Orientalism and Subaltern Studies in the Postcolonial Studies

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Accepted 28th February, 2017

Abstract

The aim of the essay is to introduce readers to the interdisciplinary field of postcolonial studies. Starting with Edward Said's founding text Orientalism. The essay shall introduce key texts references in postcolonial theory, emphasizing the contributions of Homi K. Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and the Subaltern Studies Group. The essay shall engage in critical theoretical perspectives that had influence in the field of postcolonial studies. We will be introduced to the importance of wide range of thinkers, from anti-colonial thought of Gandhi and Franz Fanon to philosophy of Antonio Gramsci, Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Through readings of theory the essay shall address the key questions and debates in postcolonial studies - representation, colonial ambivalence, subalternity, alterity, critique of nationalism, questions of race and gender.

Keywords: Postcolonial Studies, Orientalism, Representation, Subalternity, Alterity, Critique of Nationalism.

Introduction

The main objectives of this article are: 1) Engage with key questions and topics in the interdisciplinary field of postcolonial theory; 2) Analyze a variety of texts in postcolonial theory and familiarize themselves with key topics and debated in the field; 3) Learn the methodology and style of postcolonial thinking, which would help them to apply theory to particular local contexts.

Edward Said and the 'Orientalism'. Critique of Colonialism and Question of Method

Edward Said can be considered the 'father' of postcolonial theory, and his book Orientalism (1978) is the first attempt to understand and untangle complex relationship Europe had (and still does) with everything is outside Europe. Edward Said was a literary scholar, so in his work he mainly focuses on representations of the Orient in literature (English, French), art works (painting) etc. His main thesis is the Europe produced the Orient by researching it, by writing about it, by representing it - by creating what he calls a discourse of Orientalism. The notion of discourse Said borrows Michel Foucault. Discourse is a system of knowledge about a certain sphere incorporating everything is known about it, and imposes restriction and rules regarding how we should think, perceive one sphere or the other. There are many discourses of all kinds - discourse of sexuality, of medicine, of prisons and so on. Said introduces a new one - a discourse of Orientalism. Following Foucault's ideas of power and knowledge, Said contests the dominant thinking that writing about the Orient, gathering knowledge, or learning languages was always neutral, was always for the lust of knowledge, an expression of human curiosity. Looking at this as a system, all knowledge acquisition was for having better control on the subjected Orient. Second important point - the representation is never ever neutral. European representation of the Orient was informed by the prevailing thinking of the world in 18 and 19 centuries: Europe was the centre of the world, all other cultures were inferior. Racism played an important role in this too. So, all representation was one sided - it was how Europeans perceived the Orient, how they thought about it, what they thought the Orient was. The Oriental subjects could not represent themselves, because they had no power - power was in the hands of European colonial empires, their armies, as well as their explorers, writers, artists (nowadays we could add media, cinema, etc. - there is no shortage of Eurocentric attitudes after the colonial period was formally over in the second half of 20th century). So, European intellectuals in this sense produced the Orient by writing about it, by representing. Why was it important to produce it? There is another side of the coin, and a more complex one. Europe managed to consolidate its own identity and self-understanding only in the face of the Other, and in this case - Orient. More narrowly, and Said makes this argument - the 'Middle East', which was the Orient immediately 'at the doorstep' of Europe. Said in his work is not using too much theory, except Foucault, but the notion of the Other is very important in psychoanalysis, and other scholars, especially Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak and Homi Bhabha develop a far more theoretical approach to the Other.

