

Étude critique / Review Essay

Strangers in Paradise: Ideography, Metageography, and Theosophy in Modern Discourses on Colonialism

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Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds. — *The Post-colonial Studies Reader*. London: Routledge, 1995. Pp. xvii, 526.

Jack Forbes — *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples*. Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993. Pp. xiv, 195.

Gyan Prakash, ed. — *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Post-colonial Displacements*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995. Pp. viii, 352.

Robert J. C. Young — *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race*. London: Routledge, 1995. Pp. xiii, 236.

SUCH HAS BEEN the growth in the volume of post-colonial discourse and discourses about discourses over the past few decades that few readers will have escaped some acquaintance at least with the works of Frantz Fanon, Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Anthony Pagden, and others. For those as yet unfamiliar with the new paradigm, the 86 examples of post-colonial writing and critiques from more than 50 authors collected in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* provide a fairly comprehensive introduction. It is edited by the authors who penned *The Empire Writes Back* in 1989. From the vantage point of Australia, their selection of texts reflects an important perspective on Asia. Their country has in recent decades received great numbers of Asian immigrants, simultaneously extending its own “colonial” tentacles into Indonesia and south Asia generally. Africa and the

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Caribbean, however, are hardly neglected, nor is the former colony of Canada.¹

Among the readings are some classics (in addition to the writers mentioned above are Chinua Achebe, George Lamming, Wilson Harris, Jacques-Stephen Aléxis, Edward Brathwaite, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o) and others rather obscure. Hip authors like Homi Bhabba, Abdul JanMohamed, Kwame Anthony Appiah, and Chandra Talpade Mohanty are included, as are more conventional (read respectable) contributors such as Michael Dash, José Rabasa, Peter Hulme, Paul Carter, Alfred Crosby, and Gauri Viswanathan. Several of the authors are unknown to the reviewer, for which deficit he asks their indulgence.

The texts are arranged in 14 sections each dealing with a theme in post-colonial theory: central issues and debates, universality and difference, representations and resistance, postmodernism and post-colonialism, nationalism, hybridity, ethnicity and indigeneity, feminism and post-colonialism, language, body and performance, history, place, education, and production and consumption. The organization is rational enough. The topics suggest the wide-ranging, primarily literary and cultural focus of post-colonialism, its opening nonetheless to history, geography, and economics, and its intersection with late twentieth-century feminism and postmodernism. Approximately three-quarters of the selections are from works published since 1985.

The *Reader* offers the convenience of making classic statements in the field readily accessible, even if the cropping and excerpting are excessive and self-defeating. Many of the writings, like Edward Said's "Orientalism", are condensed to a few pages.² There is, one may surmise, an attempt to embrace too much. What point can there be in viewing two to five pages of a lengthy essay or book? As a pedagogical tool, this sort of collection is both limited and overextended in scope and sheer volume. One would hope that excerpts of some of the best passages from some of the best recent works will encourage reading them in their entirety.

In its preponderance of literary criticism, the *Reader* does reflect how the essential phenomenon of post-coloniality recently emerged. A body of critical writing — formerly the province of historians, social scientists, and insurgent third-world nationalists — was, in effect, hijacked during the past two decades by the literature profession. To collapse a brief history, a school of thought popularized since the early 1970s in political science and known by such rubrics as "dependency theory", "world-systems analysis", "neo-colonial economics", or "development studies", including various

1 Robert Kroetsch, "Unhiding the Hidden", and Denis Lee, "Writing in Colonial Space", in Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin, eds., *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* (London: Routledge, 1995), pp. 394–401.

2 *Ibid.*, pp. 87–91.

takes on the political economy of neo-colonial polities, became, with little transition or obstruction, the province of the literati.³

How this appropriation occurred would take us far afield. Much can be explained by the key transitional figure, Michel Foucault, uncritically acclaimed patron saint of deconstruction, of which post-colonial criticism is a branch.⁴ That Foucault proceeded from an intellectual heritage utterly foreign to North American academics and wrote in a language few of them use with facility, or that his historical “method” involved analysis of embarrassingly few primary sources, exerted no brake on his timely arrival to fill the void.⁵ Foucault rejects western ontological discourse, claiming like Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari that all social totalities are metaphysical constructs.⁶ There is no general theory of causality. He emphasizes the political, which would seem to abstract agency from geography and history. The son of a surgeon, he dissects the relations of power for no particular ideal — perhaps time on his hands. Despite its heuristic merits, Foucault’s method is historically deficient. His sources and evidence are selective and distorted, often approaching plagiarism. As a reprise to Nietzsche, he is no humanist. Such anomalies register little irony among the literati.

An uneasy truce on the part of disciplines that have long considered the world “out there” their preserve (geography, archaeology, philology, anthropology, history) allow the literati to proceed unchallenged along the path of deconstruction. They are the vanguard: bold in their neo-relativist perspective, trouncing Eurocentrism’s impertinence by disclosing the multiplicity of historical experiences and subjective, localized meanings. Can human communities across the globe or back through time, they ask, share *any* common experiences or cognitive processes? Each group is thought to have its own reality — inaccessible to outside observers. In studying, cataloguing, speaking of, or writing about and for peoples outside his own group, the male western anthropologist cannot avoid “objectifying” a voiceless “other”. His mode of observation — scientific and masculine — constitutes little more than an invasion of the “other” by a foreign “expert’s” gaze (intellectual imperialism).

3 For a selection of this literature by scholars such as Andre Gunder Frank, Immanuel Wallerstein, and Eric Wolf, see Sing C. Chew and Robert Denemark, eds., *The Underdevelopment of Development: Essays in Honor of Andre Gunder Frank* (Thousand Oaks, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1996).

4 Examples of the influence of Foucault in *The Post-colonial Studies Reader* are to be found in the excerpts from Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?”, pp. 25–28; Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders”, pp. 32–33; Edward Said, “Orientalism”, p. 88; Stephen Slemon, “Unsettling the Empire: Resistance Theory for the Second World”, p. 108; Trinh T. Minh-ha, “No Master Territories”, p. 216; Terrie Goldie, “The Representation of the Indigene”, p. 232; and Margery Fee, “Who Can Write as Other?”, p. 244.

5 Jose Guilherme Merquior, *Foucault* (London: Fontana, 1985).

6 Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus: Capitalism and Schizophrenia*, trans. R. Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen Lane, pref. by Michel Foucault (1977; Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), pp. 116–122, and *What is Philosophy? (European Perspectives)*, trans. H. Tomlinson and E. Burchell (1991; New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), chap. 2, pp. 35–60, at p. 36, n. 2.

While this perspective affords a sharp analytical tool for dissecting European discourse and the *mentalité* of imperialism, it is threatened by its own logic to devolve into solipsism — reducing, as it does, any attempt to learn about the world to a variety of “centrism”. But that’s the good news. The bad news is that the literati are utterly unqualified by training to analyze “colonial” writing, as such art is “embedded” in colonial history. Their project is flawed in three fundamental ways. First, the analysis of a literature outside its context is incompatible with the deconstructive method itself. Secondly, evidence of colonial enterprise, and especially its local reception, is collected in musty archives and is usually inaccessible to all but those trained in a combination of palaeography, philology, historiography, cartography, multiple languages, and demographic techniques. At the very least, immersion in the published literature of a particular post-colony is required to begin to assess its literature. Thirdly, and most devastatingly, though many post-colonial critics are themselves British commonwealth Asians, the daunting history of the East, especially as it defies at many points the assumed exceptional character of western development and experience, has little comparative or other effect on their views or work.

