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Publisher: Routledge

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## Textual Practice

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:  
<http://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rtp20>

### What is post(-)colonialism?

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Published online: 30 Jun 2008.

To cite this article: Vijay Mishra & Bob Hodge (1991) What is post(-)colonialism?, Textual Practice, 5:3, 399-414, DOI:  
[10.1080/09502369108582124](http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502369108582124)

To link to this article: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09502369108582124>

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VIJAY MISHRA and BOB HODGE

## *What is post(-)colonialism?*

As the British Empire broke up and attempted to sustain an illusion of unity under the euphemistic title of 'Commonwealth', a new object appeared on the margins of departments of English Literature: 'Commonwealth literature'. The ambiguous politics of the term was inscribed in the field that it called into being. 'Commonwealth literature' did not include the literature of the centre, which acted as the impossible absent standard by which it should be judged. The term also occluded the crucial differences between the 'old' and the 'new' Commonwealth, between White settler colonies and Black nations that typically had a very different and more difficult route into a different kind of independence.

The struggling enterprise of 'Commonwealth literature' was jeopardized from the start by the heavily ideological overtones of its name. Now a new term has gained currency to designate the field: 'post-colonial'. Post-colonial(ism) has many advantages over the former term. It foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery. It has helped to destabilize the barriers around 'English literature' that protected the primacy of the canon and the self-evidence of its standards. But in order to consolidate its place in the curriculum it needed a good, teachable text. With the publication of *The Empire Writes Back*<sup>1</sup> (hereinafter abbreviated to *EWB*) that need is now met. *EWB* is a lucid, judicious and representative text which is destined to play a decisive role in this emerging field. That importance is good reason for subjecting it to close critical scrutiny, as we propose to do.

The word post-colonialism (hyphenated) is not given an independent entry in the *OED* (1989). It is still a compound in which the 'post-' is a prefix which governs the subsequent element. 'Post-colonial' thus becomes something which is 'post' or after colonial. In the *OED* the compound exists alongside other compounds such as post-adolescent, post-cognitive, post-coital and so on. The first entry for the word is dated 12 December 1959: 'It was probably inevitable that India, in the full flush of post-colonial sensitivity, should fear that association with the America of that period might involve her necessarily in troubles which were little to do with Asia.' Subsequent entries (1969; 1974)

carry this meaning of post-colonial as something which happened after colonization. Edward Said writes about a 'postcolonial field'<sup>2</sup> to which modern anthropologists can no longer return with their erstwhile certitudes. Here too 'post-colonial' is used in the sense in which the *OED* defines the term.

*EWB* takes up as its central theme the relationship of the periphery to the metropolitan centre in the context of post-colonial literature. Some of the problems that it faces in positioning itself in relation to this theme can be seen in some ambiguities in the title of the book itself, which makes connections with two seemingly divergent moments in modern culture. The first is the intertext that the title echoes, *The Empire Strikes Back*, the second film in the *Star Wars* Trilogy in which the father and the Empire are momentarily on the ascendant as Darth Vader all but incapacitates his son (Luke Skywalker) and the counter-insurgency of the guerrillas is checked by the might of the Empire.

The second intertext is not so much a narrative as a personality around whom a bizarre postmodern fiction has been constructed. The title is a quotation from Salman Rushdie who, writing from within the centre as a critic of it, now finds himself denounced for complicity with the values of the colonizer, the imperialist. Saladin the 'chamcha' becomes Rushdie the 'chamcha' who, in Rushdie's own definition, is someone who 'sucks up to powerful people, a yes-man, a sycophant'. 'The Empire', adds Rushdie, 'would not have lasted a week without such collaborators among the colonized people.'<sup>3</sup> The condemnation of Rushdie by the Islamic post-colonial world raises interesting questions about the category of the post-colonial itself and whether one can ever totally remove the stains of complicity with the Empire that come with the 'profession' of post-colonial writer. For the Islamic post-colonial world the moral is clear and succinct: to write in the language of the colonizer is to write from within death itself. As a result of all this, the title of *EWB* begins to sound like a Freudian slip, announcing the inevitable triumph of the Empire's counter-attack as the slogan for a book that celebrates post-colonial subversion.

The Rushdie case is a parable that challenges the notion of post-colonial writing as defined by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin. In the final analysis post-colonial writers who write in the language of the Empire are marked off as traitors to the cause of a reconstructive post-colonialism. The authors of *EWB* seem to be conscious of this paradox, the paradox that the 'post' in 'post-colonialism' may well imply 'business as usual, only *more so*'.<sup>4</sup> Consequently, they point to the dangers of writing in English (spelt with a lower case whenever non-British English is being referred to) and they know that the post-colonial writers compose in the shadow of 'death'. Many years ago Frantz Fanon anticipated this paradox when he wrote that the colonized is either doomed to be a mere reflection of his master (located in the Imaginary) or he must fight his master through active struggle (so as to enter into the realm of the Symbolic).<sup>5</sup> The withholding of legitimate consciousness, I-ness or self-

hood, the impossibility on the part of the colonized even to qualify for the thingness of things (thingword), produces a radical politics in which violence is embraced. But as the ANC's own struggle for self-legitimation demonstrates, the colonizer never completely withholds 'I-ness' or 'self-hood' since to do so would make the colonized worthless. Thus there is always, in the colonial regime, a tantalizing offer of subjectivity and its withdrawal which, for the colonized, momentarily confirms their entry into the world of the colonizer only to be rejected by it. The colonized never know when the colonizers consider them for what they are, humans in full possession of a self, or merely objects.