I find very interesting the Said'digressions about 'Orient', 'Orientalism', 'Oriental' and so on. We know that Orient is an European invention and something related with ideas like: exoticism, a place of romance, landscapes with camels and dunes, and so on. But as Said says, "Orient is not only adjacent to Europe; it is also the place of Europe’s greatest and richest and oldest colonies, the source of its civilizations and languages, its cultural contestant, and one of its deepest and most recurring images of the Other. [...] The Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality..." (Said, 1978:1-2). It is important to remember that after the great Germanic invasion to Europe, in great part motivated by the Mongolic and Huns incursion (V-VI Centuries). In the next century came the Islamic invasion over large parts of the continent (VIII
Century). That is why we have to recognize that Orient is an integral part of the culture and civilization European. ¿Does the ‘Orientalism’ is just really an academical concept? Until the last past years, "Orientalism is a style of thought based upon an ontological and epistemological distinction made between 'the Orient' and (most of the time) 'the Occident''(Said, 1978:2). Orientalism, Said insists must be studied as a systematic discipline with its interdisciplinary focus and its own discourse characteristics. Orientalism need to be studied not only through the eyes of Europe or US, like it was in the nineteenth century, where the French and British cinema and literature (Rimbaud or Baudelaire) gave us a lot of interesting but wrong images of Orient. "East is not only a career for Westerners" (Said, 1978:5). Historically speaking, the relation between the two hemispheres has always been one of domination, hegemony and power. Understanding better the Orient and the Orientalism could change the relationships between the two parts, "because Orientalism is a cultural and a political fact" (Said, 1978:13).

YT is, above all, a discourse that is by no means in direct, corresponding relationship with political power in the raw, but rather is produced and exists in an uneven exchange with various kinds of power, shaped to a degree by the exchange with power political (as with a colonial or imperial establishment), power intellectual (as with reigning sciences like comparative linguistics or anatomy, or any of the modern policy sciences), power cultural (as with orthodoxies and canons of taste, texts, values), power moral (as with ideas about what 'we' do and what 'they' cannot do or understand as 'we' do) (Said, 1978:12).

The canon and the methodological approach to study Orientalism must still probably be conformed, but there are already critical discourses to study it with ethical, scientific and epistemological authority, not only in academic instances but even more on these ones.

The nexus of knowledge and power creating 'the Oriental' and in a sense obligating him as a human being is therefore not for me an exclusively academic matter. Yet it is an intellectual matter of some very obvious importance. I have been able to put to use my humanistic and political concerns for the analysis and description of a very worldly matter, the rise, development and consolidation of Orientalism (Said, 1978:27).

It does not matter in first place that Orientalism responds more to a concept produced by the West. Nowadays both the global process and the terrorism as correlates have reinforced the stereotypes about what is and how to see the Orient and the Orientalism.

Three things have contributed to making even the simplest perception of the Arabs and Islam into a highly-politicized, almost raucous matter: one, the history of popular anti-Arab and anti-Islamic prejudice in the West, which is immediately reflected in the history of Orientalism; two, the struggle between the Arabs and Israeli Zionism, and its effects upon American Jews as well as upon both the liberal culture and the population at large; three, the almost total absence of any cultural position making it possible either to identify with or dispassionately to discuss the Arabs or Islam (Said, 1978:27).

Young considers that postcolonial "remains always marked by these images, preserving the traces of the violence, defiance, struggles and suffering of individuals, that represent the political ideas of community, equality, self-determination and dignity for which they fought" (Young, 2001:ix). Postcolonial theory.

Is distinguished from orthodox European Marxism by combining its critique of objective material conditions with detailed analysis of their subjective effects. Fort this reason, it has also played a significant part in the growing culturalism of contemporary political, social and historical analysis. Some regard this culturalist tendency as a typical symptom of contemporary capitalist culture rather than an analysis that provides a critical perspective on its underlying dynamics. In this account, postcolonialism at best describes the effects of contemporary social and economic conditions, but does little either to unearth their causes or to change their basis. However, such an emphasis is not exclusive to postcolonialism: even western Marxism has been marked by increasing interest in the Frankfurt School and the British cultural materialists (Young, 2001:7).

Thus, the postcolonial critique for Young

Focuses on forces of oppression and coercitive domination that operate in the contemporary world: the politics of anti-colonialism and neocolonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class and ethnicities define its terrain. Interest in oppression of the past will always be guided by the relation of that history to the present. In that sense, postcolonial theory’s intellectual commitment will always be to seek to develop new forms of engaged theoretical work that contributes to the creation of dynamic ideological and social transformation (Young, 2007:11).