Though these writers often identify gross biases in standard Eurocentric historiography, they are content, like Foucault, to raise a narrow-gauge critique and are loath (and unprepared) to move on, to plumb the experience of Asia itself to erect an alternative model of global history. It is one thing to discredit colonialist, or historicist, “knowledge” by exposing the dominant popular biases of the time, and quite another to improve upon the vast literature through original research and theory. Colonial historiography, post-colonial critics seem to assume, has reached completion. In fact, it has only been underway for a few decades. Ignorance of the colonial scene throughout much of Africa and the Americas was commonplace among practitioners of “history” until the present generation. Classic texts focused closely on the political level or the micro-case study, often with little or no notion of the local or regional economic situation. Ignorance of Asia, given less accessibility to records and the difficulty of languages, can only be imagined.

The locus of the *littérateurs*’ critique of colonialism and the imperialist gaze is perforce a large body of writing, presumably produced through the prism of imperial positioning. Usually British, these works, often “classics” of the western cannon, are revealed to harbour certain unconscious regressive (racist, sexist, class-based) assumptions regarding the exotic overseas world of dusky slaves and gargantuan flora — notions found “embedded” in *le texte*. As Robert Young argues in the book that is discussed below at greater length, racism and modern science have grown up together, and academe has injected racism into every cranny of the disciplines.⁷

⁷ Robert J. C. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture and Race* (London: Routledge, 1995).

So, *cherchez et vous trouverez*. We are numbly apprised, via a sort of inquisitorial “index”, of a wide range of transgressions, sins of “incorrectness” in Shakespeare, Jane Austen, Dickens, Twain, and a panoply of writers “formerly known as liberal”. The parameters of the moral universe supposed by the inhabitants of post-structuralist literary criticism are not explicitly given, but original sin has no standing in such rarified spheres. Virtually all bourgeois and some early modern writers, we discover, were wittingly or unawares agents or propagandists of racism and empire. These include at one time or other Lawrence, Eliot, Lewis, Dickens, Jung, Arnold, Ruskin, Tennyson, Carlyle, Mill, Huxley, Spencer, Darwin, Renan, Disraeli — and the list is indefinitely extensible.

Although some of the authors discussed here work in the general field of colonial history and not with literary criticism as such, they all reflect positions developed in post-colonial literary analysis. Rather than contextualize these and try the reader’s patience, let suffice the disclaimer that terms such as colony, colonizer, colonist, and colonial have meant many things over the past and refer to a wide spectrum of phenomena. Moreover, there is nothing novel about the anti-colonial critique. Its genealogy in European literature is extensive,⁸ not to mention that today’s post-colonial literary criticism has shed neither the ideography of Eurocentrism nor the reductionism of Foucault’s parents, Nietzsche and Freud. As Gayatri Spivak forewarns, the critic of post-coloniality tends inexorably to reenact the posture of the nineteenth-century colonizers.⁹

Anti-colonialism is at least as old as its nemesis. Exceedingly virulent in the sixteenth century, it resurged with a furor two centuries later amidst the critical milieu of Newton’s orderly universe, plowing the ground for abolition first of the intercontinental slave trade, then of the domestic institution itself. The way was thus opened for meliorative measures affecting the working classes of Europe. In our century, the sources of colonialism, neo-colonialism, and internal colonialism — of “combined and uneven development”,¹⁰ — were sought by an obscure Sardinian inmate of Italian prisons between 1926 and 1937. In “The Southern Question” Antonio Gramsci posed two relevant theses: first, that determinants of geography underlay the stark social contrasts between northern and southern Italy; and second, that “culture” was central to any discussion of political contests for spatial hegemony.¹¹

8 Marcel Merle, comp., *L’anticolonialisme européen, de las Casas à Karl Marx* (Paris: Armand Colin, 1969).

9 Gayatri Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, eds., *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

10 Michael Lowy, *The Politics of Combined and Uneven Development: The Theory of Permanent Revolution* (London: NLB, 1981).

11 Antonio Gramsci, “Some Aspects of the Southern Question” in *Prison Notebooks* (trans. *Quaderni del carcere*), in Quentin Hoare, ed., *Antonio Gramsci: Selections from Political Writings 1921–1926* (New York: International Publishers, 1978), pp. 441–462.

Gramsci was among the first to theorize the meaning of “colonialism”, or the dialectical relationship of underdevelopment to capitalist development, and to take seriously the production of “culture” in the process of regional differentiation and the creation of asymmetries of power. Though pirated widely, Gramsci’s work was not available in English or in comprehensive form until recently. Nevertheless, his influence on “culture studies” is comparable to that of Walter Benjamin. A product of one of Europe’s more remote peripheries, he proposed concepts of hegemony, alterity, popular culture, and state formation that are prominent in post-colonial rhetoric.¹²

A special consciousness of the language of colonial relationships is characteristic of the post-colonial perspective. The conflation of geographical space with epiphenomena like language and race is a historical constant, operating freely until dethroned around the period between 1936 and 1945. Jack Forbes has shown the way, pointing out that academic history and even ethnography have, for centuries, taken as legitimate social categories verbally recorded phenotypical descriptions of non-European or non-European-appearing people the world over. He insists that uncritical acceptance of terms such as *negro*, *mulatto*, *loro*, and “half-breed” first by scholars, then by the public and pundits, has generated a mass perception of the history of human migration and demographic behaviour that is quite simply — false. Elaborating this case alone justifies his unusual book.¹³

Research on pre-Columbian migration bears out Forbes’s point, which he establishes by illustrating intercontinental contacts via ocean currents many centuries before Columbus and other “cannibals” (his phrase). He churns the dictionaries of the European imperial powers in Asia, Africa, and the Americas to consider the inconsistencies, ambiguities, and changes in usage over time of racial/ethnic terminology. His gleaning of tomes of European language dictionaries is commendable, though the effort generates a certain uneasiness in the reviewer. In truth, such an undertaking, embracing six continents and their respective contacts with *les autres* over five centuries, and the consequent linguistic developments — such as ethno-taxonomies — cannot presume to comprehensiveness.

It would seem the author’s intention is to upset the cart of complacency and alert his readers to the process by which compound categories of European pseudo-ethnic terminology — once used to classify, contain, and control non-Europeans — have fixed certain popular perceptions, wildly distorting the ethnographic reality of the past half millennium. His especial case is that of American Indians, who got lost in the mist as twentieth-century America invested all its mythic capital in the construction of the

12 *Ibid.*; Walter Adamson, *Hegemony and Revolution: A Study of Gramsci’s Political and Cultural Theory* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980).