In Fanon's version of the conditions under which the radical post-colonial might come into being, the colonial world must be strategically rendered as Manichean in its *effects*, since the system reduces the colonized to the status of permanent bondage. Consequently, it is in the nature of the Manichean world-order that violence should be seen as a cleansing force. This is a severe indictment of the imperialist since the withdrawal of subjectivity hits at the very core of the enlightenment project, the civilizing values of modernity which the colonized (a V. S. Naipaul for instance) sees as imperialism's positive, reconstructive, and basically humane face. The complexity of this essentially Hegelian problematic, the centrality of action in a retheorization of history as class struggle, is transformed by the authors of *EWB* into a broader, somewhat depoliticized category, the 'counter-discourse'. Political insurgency is replaced by discursive radicalism, for which the West Indian example is offered as paradigmatic.

The danger here is that the post-colonial is reduced to a purely textual phenomenon, as if power is simply a matter of discourse and it is only through discourse that counter-claims might be made. This move is clearly aimed at making the diverse forms of the post-colonial available as a single object on the curriculum of the centre. Since a *grand récit* is not available equally to the varieties of post-colonialism that *EWB* addresses, it is hardly surprising that the dominant tone in the book is the tolerant pluralism of liberal humanism. Difference is recognized but contained within a single pattern, the coexistence of two kinds of relationship to the language and culture of the centre: 'abrogation' or refusal, and 'appropriation'. The latter gathers under a single term a large and diverse set of strategies involving both accommodation and compromise, whose political meaning is highly dependent on specific historical circumstances.

#### POST-ORIENTALISM AND COUNTER-DISCURSIVITY

A grand theory of post-colonialism inevitably throws up comparisons with another totalizing form of scholarship, orientalism. This is not to say that *EWB* duplicates orientalism's political strategy or, more significantly, is unaware of its redemptive as well as damning characteristics. What *EWB*, however, ends up doing is something which is endemic

to a project in which particularities are homogenized, perhaps unconsciously, into a more or less unproblematic theory of the Other. One remembers Edward Said's well-known warning that even with the best of intentions one might, and sometimes does, give the impression that through one's own discourses the Other is now representable without due regard to its bewildering complexity. Perhaps it is in the very nature of any totalizing enterprise that simplifications which are avoided elsewhere (as in individual articles by Ashcroft, Griffiths and Tiffin) make their way into the body of the text.

The paradox that surfaces – a paradox that we would call post-orientalism – is part of an historical process that grew out of Europe's reading of the Other. Orientalism's heavily skewed and ideologically marked discourses – the enterprise was never totally homogeneous, and often contradictory – haunts the post-colonial in ways that makes, in places, the post-colonial itself post-oriental. Depending upon one's point of view, this might be a positive acknowledgement of a larger continuity. At the same time a more sophisticated orientalism (as post-orientalism) would take us back to Warren Hastings's astute observation in his panegyric on Charles Wilkins's path-breaking translation of the *Bhagavadgita* (1785):

But such instances can only be obtained in their [the Hindus'] writings: and these will survive when the British dominion in India shall have long ceased to exist, and when the sources which it once yielded of wealth and power are lost to remembrance.<sup>6</sup>

What Hastings is anticipating here are the different forms of pre-english literatures which will have a very different relationship with the emergent literatures in English. When the power of the British is 'lost to remembrance', as is increasingly becoming evident in the new Indian *lebenswelt* for instance, indigenous literatures would again begin to show a resurgence and self-confidence which would question the self-evident primacy of a literature written in English. In jettisoning the almost auratic status given to the English language, the new reckoning with an imperial language both changes the form of the language itself and marginalizes it politically: the Shiv Sena uses Marathi, the Sikh militants Punjabi, and so on.

In this instance, a post-colonial theory becomes a radical form of orientalism (or post-orientalism) which insinuates, at every point, a dialectical process now under way between literature in English, and those written and oral non-english discourses which, in Hastings' words, 'will survive'. Where the early version of orientalism effectively reduced this multiplicity of languages and ideologies into a homogenized European discourse – E. Trump gave up his translation of the *Adi Granth* (1877) because it lacked a grand epic narrative – the *EWB* strategy, for very different reasons, can't hear the almost carnivalesque sounds of the non-english unconscious either. It is a price that *EWB*, like any other enterprise with totalizing ambitions, must inevitably pay. The failure to pos-

ition author(s) into a culture so as to 'mediate between discrepant worlds of meaning'<sup>7</sup> led the orientalists back into the essentially European reconstructions of the Other. The authors of *EWB* do make a conscious attempt at this mediation, and bring together some of the best insights into post-orientalism of most contemporary theorists of the subject. However, there are intrinsic problems with any proposal to account, within a unitary scheme, for the unmanageable plethora of 'discrepant worlds of meaning' in contemporary post-colonial societies. *EWB* proposes the category of 'context' as the crucial source for the construction of meaning, but this solution has its own difficulties.

