolonial Studies

A Materialist Critique

**Benita Parry**



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# Acknowledgements

The insistence in this volume that certain explanatory categories are indispensable to the analysis of colonialism and late imperialism (a capitalist world-system, uneven development, exploitation, inequality, injustice, conflict, class relationships, resistance and struggle) would have been redundant before the advent of postcolonial criticism and stems from my intellectual apprenticeship outside of academia. In the South Africa of the 1950s the minority white community, who in large regarded domination as a condition befitting the majority, were habituated to the ignominy of living within a wall built by a punitive state, reinforced by custom and maintained by law. But because even the most stringently policed boundaries can be crossed, one such escape route was found by those few white students at English-speaking universities concerned to meet the restricted intake from the oppressed communities. Within this last group were members of radical clubs and political parties. That such Marxist forums had existed in South Africa since the early 1930s was in part due to the very small number of Africans, Asians and Coloureds who had attended overseas universities and returned as doctors, lawyers, teachers and communists of one or other persuasion. This inadvertent process of radical politicization within an egregiously repressive society was paradoxically furthered by a white immigration policy that accidentally had admitted a scattering of left-wing academics and other professionals from abroad. Similarly, a programme for increasing the white population had extended citizenship to the numerous supporters of either Stalin or Trotsky entering without detection amongst the quota of European Jews of all classes allowed into the country. This convergence meant that South Africa was home to an intelligentsia in the very sense once used by revolutionary circles to name those who had constituted themselves as an intellectual and political vanguard.

And so it came about that one of the militant groupings ranged against the regime had links with the Third International, and another was affiliated to Trotskyism. About the Trotskyist tendencies it remains to be told how an association of such theoretical sophistication, high principle and austere political standards was overtaken by the Congress movement whose organizational skills and manifest ability to act ensured popular appeal, gained it recognition at home and abroad as the official opposition and culminated with its personnel forming the first post-apartheid government. Despite this, the thinking of the less prominent current, since relegated to a footnote in the official histories of South African resistance, survives in the critiques now being made of the neo-liberal doctrine and free-market practice to which the new South African state is ideologically and practically bound.

This organization produced no Marti, Césaire, Fanon, Cabral or C. L. R. James; but all the intellectuals, only a few of whom had been educated in the metropolises or had travelled beyond South Africa, were internationalists versed in the classical texts that had declared war on oppression, and all were familiar with cognate anti-colonial writings. In the many tracts and pamphlets produced by what was then known as the Non-European Unity Movement theorists argued that social revolution in South Africa could only be achieved through a broad-based national liberation struggle; and it was as Marxists that they undertook to examine local class formations and interests within the larger context of an imperialist system. Hence a pathological white South Africa locked into an obsessive racism and seemingly isolated from the outside worlds was understood as tied by a thousand threads to the centres of imperial power which had cynically allowed a comprador regime to pursue phobic theories of biological difference and cultural hierarchy while implementing policies of segregation profitable to domestic and overseas capital.

This is not the place to reminisce about the wit, eccentricities, vanities, contradictions and imperfections of my mentors, to lament that some died in disappointed exile or to regret that others must continue to play the role of dissenters in the new South Africa. Instead I want to recall their intellectual integrity, a refusal of the easy compromises and derisory rewards offered by state and civil institutions to an indigenous elite, a determination to write and disseminate a history of conquest, expropriation, draconian laws and codified insult, an identification with and a respect for the resilience of the wholly dispossessed, and a will to contest the ethos and ideas not only of the polity under which they lived, but of world capitalism. What I especially remember and want to honour are modern subjects whose autonomous modernity had been fashioned in the teeth of a provincial ruling class, and who as participants in an emancipatory project aspired to a universalism still undreamed of in a backward outpost of imperialism.