13 Jack Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans: The Language of Race and the Evolution of Red-Black Peoples* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993).

black-white, double-bind model of society that has effectively served the political system as a permanent diversion. Rather than a country of three or four “races”, the United States (the South especially) has been portrayed by its literati, and the celluloid image-makers who followed, as a land dependent for its hyperreality upon a black-white polarity. As Forbes insists, the reality is quite different: the South is a country where native, African, and European have long vied for control of discrete spaces but have formed one society. Indians did not “disappear” from the map, but were incorporated in large numbers into both black and white populations. High proportions of whites and blacks alike claim native ancestry today. Rather than a land of two races — Yonknapatawpha — the United States is actually home to four groups: whites, blacks, Indians, and a large, unacknowledged sector of mixed descendants combining the genes of all three.

Given the focus of Forbes’s study on the evolution of a specific group of ethnic-based terms from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century, one wonders how the author can overlook, or simply ignore, terminology that would seem germane. One example is the ambiguous term “creole”, a highly adaptive moniker which has generated a substantial discourse of its own. Another is the French colonial term *métis*, mentioned only once or twice.

Not only does *créole*, found throughout the world (most often in linguistics) and commonplace in the western hemisphere and Europe, fit neatly into the time-frame of his book; it would seem both to signify and to embody the very ethno-historical process Forbes seeks to deconstruct. As much as any of the interesting terms in his lexicon, if not more so, it fits his stated intention to pry behind the popular meanings of the ethnic categories he examines. The changing sense and usage of *créole* over five centuries, in either francophone or Iberic zones, requires a large book, and yet another on its use in the Caribbean alone. Given the current interest in *créolité* manifested in a number of recent global congresses and their published proceedings, the uses of this term, whether in Africa, Australia, Hawaii, or the lower Mississippi, surely fall within the purview of *Africans and Native Americans*.¹⁴

And what of *métis*? Does it not recall a race of people of substantial demographic distribution in central Canada and over much of middle America in the last century, not to say of tremendous cultural importance as representatives of a social process that repopulated the entire Americas (*mestizaje*) in varying degrees following the genocidal depopulation of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries? Highly conspicuous in Mexico, less so in Canada, and nearly invisible in the United States, the process of

14 “Creole Cultures in Latin America and the Caribbean”, colloquium organized by Latin American Studies Program, University of Delaware, April 28–29, 1995; Francis Byrne and John Holm, eds., *Atlantic Meets Pacific: A Global View of Pidginization and Creolization* (Amsterdam: J. Benjamins Pub. Co., 1992).

repopulation through race mixture since initial European-Amerindian contacts can hardly fall outside the author's concerns. Nor is there mention of the suppressed debate among Canadian ethnohistorians as to the Indian background of the modern *Québécois*: a case that surely makes Forbes's point.¹⁵

The historic use of *métis* in the Caribbean and North America, for which there is a tantalizing literature, is vital to Forbes's urgent exploration of native persistence in the American hemisphere. Though the nexus specified is between Africans and American Indians, the *métis* phenomenon is too significant to be neglected. Far more might be said for *créole*, which clearly marks with a large stroke that historical point at which three races converge and issue in an entirely new and long sustainable culture, yet one only hinted at by Forbes.¹⁶ Rather than explore the implications of colonial social taxonomies to their ultimate potential, Forbes prefers to remain narrowly etymological.

The term *Indio* appears once, with no discussion, yet it is the key to the author's endeavour. His emphasis seems pronouncedly Hispanic or Iberian, which may be justified given the preponderance of Indians (he prefers "Americans") in the post-colonial Latin American area. It is odd, therefore, that he manages to miss the possibilities in the ambiguous application of this term since the sixteenth century. Who was *Indio* to an Hispanic observer of the sixteenth to nineteenth centuries? When did Indians begin to refer to themselves this way? For Spanish colonizers the term included "Americans", Pacific islanders, and Asians of every variety. The Hispanic perception that *Indios* represented the broadest possible geographical distribution of Asiatic peoples is, in itself, rather interesting — if not noteworthy.

Given the three lapses just observed (*créole*, *métis*, *indio*), it is difficult not to find Forbes's study eccentric or quirky. But there's more. Given his Iberian emphasis, some consideration of the Islamic background of Iberian institutions, laws, social praxis, and ethno-racial language would also seem pertinent. Despite the long and profound Islamic imprint on Iberia, Forbes barely acknowledges the eight centuries and more of Christian-Muslim contact, despite a growing specialized literature.¹⁷ Islamic impact on Iberian language, religion, and material culture and its extension via colonialism to Asia and the Americas marked the character of Ibero-American slavery

15 See Olive Dickason's various, singlehanded efforts to open the matter in *The Myth of the Savage in the New World* (Alberta: University of Alberta Press, 1984); David Long and Olive Dickason, eds., *Visions of the Heart: Canadian Aboriginal Issues* (Toronto: Harcourt Brace Canada, 1996); *Canada's First Nations: A History of Founding Peoples from Earliest Times* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992); *The Native Imprint: The Contribution of First Peoples to Canada's Character*, 2 vols. (Athabasca, Alta.: Athabaskan University Educational Enterprises, 1995).

16 Forbes, *Africans and Native Americans*, p. 190.

17 Patricia Seed, *Ceremonies of Possession in Europe's Conquest of the New World, 1492–1640* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

and social construction generally. Due to Islam's inclusiveness and non-hierarchical structure, the taxonomies the Spanish and Portuguese inherited from it tended to be broadly cultural and religious, rather than biological (scientific) or physical. Hispanic terms referent to "nations" or to Christian versus non-Christian — *gente sin razón, bárbaro* — were not displaced by explicitly racial terms until the late eighteenth or early nineteenth centuries. Guaman Poma de Ayala, an early seventeenth-century Andean chronicler, took pains in a memorial to Philip III to remind the monarch that the Indians were quite distinct from Turks and Muslims, with whom they were invidiously identified and compared by administrators.¹⁸

When did phenotypical referents take on "racial" rather more than cultural significance? Where and why did that happen, and in response to what? Forbes does not consider these questions. In large measure he develops his central thesis simply by peeling off the absurd pseudo-ethnic categories that have punctuated European narratives, historiography, and popular ideas. The implied query is unaddressed — what role did the ethnic colonial lexicon play in metropolitan epistemology, or vice versa? It took nineteenth-century science and pseudo-science to rationalize what today is associated with pathological forms of chauvinism (Forbes does not use the word) and racism in its many permutations. Current media usage of the terms "racism" and "prejudice", by the way, makes the rhetoric that Forbes examines seem highly rational in contrast. Therapeutic officiousness contrives ever new categories of bureaucratic-based melioration, carried along on its own argot. We are apprised when an act is "racially motivated" or when a "hate crime" occurs, recalling Jean Baudrillard's observation:

Racism is modern. Previous races or cultures were ignored or eliminated, but never under the sign of universal Reason. There is no criterion of man, no split from the Inhuman, there are only differences with which to oppose death. But it is our undifferentiated concept of man that gives rise to [racial] discrimination.... Racism did not exist in this period [the sixteenth century] when the Idea of Man does not yet cast its shadow over all the metaphysical purity of Western culture. ...it is due to the extent of our progress that we have since become racists, and not only towards Indians and cannibals.¹⁹

It has long been assumed (and is popularly thought) that imperialism, colonialism, and racism have their source in nature itself (an essentialist prejudice), though the era that began in 1870 managed to rationalize imperialism more thoughtfully and to formulate racist doctrines more convincingly than had any past era. In contrast, early modern empires were not based on

18 Felipe Guamán Poma de Ayala, *El Primer Nueva Crónica de buen gobierno*, 3 vols., eds. John Murra and Rolena Adorno (Madrid: Historia 16, 1987).