Orient, or in Said’s case - the Middle East was and is an integral part of European consciousness - something that is not being recognised. At the same time, it is impossible to fully comprehend European history without understanding what Europe really was doing outside Europe. On a more practical level, the economic prosperity in Europe was the outcome of colonial exploitations (British colonial economy in 19th century was based on producing opium is India and shipping it to China; rubber in Belgian Congo; sugar cane plantations in the Caribbean and Mauritius etc.). So, on this practical level Europe needed its Other to become Europe as we know it. Relationship with Arabs and Islam were complicated. Islam was seen as a rival to Christianity, plus there were the Crusades. Andalusia (in Spain) was an Islamic caliphate till the end of 15 century. So, the Orient was integral part of European imagination. On a more theoretical note - subject formation always involves the Other. Said and other postcolonial theorists picked up this psychoanalytical concept and reconstructed it as a cultural Other. All cultures in this sense needs the Other to become Self, to consolidate its own identity. If Other is not there (psychoanalytically speaking, the Other is always there in the psyche of an individual, but here we’re talking about cultural politics), it has to be constructed. This process in never conscious. Any
culture or society can find the Other onto which to project its fears and desires (can be another civilization/ country as in the case of Orientalism, or it can be 'internal Other' in the form of ethnic, racial, linguistic minorities). The relationship with the Other is always problematic, because on one hand there is desire for the Other, in case of Orient - what you mentioned - exoticism, place of romance, camels, mysteries and so on - this is the desiring part, but on the other hand there is fear of the Other, a repulsion. This is, in our case, best expressed by projecting all fears Europe had (and still has) on the Orient - that it is a savage place, barbaric, violent, uncivilized; a place that has to be managed, controlled; a place out of which radical otherness must be extinguished by 'civilizing' it, by making it more European, more recognizable (this approach can easily be applied to all sorts of contemporary contexts, like the refugee crisis in Europe, the rise of Islamophobia, fear of immigrants etc.). So Orient was constructed as the Other. Orient has to be seen as a political concept, not a geographical one. Orientalism is both an academic concept, and a theory and practice of colonialism. It is a sum of knowledge Europe produced about the Orient, and produced the Orient in this way. But before Said this sphere was seen as apolitical. Said politicized this by making use of Foucault's notion of discourse, and his concept of power/ knowledge.

No knowledge is free from power, no knowledge should be viewed uncritically. Knowledge about the colonies helped to produce the Other - both exotic, romantic, and barbaric, violent, in need of civilization. Of course, many scholars - linguists, historians, anthropologist who were researching in Asia, Africa and the Middle East, as well as artists, writers, painters who were traveling there and reproducing the knowledge were not distorting the reality consciously. Many of them had genuine passion to learn about other cultures. But what's important, and what Edward Said says elsewhere - that intellectuals are always "of their time", their perception of the world, ethics, social relationship and so on is informed by the dominant ideas of their society, of their time. So, they were Eurocentric, often racists, definitely supremacists because it was part of 'normalcy' of that time. Obviously, Orientalism is very much present in European, or what we may call "Western" thought. In late 20th century, after the decolonization it transformed, but it part of European or "Western" Self, an integral part of how the world is perceived. Orientalism gave a certain "grammar" in making sense of other cultures, other civilizations, and imposed a clear hierarchical thinking, where the European Self always has power - both physical military, as well as cultural, civilizational, and Orient/ the Other is always inferior, feared, desired.

About the Other. The biggest problem with this is a constant need for the Other. There is a desire to destroy the Other as something (someone) fearful, threatening the existence of the Self (i.e. Europe, West, whiteness etc.), but at the same time the Other is instrumentl is the subject formation of Europe/West/Global North. Without the Other there would not be a Self! This binary opposition, and similar binaries are making modern European thought all the way from 17th century. So, postcolonial theory aims does dismantle these binaries and advocates multiplicity. And at this point we should turn to European philosophy, which influenced postcolonial theorists, especially psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan, which deals with the Other, and deconstruction of Jacques Derrida. Derrida is one of the key influences in postcolonial theory, especially he had huge influence on Spivak and Bhabha (as we shall see). Derrida aimed precisely at deconstructing binaries of Western philosophy. His famous statement was that "there is no centre, or, there are many centres". This is something very appealing for postcolonial theory. Colonial understanding was centred on perceiving the world divided in two (as Fanon writes in his book I uploaded) - metropole and periphery, where the former is a colonial centre of power, and the latter - a colony. Speaking of culture, European culture was always perceived as superior, and the cultures of the colonized - as subordinate, inferior, in need of 'civilizing'. Such metropole/periphery model is very much alive even today. The world is seen as divided in two. But after decolonization and migrations from the colonial peripheries into former colonial centres (European countries), such model is far less stable. Of course, the metropole is still trying to imagine that there is a centre, and there is a periphery, but in reality this no longer holds. And here we must go back to Foucault's power/ knowledge problem. Metropole still has a political power, and a power to represent the cultural Other in a distorted way, and inferior, in need of constant control etc. But as Derrida, and postcolonial theorists say, there is multiplicity of centres, and this is a political project to realize the multiplicity, as well as philosophical one - to realize multiplicity in theory, philosophy, in knowledge, to educate differently, to present a postcolonial understanding of the world where there are no binaries. So, postcolonial project is also deeply concerned with education (Spivak wrote quite a lot about this). But with this I am jumping ahead a bit, so I will stop there.