My thanks to this early education which taught me about the indeterminate relationship between objective structural position, or social interest, and political identification; and to present friends, colleagues and students from whom I have learned much else: David Alderson, Bashir Abu-Manneh, Neville Alexander, Keith Ansell-Pearson, Rashed Araeen, Derek Attridge, David Attwell, Crystal Bartolovich, Michael Bell, Bridget Bennett, Deirdre Levinson Bergson, Allen Bergson, Timothy Bewes, Peter Blegvad, Elleke Boehmer, Tonya Blowers, Tim Brennan, Ellie Byrne, Erica Carter, Kate Chedgoy, Bryan Cheyette, Carli Coetzee, Annie Coombes, Vilashini Coopan, Tim Cribb, David Dabydeen, Jennifer Davis, Arif Dirlik, Allison Donnell, Greg Elliot, Robert Fine, John Fletcher, Maureen Freely, Gill Frith, Keya Ganguly, Walter Goebel, Priyamvada Gopal, the late Peter Gutkind, Azzedine Haddour, Sabry Hafez, Nick Harrison, Nina Hassim, Jim Hicks, John Higgins, Stephen Howe, Peter Hulme, Lyn Innes, Daniel Jewesbury, Russell Celwyn Jones, David Johnson, Leila Kamali, Bernard Klein, Juergen Kramer, Peter Larkin, Graeme MacDonald, Peter Mack, John Marks, Anne McClintock, Scott McCracken, John McLeod, Ambreena Manji, Stephan Meyer, Masao Miyoshi, Shane Moran, David Morley, Rob Nixon, Sarah Nuttall, Thomas Olver, Ken Parker, Graham Pechey, Loredanna Polezzi, Jayne Poyner, Ato Quayson, Rosvita Rauch, Bruce Robbins, Caroline Rooney, Choomki Roy, Carole Rutter, Sonny San Juan, Saskia Schabio, Tiro Sebina, Stephen Shapiro, Wai Chew Sim, Tamara Sivanandan, Kelwyn Sole, Judith Squires, Mark Stein, Nicholas Thomas, Jeremy Treglown, Margaret Tude, Andrea White, Gwen Wilcox, Patrick Williams, Marcus Wood and Robert Young.

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Alice Gutkind generously and with infinite tolerance prepared the essays for publication. To Bill and Rachel Parry I owe long years of sustenance and love, and to Sasha the joy of her recent arrival.

This book is in memory of Michael Sprinker, a loved and loving comrade who will be remembered for his intellectual integrity, political passion and gift for friendship.

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‘Tono-Bungay: the Failed Electrification of the Empire of Light’: *New Formations*, no. 34 (Summer 1998).

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‘Reconciliation and Remembrance’: An earlier and shorter version appeared in *PRETEXTS*, vol. 5, nos 1–2 (1995).

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## **Part One**

# **Directions and dead ends in postcolonial studies**



# 1 Beginnings, affiliations, disavowals

I have collected these thematically interrelated essays written over some fifteen years in the expectation that they will stand or fall as interventions in the volatile and contested postcolonial discussion. As such some of the chapters advance arguments I would no longer present in their initial form or vocabulary, and contain concessions made out of politesse or diffidence to theoretical positions I now consider unsustainable. Times have changed since the earlier of these pieces appeared and the volume and vigour of work advancing Marxist/Marxist positions within postcolonial studies has abated the predominance of a textual idealism. All the same it remains important to urge more historically grounded directions and greater discrimination in the enquiries of an ecumenical and proliferating field where the material impulses to colonialism, its appropriation of physical resources, exploitation of human labour and institutional repression, have receded from view.<sup>1</sup>

Amongst the many sober definitions of the term are those denoting a historical transition, a cultural location, a discursive stance, an epochal condition distinguished by the entry into metropolitan cultures of other voices, histories and experiences,<sup>2</sup> and an achieved transition. For many participants in the discussion, the plenitude of signification in 'postcolonial' has enabled a diversity of studies – and indeed both the subjects of enquiry and the theoretical positions are bewilderingly various. The verso to the advantages of a wide-open explanatory field is an arbitrary and ill-considered usage of the term within and beyond the academy. So capacious is the ground on which participants in the discussion have chosen to operate that one commentator has detached its sphere of enquiry from both the anterior historical situation and its consequences by contending that postcolonial studies is more concerned 'with the lived *condition* of unequal power sharing globally and the self-authorization of cultural, economic, and militaristic hegemony' than 'with a particular historical phenomenon such as colonialism, which may be plotted as a stage of capitalist imperialism'.<sup>3</sup> This refusal to engage with the prior terms which the 'postcolonial' is said to displace or supersede<sup>4</sup> serves to occlude both the capitalist trajectory of the imperial project and the capitalist nature of contemporary globalization.