19 Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), pp. 70–71.

scientific or even comprehensive theories. The vastly comprehensive French *Code noir* (1682–1685), for example, is a monument to contradiction and ambiguity.²⁰ We do well to distinguish between colonialisms of the “primitive” variety and the modern form decried by Baudrillard. The latter — modern imperialism — is distinguished by its coherent picture of human hierarchies, its con-game self-confidence, and the remarkably small coterie of arrogant egos who organized, promoted, and propagandized it.

Uncertain of religious faith, of the progress of history, of morality, politics, science, social values, economy, the meaning of meaning, even of how sexes differ, today’s critics of colonialist discourse live in an age of near total insecurity. Little consensus may be adduced. Post-colonial writing thus posits the scrutinies of an age of disintegration against the mean certainties of “scientific” imperialism and the “otherworldly” rationalism of early modern commercial capitalism. Let us not miss the irony that the “isms” of the past century and a half, based in collective reliance on science to tell truths, now lie more shattered than any Christian dogma. A similar dissipation of Christian consensus at the outset of European expansion made racialism a necessary marker of boundaries.

The spirit that animates the post-colonial critique is also an expression of the frustrated utopianism of the 1960s, when many of its practitioners came of age. It suggests a sublimated rebellion against the consumerist orchestration of contemporary social reproduction, and an alienation from the global consumerist regime’s infinite capacity to transform its opposition into yet more consumables. To break the cycle requires an ideological posture undoing all shared strands of consciousness. As with the explosion of slavery literature in the 1960s and 1970s, post-coloniality is in part a response to, and evidence of, western academia’s own subjugation. As the failures of Marxism in Europe since the Great Depression brought on the nihilism of Foucault, the sputtering of the “revolutionary” sixties prepared the disappointed to embrace textual surgery and studied detachment.²¹

Many of the issues raised by a critical reading of Forbes’s book are explicitly analyzed in the 12 essays edited in the Prakash anthology, several of which deserve high praise for coherence and significance.²² In Gyan Prakash’s introduction we find several important statements, among them the assertion that the revision of liberal historiography “from the place of otherness is yet to occur”. But is the particular practice to which he refers

20 Louis Sala-Molins, *Le Code noir, ou le Calvaire de Canaan* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1987).

21 Guido Podestà, “An Ethnographic Reproach to the Theory of the Avant Garde: Modernity and Modernism in Latin America and the Harlem Renaissance”, *MLA Notes*, vol. 106 (March 1991), pp. 395–422; Vittorio Cotesta, *Linguaggio, Potere, Individuo* (Bari: Dedalo libri, 1979).

22 Gyan Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Post-colonial Displacements* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995). The essays were originally presented at the 1990–1992 Davis Center colloquia at Princeton.

(historicizing) part of the intellectual repertoire or tradition of “other” cultures? Must they respond to the-world-as-given in a western, alien fashion? To replicate local history from the local perspective could be highly informative, but rarely do “subalterns” choose to express themselves in this fashion. Does it follow from this “difference” that they cannot speak? Is this notion patronizing? Subalterns are urged to lift “the dead weight of the colonial past”, yet we all recognize that the colonial relationship is neither dead nor past.²³

The key idea inspiring this collection is that “the violence of colonialism emerges as the central truth of modern capitalist civilization, not its peripheral and unnecessary sideshow.” Moreover, one must “question the leaden understanding of colonialism as history: history with a clear trajectory”, as this view is complicit with western domination. “To pry open the reading of colonialism from this prison-house of historicism” is the express goal.²⁴ This position opens an old debate. As an unqualified assertion freighted with economic and social data that is implied rather than demonstrated, it cannot stand, I fear. Among problems the book addresses are “enclosed fields of knowledge” including geography. Yet, if there is an open-ended discipline, historical geography it is. The most unsettling critique to date of Eurocentrism in “universalizing” schema and historiographies issues not from the precincts of *littérateurs*, but from empirical geography.²⁵

Prakash discloses that the contributors to his anthology *inter alia* “reinterpret identity as *a process of ambivalent identification*”²⁶ (a secret well known for centuries), and that they even undertake “cross historical analysis of texts with textual examination of records”.²⁷ Actually, several of these writers skip the records and proceed directly to the analysis. Lastly, the concluding phrase referring to “the precipitous basis of colonial power” causes some pause.²⁸ One wonders which European empire answers to this characterization: the Portuguese (550 years in southern Africa, 400 years in Brazil)? The Spanish (400 years in the Philippines and Cuba, and 300 years in mainland Spanish America)? What is meant by “precipitous” in the long career of colonies?

In the opening essay, appropriately, Edward Said fires the first salvo with the point that comparative literature, when it began its career at Columbia

23 *Ibid.*, p. 5.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 6.

25 Martin Lewis and Karen Wigen, *The Myth of Continents: A Critique of Metageography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), wherein Toynbee, Braudel, Wallerstein, McNeill, Stavrianos, Roberts, Huntington, and Gunder Frank all get a come-uppance. Exceptions are the late Marshall Hodgson and Jerry Bentley. On Hodgson’s exceptionality, see Anthony Black, “Decolonization of Concepts”, *Journal of Early Modern History*, vol. 1, no. 2 (February 1997), pp. 55–70.

26 Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, p. 11 (italics are mine).

27 *Ibid.*, p. 12.

28 *Ibid.*, p. 6, paragraph 1.

at the end of the last century, operated on “the notion that Europe and the United States together were the centre of the world [and that] their literatures were the ones most worth studying”. One wonders how the situation could have been otherwise. Then an anachronism: Austen and Mill are charged with flippantly whitewashing the agonies of the West Indian slaves.²⁹ Then American readers are exhorted to address and inform their government concerning “our relationship to others — other cultures, states, histories, experiences” to avoid replicating “what France, Britain, Spain, Portugal, Holland and Germany, did before us”.³⁰ Is it at all curious that a cultivated intellectual first decries the iniquities of British imperialism and then, with full knowledge of and experience with the American agenda in Palestine, supposes that the American masses have some influence in a foreign policy about which they are informed, if at all, only by fragments, long after the fact? It is somewhat disingenuous to call upon Americans to learn from the colonial post-mortem experienced by Europe. The contemporary American empire makes those of the sixteenth through nineteenth centuries look like Disney creations. The firepower delivered upon the hapless polities of Vietnam, Salvador, Panama, or Iraq, and the attendant loss of civilian life and limb, would cause the likes of King Beaudouin, Cecil Rhodes, or even Attila the Hun to blow their lunch. Is it Billy Graham or a chair-holding scholar writing this?