Frantz Fanon is a seminal figure in anti-colonial thought. He should not be mistaken for postcolonial thinker (postcolonial thought begins with Said), but he is part of a wide array of figures from various parts of the colonized world who fought against colonialism (there are many of them - Gandhi, Kwame Nkrumah, C.L.R. James etc.) Fanon was from Martinique, was trained as a psychiatrist, and came to Algeria to work as a doctor. Algeria was a French colony at that time. While working and living there, he was able to observe the relationship between the colonizers and the colonized, and began to develop a unique theory of colonial psychology. His most famous work is The Wretched of the Earth. In Algeria Fanon joined the FLN (National Liberation Front), which fought for Algeria's independence. His radical ideas, which he expresses in his book influenced many anti-colonial movements, as well as postcolonial theory. This book is often considered to be a kind of "revolutionary's handbook" in anti-colonial struggle. Homi Bhabha lists Fanon as one of his greatest inspirations. Fanon talks about the divided space, divided world of the colonizer and the colonized, and the tension that exists between the two. The colonized is always envious and wants to occupy the space of the colonizer. At the same time, the colonizer knows this, and has to mobilize disciplinary power in order to keep the colonized away. These ideas on spatial separation and the tensions this creates are indeed applicable not only to Algeria, but everywhere where there is segregation, where there are ghettos etc. Fanon uses both psychoanalysis in his work and the Marxist critique. Looking from Marxist perspective, he reworked the ideas about class struggle into racial struggle. While in Marxism you have the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (the workers and the capitalists,
masters), in colonial relationship, according to him, class turns into race - proletariat is the colonized, while the colonizer forms the colonial bourgeoisie. This is very important observation by Fanon. Furthermore, Fanon argues that it is impossible to achieve liberation without violence. Here his ideas are very similar to Marx's on revolution - there can be no negotiation, the change must be total, violent, in which existing social classes are annihilated. Fanon adapts such scenario to anti-colonial struggle, but here we have not classes, but a different type of hierarchy, the colonizer and the colonized. Peaceful resolution is impossible.

Another important issue for Fanon is nationalism. Can the elites, educated by the colonizing powers (French, British etc.), and in this way having French or British mentality become the new elites of the new nation? Or are they too affected by the colonizer's culture? In many countries after decolonization precisely the local elites (who in many cases were not supportive of colonialism) came to rule newly liberated countries. Nationalism was almost always lead by elites, not the masses. According to Fanon, this is very negative practice. He had hopes in the locals who were untouched by the colonizer's culture and education and language to lead the revolution and subsequently - new nation. These intellectuals would be the organic intellectuals, not owing anything to colonial power in terms of culture. As I said before regarding orientalism - this discourse formed the way of thinking and perceiving the orient, the colonies. It was deeply embedded in the educational systems in Britain, France and elsewhere. So, the Algerians, or the Indians educated using British or French system would so speak have a "seed" of orientalism in them, they would see their own countries from the European, and eurocentric point of view. Fanon devoted the whole book to these questions, the problems of a 'native' intellectual ("Black Skin, White Masks").