The scope of the 'context' that they mobilize in analysis is necessarily a closed frame, not an open-ended plenitude of meanings connecting unpredictability with other meanings and texts. For the authors of *EWB*, once the context of a text is understood, there is nothing terribly difficult about a Sanskrit compound or a hidden cultural text which might require specialized knowledge to identify. Thus if one were to read the song of Gibreel in Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*<sup>8</sup> through *EWB*, its effect within the context is all that would really matter to the reader. The fact that beneath the song is an entire text of Bombay Cinema which, to the bilingual reader, would recall, more specifically, Raj Kapoor's *Shree 420* (1955) is knowledge that *EWB* must either ignore or relegate to the level of spurious or unnecessary footnote. This supplementarity, however, even in terms of *EWB*'s own design is counter-discursive in a radically different fashion. The supplement, the anecdotal invasion or culture-specific power, is, however, a form of intervention that questions, as supplements always do, the very adequacy of a theory of the centre and its periphery. At the very moment that the narrative is invaded by an intertext from a different centre – the centre and centrality of the Bombay commercial cinema, India's pre-eminent contemporary cultural form – the focus shifts from a fixed centre and its satellite system to a multiplicity of centres in the culture itself.

There is an intractable problem here for the syncretic enterprise of *EWB*. Actually to explore every 'pre-english' literature is clearly beyond its scope, but their mere existence, acknowledged or otherwise, makes the unitary post-colonial itself extremely problematic. Should one, therefore, acknowledge the impossibility of a comprehensive post-colonial literary theory without encroaching upon a multiplicity of other theories and disciplines? Can the post-colonial be anything other than a celebration of a specious unity rather than a critique? The political danger here is not that post-colonial literary theory might become post-oriental without orientalism's philosophical strengths; rather it might become not unlike the project of the raj historians of the 1960s who were totally bereft of any culture-specific know-how and effectively lost the chance to develop the study of Indian culture in universities.

With these other forms of knowledge ruled out as unnecessary because they are too difficult, a comprehensive theory of an uncanonized genre such as the novel is all that one needs to interpret post-colonial literature.

Beneath the strategies of *EWB* is the dialogism of Bakhtin; and beneath post-colonial literature lies the might of the novel form. Absence of cultural specificity leads to cultural collapse, and cultural collapse takes us to the modern genre *par excellence*, the novel. The European bourgeois novel comes with a pre-existent philosophical apparatus that implicitly questions the representation of history to the extent that any counter-historical move must begin with a reading of the capacities of the novelistic genre itself. The extreme extension of this theory is that the post-colonial as a duplication of Bakhtin's essentially polyphonic reading of the novel form makes the post-colonial redundant. It is important that we meet this hypothesis half-way, accept that a European epic narrative mediated through the European bourgeois novel was an available discourse to the post-colonial writer, and then fill out the other half of the equation with those very precise, historically and culturally specific distinctions that mark off post-colonial difference without constructing, in turn, a post-colonial homogeneity that cancels out its own oppositions and fractures.

Those writers who use forms of 'appropriation' recognize that colonial discourse itself is a complex, contradictory mode of representation which implicates both the colonizer and the colonized. Nowhere is this more evident than in V. S. Naipaul, who is so very conscious of writing from within the shadow of an English master like Conrad, whose personal contact with England as a Polish émigré he finds echoes his own journey back to the centre. Years before, Romesh Dutt had translated sections from the *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* in octametric lines. It is therefore not totally true that the post-colonial precursor discourse, the colonial, existed only in the hands of the colonizer. The Aboriginal writer Mud-rooro Noongah certainly recognizes the paradox of his writing in the language of the master, for the master, in novels and criticism that nevertheless insist upon the category of 'Aboriginality' as a defining feature of the Aboriginal postcolonial.<sup>9</sup>

Into this colonial discourse, into a discourse which has been identificatory, constructing the colonized as a fixed reality, the post-colonial makes its dramatic entry. But the post-colonial is nevertheless lumbered by the discourse of the colonized and is inexorably fissured. And it is not only fissured. It has also a political agenda that requires it to deconstruct an 'alien' subjectivity (a subjectivity growing out of a Hegelian master-slave relationship) but still hold on to the dominant genre through which it had been initially constituted, realism, that leads to the crossing over of post-colonialism into postmodernism.