The chapter by Steven Feierman, a leading Africanist and deft theoretician, turns European historiography on its side, if not its head.³¹ Revealing the cracks in the universalizing texts of Arnold Toynbee, Fernand Braudel, Pierre Chaunu, Bartolomé Bennassar, and others in relation to their incorporation of Africa in their grand schemes of world history, he finds they may not seriously consider Africa and cannot therefore meet the broad criteria they claim. The observation surely merits consideration. Eurocentrism persists. On the other hand, since capitalism did not emerge in Africa, nor did the continent exert much influence on the evolution of European material culture or economy until the advent of the slave trade (which often was uneconomical), how can it be fit into a world history within a single framework, as admirably attempted by Braudel *et al.*? Africa yet remains peripheral to the world-system, however defined. The “sacred medicine of governing”, however significant to the Lemba in Kongo, is likewise irrelevant, and does not by its exclusion constitute evidence of deficiency in the methods of Chaunu or Bennassar, whose combined learn-

29 Edward Said, “Secular Interpretation, the Geographical Element, and the Methodology of Imperialism”, in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, p. 36.

30 *Ibid.*, pp. 32–35.

31 Steven Feierman, “Africa in History: The End of Universal Narratives” in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 40–65, wherein a parallelism seems gratuitously posed between African and “other” historical narratives.

ing is formidable. Though Feierman effectively shows the significance of long-term trends in trade and political processes within discrete African states, their import is confined to the continent.

Certainly “historians must open world history to Africa”, and in fact they have begun to do so in the past two decades.³² Nevertheless, the contention that “narratives originating in Africa must be given full weight alongside those originating in Europe” is somehow not self-evident. Processes internal to Africa have no necessary bearing on general global structures or narratives of history, which are, after all, accounts of a system to which many areas have been peripheral and marginal for long periods.

Next, Joan Dayan has produced a narrative that threatens to deconstruct not only Haitian political mythology, but the reader as well.³³ To allow the silent popular voices of the Haitian past (in this instance the nineteenth century) to counter the bourgeois *mulâtre* historians who reconstructed Haiti’s past from safe quarters on the Left Bank seems at first an interesting endeavour. Useful and informative as it is to dredge up scarce references to voodooists and peasant women fighting the revolution, the exact point gets obscured in a barrage of poetic verbiage that seems to go nowhere in particular. Dayan focuses on Jean-Jacques Dessalines, treated gingerly by early nineteenth-century accounts due to his popular excesses (overlooking the necessity of guerrilla ferocity) and the repugnance he elicited in bourgeois historians. A gory passage recounts the details of his assassination and mutilation in 1806 and the folk memory attached to that event. Popular religion takes centre stage in both the revolutionary war and the subsequent series of political regimes that sought to contain or marginalize the peasants from western influence and local sources of wealth.

Dayan is certainly correct that historical literature, by either Haitians or foreigners, has not as a genre looked realistically at the phenomena that have been Haitian society, economy, politics — including the key place of peasant women in maintaining what order has been precariously established over *la longue durée*. Surely there is an entirely new history, a thorough reconceptualization to be uncovered through the study of women’s experience in such a protracted and internationally repercussive event as the Haitian revolution (1789–1804). Despite the worthy goal, the author’s

32 For central and southern Africa, in English alone, see, *inter alia*, John K. Thornton, *Africa and Africans in the Making of the Atlantic World, 1400–1680* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), and *The Kingdom of the Kongo, Civil War and Transition, 1641–1718* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983); Wyatt MacGaffey, “Dialogues of the Deaf: Europeans on the Atlantic Coast of Africa” in Stuart Schwartz, ed., *Implicit Understandings: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), pp. 249–267; the works of Joseph Miller, June Hilton, Susan Broadhead, Phyllis Martin, John Janzen, and David Geggus.

33 Joan Dayan, “Haiti, History, and the Gods” in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 66–97.

agenda overpowers the narrative. Though she deserves high praise for making known previously inaccessible sources, the point of the discursus remains unclear to this reviewer. The essay beckons the reader to deconstruct the deconstructionist.

In 1998 the Museum of the American Indian in Harlem transmitted its collection, the world's largest assemblage of native American objects, to the Smithsonian, and refounded it as the National Museum of the American Indian. Not without irony, Ruth Phillips notes: "For 500 years the first peoples of the Americas have been last, but the last shall now be first."³⁴ Ethnological museum collections are actually intertextual products, reflecting distinctive collecting projects: ethnology, excavation/collection, procurement, and tourist-consumption. Tourist art has made up the major category of commodity production for many northeastern Indian communities for more than a century, 1850 to 1950 being the period of the "museum age". These products, however, are carefully excluded from exhibits. An art historian, Phillips is concerned with the politicization (commodification, fetishization) of native aesthetic products. She relates how objects showing Indians' "negotiation of Western artistic and economic systems" (assimilation?) are neither appreciated, studied, nor exhibited with collections for contradictory, but collateral reasons aimed at preserving the perception and representations of Indians as "other".³⁵ These she identifies as two interests: romantic primitivists investing in escapist strategies *vis-à-vis* industrial madness; and developers covetous of Indian land and resources. Both have sought to retain a tourist image, to present Indians as primitive, pre-modern, marginal. One might add unassimilated and unassimilable. Though the point is important and expertly argued, the reader might contrast this complaint with the claims of indigenous peoples in Guatemala and Amazonia.

Anthony Pagden's essay opens with a discussion of the abbé Raynal's *Histoire philosophique ... des deux Indes*, which appeared in Amsterdam in 1770, along with two anticolonial tracts by Denis Diderot, *Supplément au voyage de Bougainville* (1773) and a gloss on Raynal's *Histoire* wherein he decries travel, travellers, explorers, and settlers. He exempts the English, as their ventures were not fuelled by greed but by the "pursuit of liberty". All other Europeans in the New World, in contrast, become "more or less degenerate". We learn of similar sentiments in Condorcet, Montesquieu, Jaucourt, and Hilliard d'Aubertueil. This position is comparable to Johann Herder's *Ideen* (1785) in which travel, exploration, colonies, and slavery are seen to violate nature's design (human agency considered artificial) of distinct races and cultural variety (a principle of evolution as well). Herder was an early critic of the Enlightenment tenet of universally shared human

34 Ruth Phillips, "Why Not Tourist Art? Significant Silences in North American Museum Representations" in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, p. 98.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 100.

values. Raynal and Herder present contrasting Enlightenment visions critical of the colonization process, with which “we are still struggling”.³⁶

Pagden is careful to note the subtleties in Raynal, Diderot, and the Encyclopedists as to the distinction between colonization and commerce. They support the latter but abhor the former, in the belief it is derived from the vice of *voyageurisme* and vagabondage, a disease of the European heart that leads to expeditions. It is this animus that results in settlement and colonies, which in turn generate the market for the trade in reluctant slaves. This nexus — colonialism/slavery — they find inimical to “commerce”. This interesting essay shows the subtle but real differences within eighteenth-century colonial discourse and the intellectual roots of abolitionist sentiment.