Without underestimating the importance of much work done under the emblem of postcolonial studies, I want to suggest that some influential critical practices have promoted otiose revisions of colonialism and myopic perspectives on the postcolonial. When English and cultural studies departments took the lead in developing what was to become 'a postcolonial critique', the linguistic turn was in the ascendant within literary theory, and cultural studies was in the process of relinquishing its materialist beginnings

in pursuit of ‘an essentially textualist account of culture’.<sup>5</sup> With the arrival of modes where the analysis of the internal structures to texts, enunciations and sign systems had become detached from a concurrent examination of social and experiential circumstances, the stage was set for the reign of theoretical tendencies which Edward Said has deplored for permitting intellectuals ‘an astonishing sense of weightlessness with regard to the gravity of history’.<sup>6</sup> As postcolonial studies became saturated by premises predicated on the priority of signifying processes, the field emerged as an exemplary instance of such levitation. It is then no accident that despite the active participation of materialists, the discussion has come to be seen as inextricably associated with ‘post’ theories and has appeared concerned to rearticulate colonialism and its aftermath from a theoretical position freed from the categories of political theory, state formation and socio-economic relationships.<sup>7</sup>

The abandonment of historical and social explanation was soon apparent in the work of those postcolonial critics who disengaged colonialism from historical capitalism and re-presented it for study as a cultural event. Consequently an air-borne will to power was privileged over calculated compulsions, ‘discursive violence’ took precedence over the practices of a violent system, and the intrinsically antagonistic colonial encounter was reconfigured as one of dialogue, complicity and transculturation. As Simon During has suggested, ‘Postcolonialism came to signify something remote from self-determination and autonomy. By deploying categories such as hybridity, mimicry, ambivalence . . . all of which laced colonized into colonising cultures, postcolonialism effectively became a reconciliatory rather than a critical, anti-colonialist category’.<sup>8</sup> Because a negotiatory cultural politics deduced from partial (in both senses of the term) readings of colonialism’s texts displaced the record of repressive political processes, the contradictory, volatile but all the same structurally conflictual positions occupied by the heterogeneous categories of colonizer and colonized were muted, and the incommensurable interests and aspirations immanent in colonial situations conjured into mutuality. The vaporizing of conflict in colonial situations by those pre-occupied with uncovering a middle ground has little to do with acknowledging the necessary and often coerced ‘intimacies’ between ruler and ruled, or with understanding the discrepant experiences of the parties as constituting one history. It has everything to do with the dissemination of emollient retrospects lacking in conceptual credibility and amenable to neither intertextual confirmation nor empirical validation. Such vanities dissolve when exposed to the light of investigative studies: ‘at the precise moment (1870–1912) when the labour and products of tropical humanity were being dynamically conscripted into a London-centred world economy’, Mike Davis has written in *Late Victorian Holocausts*, ‘millions died . . . not outside the “modern world-system”, but in the very process of being incorporated into its economic and political structures’.<sup>9</sup>

The transition from the realist model in cultural studies should be seen in the context of a wider shift within social theory itself away from materialist understandings of historical processes and the symbolic order, and towards collapsing the social into the textual.<sup>10</sup> The scanting, indeed denigration, of social explanation has not gone unchallenged: questions have been asked of the widespread determination to ‘institute culture as the authoritative subject of a discourse on social relations’, and more, as ‘the principle, the condition of valid social judgment’,<sup>11</sup> and its pursuits have been faulted for casual analytic procedures, a lack of historical awareness and political consciousness,

and exorbitant claims to providing a total account of the social world.<sup>12</sup> These strategies have led the social theorist Nancy Fraser to urge the restoration of political economy to its proper place in critical theory,<sup>13</sup> while Fredric Jameson has remarked that matters of power and domination are now articulated on levels other than the systemic ones of 'the economic system, the structure of the mode of production, and exploitation as such'.<sup>14</sup>

The larger intellectual context inhabited by postcolonial studies is intimated in the counter-attacks launched by 'post'-critics on antagonists they see as unreconstructed Marxists. On detecting 'an attempt at consensus-building among Left Conservatives . . . founded on notions of the real', a group of such theorists in 1998 theatrically announced: 'A specter is haunting U.S. intellectual life: the specter of Left Conservatism'.<sup>15</sup> Those who in defiance of the current fundamentalism continue to produce Marxist cultural analysis have now to contend with critics prepared to travesty their practices. In her essay 'Merely Cultural', claiming the theoretical high ground for 'the cultural' or the 'post-Marxist' left, Judith Butler insouciantly chastises an 'orthodox Left' for discounting the importance of the cultural and seeking 'to separate Marxism from the study of culture'.<sup>16</sup> But only the most recalcitrantly mechanistic Marxists – and where are they now? – fit Butler's profile. If Marxist critics reject procedures which subordinate the real to the cultural and the semiotic, they take full account of both the cultural and the semiotic as social practices, as the negotiated processes within which subjectivities, cognition and consciousness are made and remade under determinate historical and political conditions. Moreover Lukács, Benjamin, Adorno, Brecht – not to speak of Gramsci, who pioneered the study of culture as a mode of political struggle – remain central to the contemporary Marxist cultural critique, while the irreducible connections between base and superstructure are continuously, and with increasing finesse, being thought and rethought within a Marxism attentive to the notion of a socio-economic *formation* within which a nexus of heterogeneous and contradictory determinations interact.