#### THE POSTMODERN CONNECTION

Linda Hutcheon, whose reading of postmodernism as parody has been taken up by so many post-colonial writers, gets her own discussion of the two (postmodernism and post-colonialism) under way by emphasizing their distinct political agendas. Implicit in the diverging political agendas

is the question of the definition of the *subject*. If for postmodernism the object of analysis is the subject as defined by humanism, with its essentialism and mistaken historical verities, its unities and transcendental presence, then for post-colonialism the object is the imperialist subject, the colonized as formed by the processes of imperialism. Hutcheon's warning is salutary and should be quoted in full:

The current post-structuralist/postmodern challenges to the coherent, autonomous subject have to be put on hold in feminist and post-colonial discourses, for both must work first to assert and affirm a denied or alienated subjectivity: those radical postmodern challenges are in many ways the luxury of the dominant order which can afford to challenge that which it securely possesses.<sup>10</sup>

In spite of Linda Hutcheon's warning – one which she herself later in the same essay seems to forget in proclaiming the ambiguous post-colonialism of Canadian culture – the project of *EWB* is essentially postmodern. Admittedly, there is a whole section in *EWB* where postmodernism is treated agonistically, and earlier Tiffin<sup>11</sup> had subtly accused postmodernism of hegemonic tendencies driven by a European desire to dominate the field of post-colonialism as well, but *EWB*'s version of post-colonialism, it seems to us, cannot, as a unified field, function without it. The central problematic arises out of the status of settler cultures, and their place in this unified field.

The 'justifying' discourse which allows this settler incorporation into post-colonialism is clearly postmodernism. In someone as astute as Stephen Slemon<sup>12</sup> the strategies of modernism/postmodernism arise out of a European assimilation of the heterogeneous colonial Other into its own social and discursive practices. It is this reading of post-colonialism as already present in European thought, as well as, by extension, in colonial culture, which allows Slemon to shift gear and move into Canadian settler culture forthwith. He speaks of Canada and the other White dominions as second world societies in which the post-colonial is an anti-colonial discourse, a kind of counter-discursive energy. Through this counter-discursivity the settler colony acquires a political agenda which demonstrates its reaction against an imperial homogenizing tendency. How this happens, in Slemon's subtle argument, is clearly based upon a 'complicity' theory of post-colonialism. Though Slemon does not make it explicit, in the complicity theory, the literature of settler colonies, which did not have to go through a prolonged independence struggle, still has post-colonial tendencies embedded within it. In the age of the postmodern, the settler colonies' counter-discursive energy can now speak with greater assurance.

Like the authors of *EWB*, Slemon is at pains to avoid the collapse of the post-colonial and the postmodern. He must therefore insist upon the political strategy of post-colonialism, and argue that all post-colonial literatures demonstrate the recuperative work going on in marginalized societies. But it is salutary that the argument is developed not through,

say, Patrick White's *A Fringe of Leaves* but through Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*. For postmodernism, Rushdie's questioning of historical certainties is exemplary of its own project; for the post-colonial what is important is the way in which another, lost master-narrative recalled through the creative power of *maya*, of illusion, is used to free the colonized. The narrative energy of Rushdie is to be found in the magical narratives of the *Mahabharata* and the *Kathasaritasagara*. Whereas a postmodern reading of *Midnight's Children* would emphasize play and deferral, a fully post-colonial reading will locate the meaning of the untranslated words and the special, culture-specific resonances of the text. It might even offer a radical reshaping or rethinking of what Habermas has called our 'communicative rationality'. The post-colonial text persuades us to think through logical categories which may be quite alien to our own. For a text to suggest even as much is to start the long overdue process of dismantling classical orientalism.

But the positions outlined above are not mutually exclusive. Pre-colonial Indian narratives too are all about deferral, and play; they are open-ended where meaning is constantly displaced.<sup>13</sup> That is, a post-colonial text in this case can draw on an indigenous precursor tradition that has some of the features of postmodernism. In Mammata's theory and poetics, (which he borrowed from the *Dhvanyaloka* of Anandavardhana) *dhvani* theory is really a theory of the signifier where meaning is constantly deferred. *Dhvani* clearly stipulates that the referent is not available, only the suggested meanings are. Thus writes Mammata:

This [the poem] is best when the suggested meaning far excels the expressed sense; it is called *dhvani* by the learned.<sup>14</sup>

Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* is a case in point, since it has been (and can be) defended on aesthetic/postmodern grounds. Thus for John McLaren<sup>15</sup> *The Satanic Verses* offers the possibilities of alternative histories to the reader, since Rushdie cannot accept any history as fixed, especially through the *ipsisima verba*, God's exact words. Similarly Helen Watson-Williams<sup>16</sup> bypasses the political arguments completely by a universalist move: the text explores 'truth' and may be explained rationally. Fantasy is simply a metaphor which can be reduced to its realist origins. As it becomes clear in Amin Malak's<sup>17</sup> reading, *The Satanic Verses* is defensible on postmodern grounds, where everything is subjected to subversive parody, but this kind of reading is highly dangerous politically. And here is the crux of the matter. The moment the dominant culture itself begins to draw generic lines (fiction, history; politics and postmodern play), the text gets transformed into distinct objects, with distinct effects and meanings. In political terms *The Satanic Verses* ceases to be post-colonial and becomes postmodern. Srinivas Aravamudan's<sup>18</sup> suggestive essay shows how *The Satanic Verses* can be both postmodern and post-colonial at the same time. In it, pastiche, parody and history as unstable discourse, in short all the root-metaphors of postmodernism, are juxtaposed alongside culture-specific knowledges (the

'420' reference requires no research for the Indian reader), the privileged position of the native reader, the absence of orientalist glossary and those obvious stylistic nuances which mark the text's post-coloniality.