Leonard Blussé examines a unique case: an early Dutch foray into Formosa (Taiwan), in which Protestant missionaries were exceedingly effective in manipulating the colonial authority into committing to a series of genocidal mercantile depredations against the indigenous population from 1629 to 1650. Failing to gain a position of first choice on the China coast, Dutch mariners decided in 1624 to settle at Formosa to create an entrepôt for the China-Japan trade with the West. There followed a systematic massacre and depopulation of the small island of Lamey, off Taiwan’s southwest coast. The missionaries afterward lamented the baleful effects of their own influence on policies of the Dutch East India Company. The study, based on records of the company and the missionary personnel, is disturbingly prefigurative of 1960s news coverage of Vietnam (Lamey today is Hsiao Liu Chiu).³⁷

Gauri Viswanathan studies an exemplary case of colonial bureaucratic Catch-22: the Indian Caste Disabilities Removal Act (1850).³⁸ In a sharply analyzed reconstruction of the interplay of religion and state policy in a colonial context, she cites material evidence from two pathetic court proceedings to illustrate how British law squared liberal social policy and ideology with reinforcement of Hindu patriarchy. Even as Hindus were to adopt Christianity, they were legally reclassified as Hindus in order to evade the cumulative economic effects of “social death” — the poverty and dependence which would (it was supposed) follow a convert’s expulsion from traditional networks of family, clan, and caste.

Regarding the social rejection attendant on conversion to Christianity as destabilizing, Indian colonial officials opted to support the claims of parents who rushed to retrieve their children (even adults) from what may have been perceived much like Satanism in the contemporary context. Viswanathan

36 Anthony Pagden, “The Effacement of Difference” in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 129–152.

37 Leonard Blussé, “Retribution and Remorse: Interaction between the Administration and the Protestant Mission in Early Colonial Formosa” in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 153–182.

38 Gauri Viswanathan, “Coping with (Civil) Death” in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 183–210.

skilfully explicates the conflicted, self-contradictory positions achieved by colonial law in its insistence on and collaboration with Hindu tradition, despite lip-service to the primacy of individual autonomy and the panoply of liberal rights. A hearty feminist subtext infuses the research and argumentation. The cases the author discusses so clearly support her thesis and elicit such pity and wonder that her view easily prevails.

Zachary Lockman takes up the passage of socialist and communist-inspired Labor Zionism from a utopian vision of worker cooperatives to outright colonial occupation of Palestinian lands and peoples between 1880 and 1920.³⁹ The Zionist project experienced internal conflict from the outset, embracing as it did both a settler project and an incompatible socialist workers project. Once it became clear that there was insufficient capital available to industrialize Palestine to provide employment for natives and immigrants and hence no industrial base from which to derive a proletarian labour movement, the workers' utopia faced a hard reality. As more immigrants flowed into the minuscule economy, something had to give; and Zionist leaders felt compelled to push Palestinians out of the job market by coercing Jewish (and also where possible) Christian and Muslim employers to employ only Jewish immigrants.

Unacknowledged or at best marginalized in early Zionist narratives, Palestinian Arabs were nonetheless always present, influencing Zionism as it evolved: "Palestinian agency always registered itself on, and helped shape, the Zionist project."⁴⁰ While Lockman provides only a very brief summary of a complex situation, he does plainly identify the debilities of early Zionist theorizing, thereby furnishing readers with a sound point of departure for analysis of succeeding developments through the Ottoman decline and the British mandate. One question looms, however: why did early Zionist socialists believe that Palestine, an arid Mediterranean enclave having no resources and dense layers of colonial history, was capable of sustaining either of their projects?

Jorge Klor de Alva asserts that, although the western hemisphere experienced the earliest and most profound pattern of colonization outside Europe, "neither post-colonialism nor decolonization can be said to have ever taken place in the Americas."⁴¹ This apparently absurd remark may be the most important statement in the collection. Close analysis is not required to sense an uneasiness with lumping Latin America into the "third-world" schema. In a verbose, roundabout fashion, he explains how the narrative and political reality of *mestizaje* (chameleonism, or self-construction and reconstruction)

39 Zachary Lockman, "Exclusion and Solidarity: Labor Zionism and Arab Workers, 1897–1929" in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 211–240.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 238.

41 Jorge Klor de Alva, "The Postcolonialization of the (Latin) American Experience" in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 241–275.

long since usurped whatever political space opened between westernized and native enclaves. Hence, no hiatus was ever experienced between the formal colonial regimens of extractive economies and labour rotation and the emergence of liberal creole regimes that often set native fortunes even further back by disestablishing missions, commons, and communes in the first half of the past century. Klor's analysis bears careful reading and ought to inspire dialogue.

Irene Silverblatt's brief excursion into the construction of "Indianness" in early seventeenth-century Peru muddles hopelessly what is already difficult terrain.⁴² The term "Spain" is thrown about as a sort of interlocutory device. In fact, there was no "Spain" in that time, only an aggregate of narrow commercial interests confined mainly to the lower Guadalquivir. The colonized Quechua and Aymara Indians are dubbed "Andeans" as though clarity were thereby achieved. The method is curious. No primary data is cited. Though archival research in Peru and Europe is claimed at the outset, no evidence of it emerges in either the narrative or the references. Nonetheless the author writes with a canny knowledge of the period's Andean imagination, about which she floats rafts of bizarre statements on a sea poetic bombast.

We learn that the Inca government "inscribed" the *ayllu* with ethnic distinctions as units of Empire. The author's narrative devices and rhetorical excesses replicate the colonial posture of self-authorization and the spirit of Counter-reformation totalitarianism. She affirms Steve Stern's claim of a pan-Andean "consciousness", one that transcended the borders of *ayllus* and ethnicity as early as 1565! We are in the twilight zone here, since even the sporadic and diffuse native insurgencies of the late eighteenth century have yet to be effectively tied to a common conspiracy. More germane, however, is that we get no sense from the essay of what sort of impositions the Indians (Andeans) were resisting, if they indeed did so, nor of how exactly they were being re-ethnicized by the colonial regime. There are some detailed studies of analogous cases, but none are cited.⁴³ The locally generated data referent to Indian behaviour over three centuries in the Andes is accessibly housed in Lima and Sevilla, Segovia and Simancas. The civil, ecclesiastical, revenue, and military data are available from which to reconstruct much of Indian life under colonial rule. Where's the beef? One wishes for Garcilaso, Guamán Poma, Tupac Amaru, or even Mariátegui to step forth and defend the Indians from this latest appropriation (academic colonization).

42 Irene Silverblatt, "Becoming Indian in the Central Andes of Seventeenth-Century Peru" in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 279–298.

43 See Alvaro Félix Bolaños, *Barbarie y Canibalismo en la retorica colonial* (Bogota: CEREC, 1994), which examines the case of one lone missionary who falsely attributed "cannibalism" to an entire native population, which was never able to shake off the effects.

When we get to Emily Apter and Homi Bhabha, we arrive at examples of the hip theorizing that pervades recent critical theory, wherein writers presume to range over vast territories — from history to language and linguistics, to semiotics and pop culture — creatively mounting a surfeit of postmodern neologism which rather fails to disguise the thin learning behind the show. Word play becomes an end in itself.