Of this connection Fredric Jameson has proposed that it is not a 'model', but 'a starting point and a problem, something as undogmatic as an imperative simultaneously to grasp culture in and for itself, but also in relationship to its outside, its content, its context, and its space of intervention and of effectivity' (*The Cultural Turn*, p. 47); and in its defence Terry Eagleton has provocatively written: 'Culture is the child of a one-parent family, having labor as its sole progenitor . . . At least one reason for trying to make some sense of the much derided base/superstructure image is that, in a kind of Copernican iconoclasm, it at least succeeds in powerfully *dislodging* culture from its idealist supremacy'.<sup>17</sup> Perhaps then the charges made against a left orthodoxy may serve to advance the case for restoring 'the real' to critical theory. At the Third International Crossroads in Cultural Studies Conference held at Birmingham, UK, in the summer of 2000, one session called itself 'The (Dis)loyal Opposition: The Return of "Conservative" Cultural Studies'. The abstract lists Marxism as amongst the heresies within present-day cultural studies and asks: 'Have such forms of cultural analysis been vanquished, or have they never gone away? . . . are they the scabrous phantoms of a political consciousness that cultural studies has sought to suppress? . . . What is the future of "conservative" cultural analysis within the trend-fixated field of cultural studies? Who dares to-day to take on the mantles of post-post-Marxism, [post-post]-humanism?'<sup>18</sup>

Recent as the field is, postcolonial studies quickly moved from its beginnings in colonial discourse analysis, which itself was part of the larger investigation undertaken during the 1980s, into systems of representation designed to validate institutional subordination and silence the voices of competitors. All had recourse to the same range of critical paradigms.<sup>19</sup> According to Peter Hulme the disciplinary area known as colonial discourse analysis came into being as a critique of the continental theoretical work it enlisted, and for Hulme it was Edward Said's singular achievement to have brought together 'the rhetorical power of the textual readings offered by discourse analysis . . . with a "real" world of domination and exploitation, usually analyzed by a Marxism hostile to poststructuralism's epistemological scepticism'.<sup>20</sup> Thus, Hulme maintains, Said, who recognized 'the scrupulously ethnocentric nature' of Foucault's undertaking, chose to emphasize the inherent *possibilities* of this work in the interests of extending to a global terrain the concept of discourse with the constant implication of textuality within networks of history, power, knowledge and society.

In freely acknowledging a debt to continental theory, western Marxism and Anglo-Saxon cultural criticism, Said not only interrogated its privileged inclusions and its absences, observing the massive indifference of these modes to colonialism as *constitutive* of metropolitan society and culture, but he also called attention to the failure of their authors to recognize that anti-colonialist critics such as Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon and C. L. R. James had confronted the contradictions and hierarchies in the thought of European modernity long before prominent theorists in Europe, North America and Britain had got round to it.<sup>21</sup> Said's own writings then can be seen to negotiate an alliance between metropolitan theory and the analyses developed by liberation movements, in the process producing elaborations which were not in either source. However, a consideration of what came to constitute the most influential practices within post-colonial theory will suggest the distance travelled from the initial project of unmasking the making and operation of colonial discourses – an undertaking which for all its diversity, shared a concern with the specific historical conditions and social purposes of ideological representation.<sup>22</sup> By no means all the studies that can be subsumed under colonial discourse analysis were attentive to the indigenous systems of thought and hermeneutic traditions which metropolitan writing had mistranslated or traduced; nor were they necessarily concerned with recovering signs of native resistance.<sup>23</sup> All the same, these dimensions were not programmatically ruled out.