By seeming to transform the post-colonial into an object of knowledge that might be critiqued through a postmodern/novelistic critical discourse, what *EWB* has done is to remove the post-colonial as a radical political act of self-legitimation and self-respect locked into practices which antedate the arrival of the colonizer, and bracket it with postmodern practices generally. It is not surprising, therefore, that the trope of metonymy becomes so decisive for the authors of *EWB*. Since metonymy bypasses the laws of censorship (Lacan called it the trope of the Unconscious), it enables the return of the repressed, the articulation of that which has become taboo in a colonized world. Thus in an example taken from *Nkosi* it is the power of the book, the pen, which is advanced: since writing is power, the pen, metonymically, is the displaced colonial phallus seeking a fulfilment of desire in its relationship with the absent Other. Occasionally, as in Chapter 3, where *Nkosi* is examined at some length, the political argument comes across decisively: 'only by denying the authenticity of the line [the apartheid line] and taking control of the means of communication can the post-colonial text overcome this silence' (p. 87).

#### FORMS OF POST-COLONIALISM

What emerges, especially past Chapter 4 of *EWB*, is the fact that we are really talking about not one 'post-colonialism' but many postcolonialisms. When we drop the hyphen, and effectively use 'postcolonialism' as an always present tendency in any literature of subjugation marked by a systematic process of cultural domination through the imposition of imperial structures of power, we can begin to see those aspects of the argument of *EWB* which could be profitably extended. This form of 'postcolonialism' is not 'post-' something or other but is already implicit in the discourses of colonialism themselves. We would then want to distinguish sharply between two kinds of postcolonialism, viewed as ideological orientations rather than as a historical stage. The first, and more readily recognizable, is what we call oppositional postcolonialism, which is found in its most overt form in post-independent colonies at the historical phase of 'post-colonialism' (with a hyphen). This usage corresponds to the *OED*'s definition of the 'post-colonial'. The second form, equally a product of the processes that constituted colonialism but with a different inflection, is a 'complicit postcolonialism', which has much in common with Lyotard's unhyphenated 'postmodernism': an always present 'underside' within colonization itself.<sup>19</sup> Thus Charles Harpur, Marcus Clarke, Christopher Brennan as well as V. S. Naipaul and Bibhutibhushan Banerji are postcolonial in this sense.

It would follow, therefore, that other theories such as feminism which are also predicated upon some definition of oppression would find points

of contact with postcolonialism. Significant terms used by the authors of *EWB* such as 'other', 'subversion', 'marginalized' and 'linguistic difference' are all replicated in feminist discourses. But the analogy also gives rise to a problem within postcolonial women's writing which would require a different order of theorizing, since postcolonial women are like a fragment, an oppositional system, within an overall colonized framework. Women therefore function here as burdened by a twice-disabling discourse: the disabling master discourse of colonialism is then redirected against women in an exact duplication of the colonizer's own use of that discourse *vis-à-vis* the colonized in the first instance.

One finds a reaction against this twice-disabling discourse even in the context of someone who writes, essentially, within the *riti* ('love') and *bhakti* ('devotional') poetics of India.<sup>20</sup> In Mahadevi Varma's *chhayavad* poetry the metaphysical domains of both *riti* and *bhakti* are replaced by a search for an ennobling humanism, the discriminatory desire of a woman herself as she seeks fulfilment in love. Into the hegemonic world of traditional Sanskrit genres and discourses, Mahadevi Varma inserts the female body, its sensations and its self-identity as woman. In the 1920s and 1930s Mahadevi Varma, as a woman, was grasping the nettle of a poetics which had produced the great patriarchal figures of Nanak and Tulsidasa.

The homogenizing drive of *EWB* leads it to seek to establish a dominant field and not a set of heterogeneous 'moments' arising from very different historical processes. As we have said, it is especially important to recognize the different histories of the White settler colonies which, as fragments of the metropolitan centre, were treated very differently by Britain, which, in turn, for these settler colonies, was not the imperial centre but the Mother Country. What an undifferentiated concept of postcolonialism overlooks are the very radical differences in response and the unbridgeable chasms that existed between White and non-White colonies.

A difficult category which is in need of theorizing is, of course, *race*. The decisive role that race has played in all forms of colonial society over the past 500 years (and perhaps even before that) cannot be overestimated. At the same time since racial categories interweave with social classes at every point, they become much more complex in their uses and effects. There is certainly no essentialist meaning of race itself. It is what one does with the category and, more importantly, how it impinges upon power relations in the colonial/post-colonial world that is of concern to the cultural theorist. It is here that the concept itself, in a non-essential fashion, nevertheless needs a level of specificity which would identify its function as a category of analysis. Race is not part of an unproblematic continuum alongside discursive categories such as linguistic rupture, syncreticism, hybridity and so on. In all kinds of oppositional postcolonialism (within settler countries themselves and without) race was part of a larger struggle for self-respect. The post-colonial is the

single most important phenomenon in which it played such a decisive role.