Apter's is the only strictly literary essay in the book.⁴⁴ We know this on encountering a lexicon that includes "performativity", "recathexis", "imbricated", "claustrated", and "epigones". Her subject, the relation between historiography and colonial representation, involves the case of Elissa Rhais, a popular Algerian novelist of the 1920s who represents a critical juncture between colonialism and feminism, and an instance of "literary cross-dressing". This is no ordinary literary biography. Rhais is not clearly identified, even as to gender, age, or ethnic origin — though internal evidence from her work suggests she was Jewish. Her bisexual-biculturalism is easier to establish.

The case of Rhais does seem to bear out an important process often overlooked in literary criticism. In spite of drawing on the wealth of exoticized cliché and tourist narrative to sell her works, she gave them a social realist cast. She redeemed her complicity with the commercialized patriotic genre of fiction by constructing scenes that could only rouse her readers' social conscience. Given the obvious constraints, she was admirably adept at balancing literary success with moral and critical integrity. Her cultural and gender masquerade is seen by Apter as an aspect of a pervasive but low-keyed sensibility associated with the "the utopian dream of a trans-historical, geographically global female colony".⁴⁵ The author concludes, "Just as traditional gender terminology recedes under the onslaught of challenges to 'compulsory heterosexuality', to be replaced by more tentative articulations of performative sexual identities or by *nothing at all* [my italics], so the language of culture and type becomes increasingly impossible to employ in good faith."⁴⁶ In plain English, as the sexes become less differentiated, it's hard to tell what you're getting.

Homi Bhabha opens with a paean to Foucault, whose concern with "history's doubting", we learn, compelled him to "resort to anthropology and psychoanalysis".⁴⁷ The term "catachresis" appears variously (though it does not surface in my dictionary between catacomb and catalepsy), as does metonymic, scansion, metaleptically, sublation, and more. Luckily there follows this clarifying passage:

44 Emily Apter, "Ethnographic Travesties: Colonial Realism, French Feminism, and the Case of Elissa Rhais" in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, pp. 299–325.

45 *Ibid.*, p. 319.

46 *Ibid.*, p. 321.

47 Homi Bhabha, "In a Spirit of Calm Violence" in Prakash, ed., *After Colonialism*, p. 327.

And it is my contention, elaborated elsewhere, in my concepts of mimicry, hybridity, and sly civility, that it is this initial moment of identification — eluding resemblance — that produces a subversive strategy of subaltern agency that negotiates its own authority through a process of an iterative “unpicking” and relocating.⁴⁸

An example — Sweet Home, Kentucky, the world of *Beloved* — is related to the “Indian Mutiny” in Bengal during the 1850s and 1860s. (It will require a more perspicacious reviewer to appreciate the subtlety of such an analogy.) And Toni Morrison, we are assured, is “specifying slave history” in her novel, through a process known as “rememoration.”⁴⁹ Research, it seems, is no match for creative caprice in reconstructing past relations of domination.

How the essays in the Prakash volume form a thematic ensemble is unclear. Neither geographical nor thematic nor methodological unities seem at work. By itself the sequence of presentation is unimportant, but it may be symptomatic of the logical chaos of the post-colonial enterprise generally — which in no way seems to dampen the enthusiasm of granting agencies. Two types of essay prevail: the conventional historical narrative of colonial situations and literary criticism. Several essays seem to act as a group, while others are out of step, off on their own. For an anthology of only 300 pages, one will find throughout an exceptionally large number of key ideas and formulations worth knowing. The ideas of several writers threaten originality and bear serious attention.

As Forbes’s work demonstrates, and the Prakash anthology indicates in many particulars, some notion of race is always at work in modern colonialism. Race has always been conflated with both language and geographical space. Not until the 1930s were these associations dethroned. Classical Marxism and modernization theory both rested on a geohistorical vision of western exceptionalism. In fact, “Europe at the centre of analysis” informs the work of modern writers of every ideological category. Those writers who claim to subvert Eurocentrism remain caged in that doctrine. The world-system and dependency schools made a big step in showing how the West (the core) itself derived from the exploitation of the rest rather than from essentialist progress and virtue. “Periphery”, for example, does seem quite an improvement over “Dark Continent”.

Robert Young probes the ideological dimensions of nineteenth-century British science and high culture as they relate to race and empire. The preface of *Colonial Desire* opens appropriately with familiar lines from the signature tune in South Pacific: “You’ve got to be taught.” It is at once clear that the work is carefully conceived. Like Forbes, Young considers at

48 *Ibid.*, p. 330.

49 *Ibid.*, p. 331.

the outset the language of culture contacts: miscegenation, hybrid, creole, pidgin, mulatto, and their uses in nineteenth-century dictionaries. “Miscegenation” (coined in 1864) succeeded “amalgamation”, and so on, not that terms once coined ever disappear entirely from circulation. Recall the use of “amalgamation” in much of the published literature in the Deep South of the late 1950s opposing federally forced racial integration of public facilities.

Through analysis of the meanings and uses of “hybridity”, Young builds a case against the past century’s “normalization” of racism. A key theme is that “theories of race were also theories of desire.”⁵⁰ Desire is evinced in discourses on hybridity — a multivalent, two-edged concept more rhetorical than biological. It is interesting how some colonial governments of the early mercantilist period viewed hybridity as a necessary adaptation to solve problems of underpopulation and survivability in the tropics. Later policies prohibited interracial marriage. Hybridity may imply contrafusion and disjunction, or separate development (apartheid) as well as assimilation and fusion (Vasconcelos’s “cosmic race” comes to mind).

As a method, the examination of theories of hybridity works well. Young opens with a brief treatment of the relativism and universal values of representative eighteenth-century *philosophes*. He persuades the reader that Herder and Diderot were far more progressive than their successors. He cites Tzvetan Todorov’s survey of Montaigne, Fontenelle, Labruyère, Helvetius, and Rousseau to show that a critique of ethnocentrism was widespread and even fashionable. The paradox is thence implied wherein the “progress” of the last century required the debasement of *les autres*.

A parallel theme — the diffusion of hegemonic racism through European society via the intelligentsia — leads Young to make a case against Matthew Arnold. A long argument concerned with the significance of Arnold’s *Culture and Anarchy* (1869) is the centrepiece of the study.⁵¹ While 50 pages may seem lengthy and tedious, the case for Arnold’s place in the mentality of the *haute bourgeoisie* of the period is carefully made in an elegant, sustained argument of a kind rarely seen today. Young, as demonstrated in *White Mythologies* (1990), knows what he’s talking about and how to talk about it. He does not shy from a patient, assiduous, carefully reasoned pursuit of the reader’s assent. The charge of “imperialist racist” which he strives, reasonably and logically, to make against Arnold is nevertheless strained. Not only was Arnold the mildest possible case to be found, he was not aware of today’s popular (media-inspired) sensibilities, for which he seems to be taken to task.

Young is conversant with but not slavish to French theorizing. A

50 Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 9. Jean-Paul Sartre identified the paradox in 1946 in *Anti-Semite and Jew* (New York: Schocken, 1958, trans. of *Réflexions sur la question juive*, originally published in 1946).