This was the effect of privileging immanent critiques of colonial discourse which as one theorist put it, would 'tamper with the authority of Europe's storylines' as the critic who occupies the heritage of imperialism 'intimately but deconstructively' negotiates and attempts to change what s/he necessarily inhabits 'by reversing, displacing and seizing the apparatus of value-coding',<sup>24</sup> or in the words of another, 'attempts to intervene in and interrupt the western discourses on modernity'.<sup>25</sup> When questioning these directions Laura Chrisman has suggested that 'anti-colonial movements . . . become a fundamental element in the theorisation of colonial discourse', which should be construed 'less as a self-determining and pre-determined condition of power/knowledge, and more as a product of struggle and contestation with the oppositional (physical and cultural) presences of the colonized'.<sup>26</sup> This serves as a reminder that it was the writings of liberation movements that had inaugurated the interrogation of colonialism and imperialism. Nonetheless, the relationship of the newer debate to the prior discussion is less intimate than one could expect of a filial relationship; and indeed it appears that

those preoccupied with authoring a 'postcolonial positionality' that is 'neither inside nor outside the history of western domination but in a tangential relation to it'<sup>27</sup> have deliberately distanced themselves from the confrontational inscriptions of the anti-colonialist critique.<sup>28</sup>

However, amongst the numerous retrospects on the beginnings of postcolonial studies Robert Young's recent overview is concerned to situate its practices as operating 'within the historical legacy of Marxist critique on which it continues to draw but which it simultaneously transforms according to the precedents of the great tricontinental anti-colonial intellectual politicians'.<sup>29</sup> The designation of postcolonial criticism as 'a form of activist writing that looks back to the political commitment of the anti-colonial liberation movements and draws its inspiration from them' (*Postcolonialism*, p. 10) is a brave statement in an intellectual environment where so many postcolonial critics are disposed either to ignore, relegate or misconstrue this body of theory. Young however goes on to modulate his account of the field's genesis by introducing poststructuralism as another and metropolitan begetter, contending that 'the colonial apparatus, the imperial machine' is the structure to which poststructuralism is 'post': 'Its deconstruction of the idea of totality was born out of the experience of, and forms of resistance to, the totalising regimes of the late colonial state, particularly French Algeria' (p. 415); and it was, according to Young, Derrida, the Algerian-born Jew 'neither French nor Algerian, always anti-nationalist and cosmopolitan, critical of western ethnocentrism from *Of Grammatology*'s very first page, preoccupied with justice and injustice, [who] developed deconstruction as a programme for intellectual and cultural decolonization within the metropolis' (p. 416).<sup>30</sup>

If Young is not displacing Marxism with deconstruction in accounting for the ancestry of the postcolonial critique, then perhaps he is placing deconstruction amongst 'the great tricontinental anti-colonial intellectual' traditions according to which the Marxist legacy was transformed within postcolonial studies – a possibility supported by Young's description of his own work as an attempt to translate deconstruction's philosophical and literary strategies 'into the more painful framework of colonial and postcolonial history' (p. 412). Young is sanguine about bringing the distinctive theoretical projects into alignment within postcolonial studies; yet the rejection by poststructuralism of the Marxist notions underpinning left anti-colonial thinking – the capitalist system, structural divisions, nationalism, an emancipatory narrative, universalism – suggests that the discrepancy between the informing premises is not readily negotiated. This is a problem observed by Tim Brennan when accounting for the paradoxical position of Marxism within a field where prominent theoretical tendencies have sought to suppress a parentage in anti-colonial liberation movements: 'If in the postcolonial discussion an undifferentiated Marxism has played a frequent role, it has done so usually as an example of how a certain brand of Eurocentrism promoted technological or disciplinary modernity, and therefore, by definition was antagonistic to non-Western forms of emergence'.<sup>31</sup>

All the same and despite disavowals, residues of Marxism can be seen to circulate as if unconsciously and without acknowledgement in the discussion: on the one hand Gramsci's concept of hegemony is pervasive and resonances can be heard both of his notion that the inventions of cultural activity kept the ideological world in movement, and of Raymond Williams's contention that the maintenance of domination depended on 'continuous processes of adjustment, reinterpretation, incorporation, dilution', conducted in relation to 'alternative', 'oppositional', 'residual' and 'emergent' cultural

formations.<sup>32</sup> On the other hand the Marxist analysis of colonialism has been eschewed. At stake is whether the imperial project is historicized within the determining instance of capitalism's global trajectory, or uprooted from its material ground and resituated as a cultural phenomenon whose intelligibility and functioning can be recuperated from tendentious readings of texts. For where 'the politics of the symbolic order' displaces the more demanding politics operating in real-world situations, and a theoretical commitment to rejecting fixed subject-positions as ontologically faulty and dyadic polarities as epistemologically unsound acts to erase structural conflict, there is no space for anti-colonialist discourses which inscribe irreconcilable contest, or for anti-colonialist practices that were manifestly confrontational.