Anti-colonialism sprang up in various colonies (India, Algeria, and elsewhere) as a movement to achieve political independence. It usually was a violent struggle, but produced intellectuals, usually at the forefront of the movement, who were not only political or guerilla leaders, but also writers who developed theories about colonialism, wrote about best strategies to fight colonialism. Postcolonialism should be understood as a particular theoretical approach to study colonialism. There is quite a lot of debate about what "post-" means - is it a temporal dimension, is it spatial, or is it just theoretical. A bit of all three, in fact. Postcolonialism may mean a period that came after the decolonization. It can be spatially seen as a country, which is a former colony (a postcolony), and, as I said, as an theoretical approach. Thinking about postcolonialism only from one of the three perspectives does not give a full picture of that it is all about. Critics of postcolonial theory try to portray postcolonialism as a fancy theory and nothing more (Edward Said was especially under attack after publishing his book on Orientalism). To an extent it is possible see postcolonialism as a period, but then postcolonial theory is often applied to countries that are struggling to become free (e.g. Palestine), countries where there are other types of struggle against oppression, like Iran - it was never a colony, but the social, political, cultural processes there are analyzed from postcolonial perspective (e.g. see Hamid Dabashi). Same goes with the studies of migration, ethnic and religious tensions in Europe and North America, 9/11 - postcolonial scholars are also analyzing these issues, and in this particular case - they are analyzing former/present metropoles like UK, France, the US from postcolonial perspective. So, it is a bit tricky to pinpoint postcolonialism. But to answer your question - the major difference between anti-colonialism and postcolonialism is that the latter is an intellectual, academic movement, or discipline, while the former was the actual struggle to overthrow colonial regimes. Said writes that Flaubert notes for Bouvard and Pécuchet "had learned that it is better not to traffic in ideas and in reality together". What he wants to express with this is that "knowledge no longer requires application o reality; knowledge is what gets passed on silently, without comment, from one text to another. Ideas are propagated and disseminated anonymously, they are repeated without attribution; they have literally become idées recues: what matters is that they are there, to be repeated, echoed, and re-echoed uncritically (Said, 1978:116).

Thus, Orient was something more than the Islamic territories. In the meanwhile Europe moves on other parts in the world, like the Orient, this that we will call Orientalism began to appear in the European books, letters, images, architectures, paintings and so on. It contributed finally to re-elaborate a sort of Western Romanticism. Said talks about four elements on whose presence "depend the specific intellectual and institutional structure of modern Orientalism: expansion, historical confrontation, sympathy and classification" (Said, 1978:120). These "existential paradigms" were not simply removed or substituted, they were reconstituted, redeployed, redistributed in secular frameworks and renewed articulations, sometimes in more creative ways than others. On this sense "the modern Orientalist was, his view, a hero rescuing the Orient from the obscurity, alienation, and he himself had properly distinguished" (Said, 1978:121), in this relational process even the Orient as the Orientalist disciplines suffered big changes. The Orientalist work becomes a complex labor to sew fragments, representations, parts, to try to make sense against the usefulness and particular interests. "Each Orientalist re-created his own Orient according his own epistemological rules (Said, 1978:141).

There are the philological comparative works and studies of the Semitic languages of Renan. This breakthrough consisted in speaking about the development of Indo-European linguistics and the differentiation of Orientalism in a degraded form in both the moral and the biological sense (Said, 1978:141). As Renan was often to say: "Linguistic temporality and history are full of lacunae, enormous discontinuities, hypothetical periods. Therefore linguistic events occur in a nonlinear and essentially discontinues temporal dimension controlled by the linguist in a very particular way" (Said, 1978:143). Orient has been sometimes overvalued: (pantheism); and, sometimes reduced extremely: barbaric or antidemocratic. Orientalism has become a complex growing discipline with his authorities and competitors as a form of specialized technical language.