51 Young, *Colonial Desire*, pp. 44–140.

Williamsite, he uses *Keywords* extensively, as well he might, *comme il faut*.⁵² The complicity between culture and racism in the last century, the extent to which the arts and sciences were infused with racial assumptions, “has been underestimated”, according to the author. Racism was “more than a mere embarrassing interval in the history of knowledge”.⁵³ Sander Gilman’s study makes that graphically — pornographically — clear.⁵⁴

The query “why racism?” has not been satisfactorily answered. Even if we assent to Young’s thesis, we have yet to get at its source, especially since it was not apparently operative in the preceding century. Correlated with science and industry, with increasing rationalization of society generally, racism could only have emerged in answer to a need. That need, may I suggest, was the one that makes boundaries. The operative social marker in the West had for many centuries been religion. With secularization steadily gaining ground from the mid-eighteenth century, religion no longer served to inform analytical categories or to continue acting as a marker of separation and identity. Racism took up the space in a sort of physics of the topos. Physical differences could no longer be contained or subsumed under larger epistemological considerations, concerns, categories.

Though racial prejudice may have preceded racism as science and ideology, it does not follow that scientific racism is somehow superficial or peripheral. Young insists that “race became the fundamental determinant of human culture and history; indeed, it is arguable that race became *the* common principle of academic knowledge in the 19th century.”⁵⁵ At this juncture the author really goes over the edge, but he has made his case without “essentializing” racism. It still functions as a social construct, is not “normalized”, and passes through the last century in logical steps.

In general, the foregoing books seek to explore the liminal sites of mixings and crossings, the ceaselessly expanding circles of the global ethnic frontier — all driven by the exercise of colonial power. They suggest that contemporary critical discourse regarding colonialism, post-colonialism, colonial historiographies, and post-colonial literature is not necessarily the best of all possible techniques for explaining the transition from colonialism to postmodernity, nor even the dynamics of colonial relationships. Post-colonial critics are generally deficient in historical awareness, though a minority are versed in colonial research and comparative study other than analysis of *textes*. The result is a congeries of “critical” works based on some rather weird assumptions regarding the past (societies, civilizations,

52 Raymond Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).

53 Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 90.

54 Sander Gilman, *Difference and Pathology: Stereotypes of Sex, Race and Madness* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

55 Young, *Colonial Desire*, p. 93.

practices, values, experiences) and exhibiting a set of arguments based on little evidence.

What is most troubling is the general assumption of the uniqueness of western imperial behaviour, policies, practices, prejudices, and shared assumptions. Virtually no attention is paid to the narratives and positionings, assumptions and ethno-racial constructions of the Russian, Chinese, Japanese, Ottoman, and other empires. There is currently a growing literature on non-western imperialisms that may be sobering. What of the Russian Empire's 350-year expansion into Central Asia, from which a rich ethnographic and "natural history" archive has been accumulated?⁵⁶ Would these same writers have received diverse grants, academic chairs, accolades, and sundry amenities and supports to "deconstruct" the Japanese empire of the early twentieth century? Or would the status of Korean "comfort women" or court eunuchs more likely have been theirs?

To a certain, indeterminate extent, the distortions in perspective and frailties of basic research characteristic of the post-colonialists must be lain at the feet of their godfather, Foucault, whose method supposes that the history and refinement of techniques of oppression constitute a mere object of theory. Despite the rich pantheon of French intellectual virtuosi who have focused on global history and post-colonial issues — a short list might include Althusser, Bataille, Bannassat, Bourdieu, Braudel, Certeau, Chaunu, Clastres, Godelier, Kristeva, Todorov, and Vilar — it is Foucault, the most methodologically suspect, who has collected the dogged allegiance of feminists, trans-sexualists, and a wide range of deconstructionist critics. But somehow deconstruction has lost sight of construction.

Is the ubiquitous, slavish reliance on Foucault liberating? Catholicism, and later classical Marxism, have performed their share of violence on non-western spaces which are outside the societies and class relations which initially gave rise to these ideologies. Non-westerners will decry the presence of the West in their texts, but discursive criticism will not allow them to create a discourse independent of the European *ratio* and Cartesian categories, any more than materially they might elude the IMF or the CIA.⁵⁷ The emperor has new clothes, and they exhibit a harrowing global

56 Yuri Slezkine, "Naturalists versus Nations: Eighteenth-Century Russian Scholars Confront Ethnic Diversity" in Daniel Brower and Edward Lazzarini, eds., *Russia's Orient: Imperial Borderlands and Peoples, 1700–1917* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997), pp. 27–58.

57 It is quite extraordinary how literary/critical studies have evaded theoretical developments in communications theory over the past decades. My objections to the range of assumptions discussed above are anticipated in the works of Gregory Bateson during the 1960s. A seminal text in this line of argument is Anthony Wilden, *System and Structure: Essays on Communication and Exchange* (London: Tavistock, 1972 [2nd ed., 1980]), especially "Epistemology and Ecology", pp. 202–229; also Tom Conley's analysis of Montaigne's "Des coches", which exhibits "power enough to change the ideological contents in which it surfaces". In contrast, most work that we now encounter tends to reproduce what might be called a "designer consciousness", that is, a carefully articulated order

fit. Lamenting the excesses of the Raj or the *encomienda*, *mita*, and *corvée* cannot liberate us from the empire of media, doubletalk, pseudo-celebrity, and environmental terror. Literary virtuosi threaten to become stock characters in an academic cover-up of the serious human issues that stalk the planet, many of which have their source right here in what José Martí, living in New York, described as “the belly of the monster”. If these works tell us anything, it is that only a splendidly self-confident (hegemonic) regime could afford to subsidize and publicize its own stable of privileged critics.

Deconstructionism and post-colonialism are part of the detritus of failed Marxism; politics masquerading as art. Commentary on canonical or other literature is not the same practice as “producing” literature. Those who can do something, do it; those who cannot, wind up teaching — talking about it. Only a very rich society can import and maintain critics in posh institutions where they may elude the stench, confusion, and disregard for life in the streets of their home towns, and provide the empire with harmless rhetoric sufficient to sustain for the State the guise of academic freedom and “the open society”. For half a millennium the West has been busy recreating itself in “others” — a trend as inexorable as it is determining. The agency of “others” has been absorbed in reproducing the West in themselves. Now, via cyber-time, all borders and boundaries have imploded. The real question becomes simply: can humanity survive the expansion and breakdown of a global capitalist neo-colonialism in possession of marvelous tools?

of limited effects of contradiction that are aimed at making the reader a primarily buying subject. Critical relations with objects are discouraged in favour of quantifiable returns taken from relations of desire written into style and format. “‘Marketed’ thus, readers or viewers are offered limited fields of perplexity that can be resolved by further purchase of the same effects...”. Still, Henri Lefebvre’s *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (1968; New York: Harper, 1971), chap. 2, “Controlled Consumption”, nowhere makes itself felt in the literary/critical writers surveyed above. See Conley’s *The Graphic Unconscious in Early Modern French Writing* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 164–165.