These difficulties disrupt the smooth and seamless surface of *EWB*'s definition of the 'post-colonial':

We use the term 'post-colonial', however, to cover all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of preoccupations throughout the historical process initiated by European imperial aggression.

(p. 2)

What is this 'continuity of preoccupations'? Is it purely aesthetic? What is the material basis of this aesthetic? How is the 'post-colonial experience' reconstructed? How does it become 'rich' and 'incisive' (p. 91) if we can't relativize this image of discursive wealth through some understanding of social conditions? The annual per capita income of an Indian, for instance, is around \$150, that of an African is around \$300. In the West Indies it is probably not much more. And social security is non-existent. An average Australian worker (though not an unemployed Aborigine) earns above these levels in a week. Perhaps it is only in the Indian diaspora of Britain, the US and Canada that the 'historical process initiated by European imperialist aggression' can be placed upon a uniform material footing. Without an adequate materialist theory of postcolonialism, *EWB*'s theory of 'post-coloniality' is a general hypothesis applicable to any text which dismantles power relations existing in an 'anterior' text. The problematic, extended and reformulated, finds centre and periphery in social structures as diverse as race, class, women's rights and so on.

In practice, therefore, for the authors of *EWB*, the postcolonial is a hermeneutic which is vindicated by the conditions in non-settler colonies, but is then used unchanged to apply to settler colonies, thus making strategic moves of these settler colonies towards greater political and economic autonomy within a capitalist world economy appear as heroic and revolutionary ruptures. 'The Empire strikes back' indeed, under the cover yet again of its loyal White colonies. From the base of this elision, the construction of meaning in these non-settler colonies takes up a highly postmodern resonance. Meaning resides in the 'slippage' of language; meaning is constantly deferred; meaning grows out of a dialectical process of a relationship between the margins and the centre (meaning arises out of a discourse of marginality); meanings are not culture-specific and in postcolonial texts are constructed metonymically, not metaphorically. Since metonymy defers meaning, it is repetitive, and returns to haunt us in a replay of a version of the Gothic. Not surprisingly, then, the postcolonial text is 'always a complex and hybridized formation' (p. 10).

The more we probe statements such as these, the more conscious we become of a model for the construction of meaning which advances

metonymy over metaphor, hybridity over purity, syncretism over difference, pluralism over essentialism or pan-textualism, and diglossia over monoglossia. The paradigmatic postcolonial text is the West Indian novel which is elevated, implicitly, to the position of pre-eminence: all postcolonial literatures aspire to the condition of the West Indian, and the achievements of West Indian writers are read back into the settler traditions. But the West Indian paradigm is just not applicable to a country like Australia for instance, either historically or linguistically. Australian English is an almost exact duplication of Received Standard English and Australian colloquialisms (its most obvious anti-language) follow exactly the rules by which the language of the British underground comes into being. That crucial fracturing of the deep structure of a language found in non-settler 'englishes' just does not occur in Australia, a country which, historically, has always seen itself as part of the Empire, ever ready to follow, uncritically, in the footsteps of the Mother Country. Gallipoli, the Australian colonization of the Pacific, the White Australia Policy, Prime Minister Menzies' recitation of love-poetry for the departing Queen Elizabeth in 1953, may be explained simply in terms of a country which saw itself as an integral part of the White British Empire. The settler colonies provided the manpower, the support systems for colonialism to flourish.

At the heart of the oppositional post-colonial are three fundamental principles – principles which are as much points of difference between White settler colonies and the rest – which may be summarized as (a) racism, (b) a second language, (c) political struggle. For the category of the post-colonial to work in any other fashion it must become a 'complicit post-colonialism' and therefore effectively postmodern. It is the uneasy manner in which these three principles may be discussed with reference to the settler colonies which, to our mind, explains the pan-textualist bias within an otherwise mutually exclusive pluralist enterprise. Thus where subversion, for instance, is emphasized, this is done in largely non-political and non-racial terms. In short subversion becomes a kind of an anti-language (the authors call it an inter-language) which largely defines the postcolonial experience. What is worrying is that the category of subversion applies without change to literary tendencies within the canon itself (Donne, Sterne, Mary Shelley, etc.) rather than specifying those material conditions which give rise to post-colonial difference.

An uncritical adulation of pluralism, which leads, finally, to post-colonialism becoming the liberal Australian version of multiculturalism, then produces concepts such as 'hybridity' and 'syncretism' as the theoretical 'dominants' of post-colonial society. In doing so the authors then implicitly argue that the post-colonial rejects a monocentric view of human experience: assimilation (monocentrism) is out, hybridity (multiculturalism) is in. John Lennon sings 'Imagine all the people . . .'. Theories of syncretism/hybridization are essentially pluralistic, as they maintain a pluralism which encourages freedom and independence. Their parallel, as we have said, is to be found in Australian multiculturalism, a utopian

view of the world which is so very recent in origin and reflects as much global economic policies as any concerted effort on the part of Anglo-Celtic Australian society to change itself.