In the system of knowledge about the Orient is less a place than a topos, a set of references, a congeries of characteristics, that seems to have its origin in a quotation, or a fragment of a text, or a citation from someone's work on the Orient, or someone bit of
Colonialism, depicting the Orient as culturally lower went hand in hand with European romanticism. European modernity developed a linear perception of civilizational evolution (later, obviously, it was influenced by Darwin as well). European cultures were seen and imagined as more evolved, more 'contemporary' than ones in the Orient. The Orient signified European past, to see an analysis of the Orient was like looking at the way Europe was before it 'civilized' itself. This idea went very deep into European, or, more precisely - eurocentric perception of the world. European scholars interested in the Orient were in effect looking at Europe's past, were romanticizing it. There was no romanticism in political and economic dimension of colonialism, but romantic orientalist discursive via representations of the Orient helped both to create the Orient, and to create a myth about a need to civilize the Orient, to help the Orient achieve what Europe had. This is what was called a "civilizing mission", a sort of burden Europe had. Hence Said writes that the Orientalist was a kind of hero rescuing Orient. One good example would be Rudyard Kipling, among others, but nevertheless quoting him now is useful. He wrote a poem called "White Man's Burden" (1899), in which he calls the colonized a "half-devil and half-child". This very well illustrates the problem. Orientals were seen as kind of younger brother and sisters, in need of civilization, and on the other - menacing 'devils' one needed to manage. So, herein lies romanticism, and colonial pragmatism. Romanticism and 'civilizing mission' rhetoric helped the European colonial empires to justify colonialism at home. There was no shortage of debates in the British Parliament if Britain should expand its colonies, especially related to India, the largest colony. Of course, those politicians who argued against colonialism were doing so not on moral grounds - they simply saw that the benefits are not that great in economic terms (that changes later in 19th century). And so romanticizing the Orient, researching it, producing knowledge 'filtered' through European and eurocentric understanding of the world helped in this cause. That’s why Said says that knowledge, ideas are simply there, they are unchecked, accepted uncritically - the Orient was a 'child'. The self-representation of the Orientals did not matter. In the words of Spivak, whom we will discuss later, they simply 'could not speak', were not allowed to represent themselves. Like I said before, before Said no one really took up the task to look at Orientalist writings, literature and art critically from this position.

As by now you are all well aware, postcolonial theory makes use of post-structuralist theories of Foucault, Derrida, among others, to build its arguments. This has met with criticism, as I already said, as these European philosophers are often seen to be Eurocentric. Also, they barely mention colonialism and decolonization in their work despite the fact that they were most active as scholars during the tumultuous 1950s and 1960s, the Algerian War of Independence. Only Sartre was very vocal about colonialism. So, Young's statement that Foucault's silence on these issues seems almost deliberate, given what themes he was interested in (exclusion, disciplinary practice etc.) is an interesting one. Foucault himself spent two years in Tunisia writing his "Archeology of Knowledge", his methodological magnum opus. Robert Young elsewhere writes that post-structuralism itself should be understood as 'Algerian theory', because although most of the philosophers were silent on the question of French colonialism in North Africa, many of them were in one way or the other affected by the events, or related to Algeria. Jacques Derrida was born in Algeria, and as a Jew in a French colony at the time when anti-semitism was an institutionalized practice, he himself felt ambiguous "third" element - he was not a colonized (i.e. Algerian), so could not identify with this entity, and he was excluded from 'Frenchness' because he was Jewish, although he identified with France and French culture. His personal experience of non-belonging, of being 'undecidable' contributed to his theory of deconstruction. He himself was not able to belong to the either side of the binaristic logic of Self (French) and Other (Algerian), and was occupying a space in-between. We will come back to this idea of 'othered self' and hybridity in terms of identity when we discuss Homi Bhabha - hybridity and 'thirdness' is Bhabha's domain. So, Derrida only towards the end of his life published a very interesting theoretical and semi-autobiographical book Monolingualism of the Other. Apart from Derrida, Foucault spent time in Tunisia, Helene Cixous, an eminent philosopher and feminism was also Algerian Jew, sociologist and anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu served in French army and was stationed in Algeria during the independence war, and after the war stayed on there to lecture and do research. So, many of the Parisian intellectuals and their radical ideas owe a lot of French colonial experience, even if they are silent about this.

So, Foucault's ideas must be seen in the social and political context of his time. Many of his ideas on exclusion, discourse, discipline, spatiality are appropriated by postcolonial theorists. Theory of discourse is a central one in Foucault's work, and Said was the first one to make use of it in 'Orientalism', but as Young says, Said highly reworked the notion of discourse, and did not engage with more difficult elements of this theory, like 'statement'. Discourse for Foucault is a way knowledge is constituted as practice, but in relation to the material world. There is no discourse, no knowledge without the material world, that is - first you must encounter the material world. For Said is the other way around - first the knowledge is formed, or imagined about the material world (orient), and the material world re-shaped, misrepresented according to the imagined knowledge. Foucault would have sharply disagreed with such inversion of his idea. Foucault elaborated on the theory of discourse in one of his last books - History of Sexuality vol.1 (See the quotes Young, 2001: 406-407).