Integral to this revisionist endeavour is the re-presentation of colonialism as transactional, a move that displaces the received perception of conflict with the 'in-between' space of negotiation. If the purpose is to construe colonialism as a complicated, overlapping and entangled event, then this should not imply that its operations are to be understood as necessarily conducted in an interstitial space.<sup>33</sup> The understanding that both interconnection and division were innate to the colonial encounter is to the fore in the work of Nicholas Thomas: while insisting that colonialism's power was never total, its history having been shaped by both indigenous resistance and accommodation, its discourses not only exhausted by its own internal contradictions and debates, but always in unacknowledged traffic with the native's discontents (see *Colonialism's Culture*), Thomas dissociates himself from those paradigms within 'the anthropology of exchange' which he considers to be 'myopically liberal in their models of reciprocity and assumptions of consent'. For what is relegated as mere external contingency, he argues, is that this interchange took place in the 'context of illiberal domination' that was colonialism; and what is overlooked is that the centrality of exchange in everyday practice does not encompass 'the larger field of power relations that constitutes the circumstances of colonized populations'.<sup>34</sup>

A similarly nuanced reading is offered by Annie Coombes: although she is concerned 'to indicate some of the more ambiguous and strategic exchanges in the dialogue between colonizer and colonized' and to explore 'the possibility of an interactive and mutually transformative relationship' between communities that were heterogeneous rather than 'easily unified and straightforwardly oppositional entities', Coombes does not overlook that 'any dialogue said to occur between colonizer and colonized is already circumscribed by the all too tangible violence of imperialism'.<sup>35</sup> This suggests the impediments to colloquy in the context of a coercive colonialism and hence the need to devise other terms to describe transactions where the native was sometimes an informant, always a topic, but rarely, and only in very special circumstances, an interlocutor recognized as an agent of knowledge. The same qualification applies to accounts that would designate as 'cultural dialectics' or 'a politics of reception'<sup>36</sup> the appropriation by the west of Asian and African architectural styles, decorative arts and artifacts, or the successive vogues in Europe for the myths and metaphysics of the east and Egypt. European culture is undeniably 'hybrid', as are all cultures, and certainly metropolitan societies were multiply inflected by traffic with the colonial worlds. But this infiltration of influences should not be represented as a conversation with other cultural forms and cognitive traditions, a phrase that should properly be retained for reciprocal communications.

The inequality and constraints in the exchanges of colonial encounters emerges from Mary Louise Pratt's deployment of the notion of 'transculturation' as a

'phenomenon of the contact zone', a process where 'subordinated or marginalized groups select or invent from materials transmitted to them by a dominant or metropolitan culture', determining 'to varying extents what they absorb into their own, and what they use it for'. But when Pratt asks 'another perhaps more heretical' question, 'how does one speak of transculturation from the colonies to the metropolis', of the ways 'the periphery determines the metropolis', what she is able to offer suggests a greatly attenuated, indeed a solipsistic notion of 'transculturation', since the only instance she cites is 'the latter's obsessive need to present and represent its peripheries and its others to itself'.<sup>37</sup> Thus whereas the peripheries can readily be shown to have appropriated and redeployed materials from the centre, what emerges is that the centre was *unable* to recognize the materials from the periphery as constituting Knowledge.

The poverty of serious discussion on liberation theory in a field devoted to the production of anti-colonial/imperial critiques signals a preference for rewriting a historical project of invasion, expropriation and exploitation as a symbiotic encounter. Previous Marxist and Marxisant enquiries into empire and its consequences had narrated colonialism and imperialism as stemming from capitalism's urge to insert the non- or incipiently capitalist zones into its world-system, had recognized racial domination as an integral component of Europe's expansion, attended to the exploitation of labour in the extraction of raw materials, and observed the construction of a minimal and strategic infrastructure and the establishment of an apparatus of administrative coercion.<sup>38</sup> Many of these matters had already been addressed by Marxist activists who were faced with organizing mass movements in overwhelmingly agrarian societies divided by custom, language and religion, lacking a proletariat and harbouring collaborationist elements amongst traditional regional hierarchies and more recently constituted comprador elites. Hence theorists addressed the anomalies of combined and uneven capitalist development in their regions, analysed the class formations consequent on the introduction or acceleration of new modes of production, considered the possibilities of anti-colonial alliances within which different interests and tendencies intersected and clashed, sought to form vanguard parties that were not disconnected from the people and local forms of resistance, and devised programmes for non-coercive development that would avoid installing capitalist social relations. Few of the problems engaging radical anti-colonial thinkers figure in the contemporary postcolonial discussion of the colonial past.