The emphasis on hybridization leads to an uneasiness with social and racial theories of post-colonial literature. Though Sanskrit theories are given an extended gloss, their interest for the authors of *EWB* lies, it seems to us, in their affirmation, finally, of an ahistorical aesthetic. Sanskrit theories of reception (*rasa*) and suggestiveness (*dhvani*) after all keep the primacy of the literary object intact. Sanskrit theories are still individual-oriented and easier for a pluralist to handle than theories of negritude (Aimé Césaire, Leopold Senghor, Fanon) or Aboriginality (Narogin). The authors of *EWB* tend to use the word 'essentialism' for any mode of criticism that claims indigeneity and avoids pluralism without in fact conceding that pluralism itself might be yet another version of what Achebe called 'colonialist criticism' (p. 127).

Furthermore, a related question may now be posed. Does the postcolonial exist only in English? The emphasis on language and 'englishes' in *EWB* seems to say so. But why are Premchand, Bannerjee (of *Pather Panchali* fame) and Satyajit Ray, and Raj Kapoor and Guru Dutt (the last three film-makers) not postcolonial? And what about the writings of the Indian diaspora not written in English, such as the Mauritian Abhimanyu Anant's *Lal Pasina* ('Blood and Sweat')?

For the authors of *EWB* it is syncretism ('syncretism is the condition within which post-colonial societies operate' (p. 180)) and hybridity ('hybridity . . . is the primary characteristic of all post-colonial texts' (p. 185)) which are the hallmarks of postcolonial writing. As a consequence post-colonial literatures are 'constituted in counter-discursive rather than homologous practices' (p. 196). In the process, as we have argued, the post-colonial has adopted almost every conceivable postmodern theory as well as a number of propositions which are absolutely central to the rise of the bourgeois novel in Europe.

#### WHAT IS POST(-)COLONIALISM?

The work of Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin is a timely contribution to the post-colonial debate. The strategic moves they adopt in their unenviable task for a comprehensive post-colonial theory have paved the way for our own critique. What follows is, we hope, an extension, albeit in a slightly different form, of their own intrinsically difficult project. Firstly, there is, we feel, a need to make a stronger distinction between the postcolonialism of settler and non-settler countries. But within each of these there is a need to see greater continuities between the colonial and the post-colonial. In some ways the postcolonial is really a splinter in the side of the colonial itself and the kinds of rebellion that we find in the postcolonial are not unlike the reactions of the child against the law of the father.<sup>21</sup> Because of the indeterminacy of the fused postcolonial (in which oppositional and complicit forms

coexist) theorization about it inevitably pushes us towards postmodernism. If we catalogue the crucial features of postcolonialism as advanced by *EWB* – fracture, interlanguage, polyglossia, subversion, and so on – we find that we are drawn, via the defining qualities of postmodernism, to propose a counter-literary history functioning as the underside of the dominant literary history. The postcolonial (unhyphenated) is a ghost that stalks the parent literary history just as vernacular literatures of Europe in Rome's former colonies challenged Latin, and Hindi-Urdu literature challenged Sanskrit/Persian. From this point of view it is then possible to claim that the postcolonial as a category subsumes the post-modern.

As the memory of independence struggles recedes and global capitalism in its latest avatar dominates our lives, and Hastings's prophecy is no longer simply a future hope but a living if still partial reality, we believe that postcolonialism, in its unhyphenated variety, will become the dominant 'post-colonial' practice. Though it seems highly unlikely that the difference between settler and non-settler countries will cease to exist – they will in fact become more marked – it is, nevertheless, possible to construct a theory which predicts the inevitable triumph of various complicit forms of postcolonialism in all late post-colonial societies. In order to explore the ramifications of this claim we would need further research into the nature of colonialism itself and the ways in which the struggle towards self-determination found expression. In doing so we should be able to acknowledge the quite radical differences in the 'colonial' relationship between the imperial centre and the colonized in the various parts of the former empires. It appears that the experience of colonialization was more similar across all the White settler colonies than in the non-settler colonies. In the Indian subcontinent the colonial experience seems to have affected the cities only, in Africa it worked hand in hand with evangelical Christianity, in Southeast Asia the use of migrant labour – notably Chinese and Indian – mediated between the British and the Malays. In the West Indies slave labour, and later indentured Indian labour, again made the relationship less combative and more accommodating. To use a non-literary marker, cricket triumphed in the British settler countries, on the Indian subcontinent and in the West Indies but not in non-settler Africa, the Middle East or Southeast Asia. Smaller *révits* must replace the *grand récit* of postcolonialism in all these instances so that we can know the historical background better. In these smaller *révits* it may well be that the term 'postcolonial' is never used.