Discourse, as Young suggests, is a product of establishment, a product of power, sometimes understood as a sum of knowledge about a particular object, certain rules regarding how the object should be understood, how one should speak about the object. The discourse sets certain rules in this sense in terms of relationship between language (things said, written about the object) and the material world. For Foucault there is never a monolithic discourse - a discourse can in itself incorporate a variety of often-contradictory statements, there is always a multiplicity within a discourse,
a multiplicity of discourses, and the discourses interact, influence one another. In postcolonial theory, especially for Said and Spivak, the colonial discourse is hegemonic, it silences other voices, 'subaltern' (the term can be understood as 'subordinate' - we'll discuss this later when we talk on subalternity) voices. Foucault states that repression produces the voice of the repressed, that is - power constitutes the subject by the act of subjection, and makes the counter-discourse possible - and this is far from silence. Spivak sharply criticized Foucault, and wrote one of the most influential texts in postcolonial theory "Can the Subaltern Speak?", and we will read it later on. For her, the subaltern cannot speak, represent themselves, because the hegemonic discourse silences the voice of the colonized, distorts it; because the hegemonic, colonial discourse has a power to shape the discourse and establish the rules. Foucault maintains that a discourse is far more complex than that - for him, the subaltern, the repressed (or, the colonized), cannot but speak, either within one discourse or the other.

There is no silence, colonialism produces critique and resistance. Any discourse is highly unstable, always transforming, and vulnerable - it is in a way a constant negotiation, a constant production of statements, which can be very different. So, here lies a paradox - Foucault was such an important figure in the formation of postcolonial theory, but postcolonial theory often contradicts Foucault. Homi Bhabha was the one who picked up Foucault's ideas on discourse, Derrida's on deconstruction and Lacanian psychoanalysis, and produced his own ideas on hybridity.

So, understanding colonialism via Foucault complicates the picture, and a colonial discourse does seem far more open than the scholars influenced by Marxian dialectics may think.

As Young explains it (though he does not go into explaining 'enunciation', and engages with the 'statement' only), the difference between the two terms is difficult to pinpoint. Foucault himself does not make things easier. Both terms mean very similar things. Best way too look at it is to see a statement as a unit in a discursive formation - something said about something. Enunciation can be viewed as an act of producing the statement; and the analysis of enunciation - what conditions made the statement to be produced in the first place. Within what discourse the statement was produced, i.e. within what discourse and informed by what enunciation occurred. This analysis, once grasped, is very effective in analysing literary texts, historical documents, academic writing (for example - ethnological, anthropological studies of the colonies produced in the 19th century by the British/ French and influenced by the colonial discourse, eurocentric discourse of that time). This is something Said, Spivak and Bhabha, and other postcolonial scholars do. About the discourse and opposing view within it. Herein lies the ambiguity and perhaps the biggest challenge in grasping what the discourse is. One the one hand, there can be a discourse, and a counter-discourse, and they can interact with one another, i.e. the discourse of the colonizer, and anti-colonial discourse. But this, though a valid explanation, means that the discourses understood in this way operate in a binary logic, and are self-contained. There is nothing wrong in seeing it this way, even Said sees it this way. But what Foucault had in mind is that there may be many discourses, many small discourses (i.e. discourse on gender, discourse on medicine, discourse on psychiatry, discourse on education etc.), and they may contain contradiction within, and can accommodate opposing views, as discourses are never stable, never are unchanging. So, postcolonial critique, as well as anti-colonial critique can be understood as a separate discourse, but it is more beneficial from the theoretical standpoint to see many discourses on different issues and to see a 'debate' within each. And the colonized, the subaltern, the 'native intellectual' participates in this 'debate' with his/her opposing statement, which is usually excluded, ignored. But this does not deny the fact that such statement EXISTS.