The recuperation of liberation theory as a revolutionary project for overcoming both colonialist social institutions and archaic indigenous forms seems essential at a time when postcolonial critics traduce its positions, negate its analysis of exploitative and conflictual conditions, and ignore its ethical analysis of colonialism's illegitimacy. In aspiring to transform material and existential conditions, liberation movements did not seek to resurrect a pre-colonial past or imitate a capitalist present; and because alternative systems still stood in the way of capitalism's accelerating global reach, popular Marxist struggles, despite the recalcitrance of pre-capitalist oligarchies and the hostility of an emergent bourgeoisie, looked forward to the immanent possibility of constructing socialist societies. This capacity to disengage from the past and imagine a transcendence of the existing social order makes liberation theory an original and indigenous project of modernity, neither enforced nor gifted by a predatory colonialism which had

institutionalized economic and social retardation to further its own interests and inhibit colonial peoples from experiencing and conducting themselves as modern subjects.

If some postcolonial critics have intimated their recoil from the thinking and temperament of liberation theory, others, whether because of doctrinal aversion or willed ignorance, have dismissed anti-colonialism as always nativist, essentialist, atavistic and wedded to pre-modern ideologies. What is overlooked is that notions of communal ethnic identity were invoked in the interests of mobilizing populations against their foreign rulers, while cultural heritages denigrated and despised by colonialism were affirmed as authentic traditions. Such recuperations, however, were not made in the interest of discovering uncontaminated origins or claiming ethnic purity, and were remote from any attempt to retrieve a past known to be irrecoverable. Even Fanon, the most modernist of theorists, recommended the construction of an insurgent black subjectivity while offering a perspective of a future beyond ethnicity – for Fanon decolonization ‘sets out to change the order of the world’.<sup>39</sup> Nor should disenchantment with post-independence regimes blind critics to the import of liberation struggles conducted in the name of nationalism, an ideology and practice which prominent participants in the postcolonial discussion denigrate in the interest of valorizing hybrid, deterritorialized and diasporic forms of consciousness that are apparently uninflected and untroubled by ethnicity or class. The referents of this configuration suggest urbane sophisticates voluntarily dislocated from their natal lands but productively inhabiting capital cities, who may or may not be actively engaged in constructing practical critiques of either metropolitan or more distant infamies, or in putting into practice their compassion for the exploited and insulted of the earth. However, as if extrapolating from their own situations,<sup>40</sup> advocates of the unhomely condition have proleptically proposed a multitudinous category of the dispossessed who will/must come to desire and attain deliverance from the shackles of nation and place. The most enthusiastic proponents of this vision are not postcolonialists but Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, whose work (discussed in Chapter 6) impinges directly on the discussion of what the postcolonial has come to signify for many working within the field.

Moreover a disavowal of nationalism overlooks the distinction between imperialist and anti-imperialist nationalist problematics, the former being an appropriative nationalism taking the form of ‘projects of unity on the basis of conquest and economic expediency’, whereas the latter are oriented towards the task of reclaiming community from the fragmentation and denigration attendant on colonialism.<sup>41</sup> Yet so commonplace is the charge of a retrogressive nationalism inherent in anti-colonial movements<sup>42</sup> that it seems vital to specify and contest such tendencies where they are evident, in order that informed discussion can proceed on the more consequential differences between moderate nationalist movements for independence within the status quo, and which were directed at entrenching the hegemony of the native bourgeoisie, and revolutionary anti-capitalist nationalisms. Meanwhile in scorning emancipatory expectations as naive and self-righteous, and liberation movements as self-interested, critics have rendered nugatory the joining of intelligible and still viable indigenous resources and age-old traditions of colonial resistance with the ethical horizons and utopian reach of socialism.

In accounting for the arrest of the revolutionary energies that had once driven liberation movements, proper weight must be given to sabotaging by the powerful