Beyond that, in the present late stage of world capitalism, the complicit postcolonial is on the way to becoming the literary dominant of 'post-colonialism'. In this situation it is important to recognize its complex relationship with postmodernism, neither collapsing the two categories nor positing an absolute distinction. The postmodern has made some features of the postcolonial visible or speakable for the colonizers, reassuringly strange and safely subversive, just as orientalism did in an

earlier stage of colonial ideology. In return, postcolonialism draws attention to the occluded politics and forgotten precursors of postmodernism.

Postcolonialism we have stressed is not a homogeneous category either across all postcolonial societies or even within a single one. Rather it refers to a typical configuration which is always in the process of change, never consistent with itself. In settler countries like Australia, for instance, writers such as Harpur, Brennan, Richardson and Patrick White can be read as aspirants to the canon, extending but not challenging the standards of the imperial centre. But even while this was going on, the indigenous peoples whom the settlers had silenced could not be ignored, and their ghosts began to invade the texts of the dominant tradition. The kind of parasitism found in the original settler literature *vis-à-vis* the Mother Country is at first a prominent feature of the emerging writings of the Australian Aborigine, the New Zealand Maori and the Canadian Indian. Then a distinctive form of the postcolonial arises, as defiant as oppositional postcolonialism but without political independence or autonomy ever a realistic option. This symbiotic postcolonial formation has many of the same features as the more exciting postcolonialism of the non-settler countries as they establish their national identity. From here it begins to affect the form of writing of the settlers themselves, leading to a shift of balance within a type of the fused postcolonial.

In the age of the postmodern, then, there is a double trend towards the complicit postcolonial: an increasing alliance with the postmodern at the level of theory, and an increasing predominance in political life. The echoes of guilty partnership in an illicit affair are set off by the word 'complicit', and these overtones hold back the difficult task of defining the 'new' postcolonialism which would take us beyond the oppositional postcolonialism of non-settler colonies that pivots around the moment of independence. It must be possible to acknowledge difference and insist on a strongly theorized oppositional postcolonialism as crucial to the debate, without claiming that this form is or has been everywhere the same wherever a colonizer's feet have trod. We can trace the creative process of cultural syncretism and its collapse of distinctions without having to overlook the contradictions and oppositions which still survive, and without disavowing the sometimes violent nature of colonial struggles in non-settler countries before and after independence. It is precisely if we acknowledge the pervasiveness but not universality of complicit forms of the postcolonial that we can trace the connections that go back to the settler experience and beyond, and forward to the new postcolonialism. Theory must be flexible and prudent enough to say: the post-colonial is dead; long live postcolonialism.

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NOTES

- 1 Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin, *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-colonial Literature* (London: Routledge, 1989). All quotations from this text are cited parenthetically.
- 2 Edward W. Said, 'Representing the colonized: anthropology's interlocutors', *Critical Inquiry*, 15, 2 (Winter 1989), p. 209.
- 3 Salman Rushdie, 'The Empire writes back with a vengeance', *Times*, 3 July 1980, p. 8.
- 4 Terry Eagleton, *The Ideology of the Aesthetic* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), p. 381.
- 5 Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books 1961). See also Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967).
- 6 Charles Wilkins (trans.), *The Bhagvat-Geeta or Dialogues of Kreesna and Arjoon* (London: C. Nourse, 1785), p. 13.
- 7 James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture. Twentieth-Century Ethnography, Literature and Art* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), p. 113.
- 8 Salman Rushdie, *The Satanic Verses* (London: Viking, 1988), p. 5.
- 9 Mudrooroo Narogin, *Writing from the Fringe. A Study of Modern Aboriginal Literature* (Melbourne: Hyland House, 1990).
- 10 Linda Hutcheon, 'Circling the downspout of empire: post-colonialism and postmodernism', *Ariel*, 20, 4 (October 1989), p. 151.
- 11 Helen Tiffin, 'Post-colonialism, post-modernism and the rehabilitation of post-colonial history', *Journal of Commonwealth Literature*, 21, 1 (1988), pp. 169–81.
- 12 Stephen Slemon, 'Modernism's last post' *Ariel*, 20, 4 (October 1989), pp. 3–17.
- 13 Vijay Mishra, 'The centre cannot hold: Bailey, Indian culture and the sublime', *South Asia*, n.s., 12, 1 (June 1989), pp. 103–14.
- 14 Mammata, *Kavyaparakasha*, ed. Acharya Vishveshvar (Varanasi: Jñanamandala, 1960), IV, 39, 24, p. 91.
- 15 John McLaren, 'The power of the word: Salman Rushdie and *The Satanic Verses*', *Westerly*, 1 (March 1990), pp. 61–5.
- 16 Helen Watson-Williams, 'Finding a father: a reading of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', *Westerly*, 1 (March 1990), pp. 66–71.
- 17 Amin Malak, 'Reading the crisis: the polemics of Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', *Ariel*, 20, 4 (October 1989), pp. 176–86.
- 18 S. Aravamudan, 'Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*', *Diacritics*, 19, 2 (Summer 1989), pp. 3–20.
- 19 See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1986).
- 20 See Karine Schomer, *Mahadevi Varma and the Chhayavad Age of Modern Hindi Poetry* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).
- 21 See Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra, *The Dark Side of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1991).