That's why the subaltern CAN speak, and do speak all the time, according to Foucault. For Spivak such 'speaking' amounted to non-speaking and silencing. But in theoretical debate it depends how you look at it. Early postcolonial theory saw oppositions, silences etc. Nowadays the discourses are seen as more open, with porous borders; more open to counter-statements. This is partly what Derrida wanted to say. Note that Marx had a strong influence on postcolonial theory (still does), and Marxism tends to see a binary logic of class relationship (bourgeoisie vs. proletariat). Interpreting Marxism in a colonial context, we may see such binary relationship between the colonizer and the colonized. There is a lot of truth in such view, but this view can be supplemented by a more postmodernist position of Derrida, and some other philosophers (like Deleuze, but I will not touch upon him in this course). So we can say - yes, Western philosophy imagines, produces the world built on binaries, and succeeds in doing so. But this is a construct, and such construct can be challenged by a nomad, a marginal, a subaltern, someone whose identity is 'undecidable', someone who is more complex, someone who is hybrid. And indeed, 'native' intellectuals with western education can be viewed as such 'interventionists'.

The act of political independence is merely a political act. Decolonization involves far more than that - it is most importantly the decolonization of the mind, of thinking, of knowledge. At the same time, the decolonization must happen on the side of the colonizer as well, in the former colonial powers. And this type of decolonization has been partial on both sides. Colonial mentality and eurocentric perceptions have deep roots in European modernity in general, and what many scholars working in this field say - we are all postcolonials, whether we are from the former colonies, former (or present) colonial centres, or from countries that had nothing to do with colonialism. Modern world was shaped by colonialism, and it is not something we can resolve that easily. Intellectuals, scholars, artists are trying to bring about positive change, but of course there is a lot of resistance to that, because it challenges the core European beliefs - too often colonialism is considered to be only a historical fact belonging to a distant past. It is very much part of our present, and that's not easy to accept. About economy - it was the most important element of colonialism and its driving force. Europeans set out to the far away lands for economic reasons in the first place - initially it was about trade, it was about goods that were needed but not available in Europe. Like spices, especially pepper in Europe in the 17th century. At that time pepper (simple black pepper) was more expensive than gold. The British started their voyages to India precisely because of that, established their warehouses, packing facilities, because pepper was brought back to Britain in ships, and journey took 6 month one way.
And slowly they built more and more warehouses, negotiated better deals with local kings, and step by step took over the whole subcontinent. Later in 19th century they were growing poppies all over India, producing opium and shipping it to China. Opium was the biggest source of British empire’s revenue. Also, sugar plantations in the Caribbean were very important for both British and French, at the turn of the 20th century rubber in Congo became a very important source of revenue for Belgium, as in the 19th century a rubber tyre was first produced in England, the demand for it started growing later on with the manufacturing of cars etc. So, the economy, the goods that were available in the Asia, Africa and elsewhere were needed, and needed at good prices. It is easier to overtake and occupy or colonize the country than negotiate deals, share profits.

This resembles so much what was happening in the 20th century after the discovery of oil in the Middle East. This region was never important for Europe economically, as it had nothing Europe wanted. It was just a space “in the middle” between Europe and India. With oil things have changed, and European, and later American powers had to have some control over there. With decolonization things have changed, and we entered into a so-called neocolonial age. No longer there was a need to physically colonize the countries. You had to have a friendly regime, usually a friendly dictator, who would give the ‘best deal’ in oil trade, secure the interests of American (especially) and British oil companies (think of Saudi Arabia, or Iran under the Shah rule till 1979, or Saddam Hussein till late 1980s). Colonialism transforms in this sense, in 21st century it may look very different in its form than the earlier version of it, but economic interests are always there. It is very hard to say how, or when, or if the colonialism in its many forms would be over. Sounds a bit pessimistic, I know...

About God’s will. Fanon looks at this from the psychoanalytical point of view. When you face the horror of oppression and violence of the colonized and when you can do nothing about it, you make peace with it invoking fate, God’s will and so on. The psyche of the colonized does this in order to divert the focus off the trauma, in short- to make life bearable. But a point is reached when it all becomes unbearable, and from this point we have Fanon the Marxist speaking - the colonial proletariat (in this case the colonized) realizes the conditions of life, becomes fully aware of injustice, starts mobilizing the masses for revolution against the colonial bourgeoisie (the colonizer). Marx and Engels wrote about this in the ‘Communist Manifesto’, and the revolutionary ideals of Marxism were very popular among the colonized intelligentsia, it gave the ‘grammar’ for a possible resistance, for understanding their condition.

References


