POST-COLONIAL TRANSFORMATION

BILL ASHCROFT

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In his new book Bill Ashcroft gives us a revolutionary view of the ways in which post-colonial societies have responded to colonial control.

The most comprehensive analysis of major features of post-colonial studies ever compiled, *Post-Colonial Transformation*:

- demonstrates how widespread the strategy of transformation has been
- investigates political and literary resistance
- examines the nature of post-colonial societies' engagement with imperial lan guage, history, allegory and place
- offers radical new perspectives in post-colonial theory in principles of habitation and horizonality.

Post-Colonial Transformation breaks new theoretical ground while demonstrating the relevance of a wide range of theoretical practices, and extending the exploration of topics fundamentally important to the field of post-colonial studies.

Bill Ashcroft teaches at the University of New South Wales and is the author and co-author of several books and articles on post-colonial theory, including *The Empire Writes Back*; *The Post-Colonial Studies Reader*; *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*; and *Edward Said: The Paradox of Identity.*

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Introduction

From the Renaissance to the late nineteenth century, European colonial powers invaded, occupied or annexed a huge area of the globe. That movement outwards, seldom wholeheartedly supported by those countries' domestic populations, plagued by political opposition and by controversy over the morality or even the practicality of colonial occupation, nevertheless advanced so relentlessly that it has come to determine the cultural and political character of the world. The pre-dominance of Western civilization by 1914 was unprecedented in the extent of its global reach, but it had been relatively recently acquired. The centuries-long advance of European modernity had been radically accelerated during the eruption of capital-driven, late-nineteenth-century imperialism. The huge contradiction of empire (which also reached its most subtle expression in that period) between the geographical expansion, designed to increase the prestige and economic or political power of the imperial nation, and its professed moral justification, its 'civilizing mission' to bring order and civilization to the barbarous hordes, is a contradiction which also continues in subtler forms in the present-day exercise of global power. There may have been much good, in medical, educational and technological terms, in the colonial impact upon the non-European world. But the simple fact remains that these colonized peoples, cultures and ultimately nations were prevented from becoming what they might have become: they were never allowed to develop into the societies they might have been.

As Basil Davidson points out, the legacy of this colonial control for newly independent governments in Africa 'was not a prosperous colonial business, but in many ways, a profound colonial crisis' (1983: 182). As he puts it, in a discussion of the charismatic Kwame Nkrumah, who led Ghana into independence, the 'dish' the new leaders were handed on the day of independence

> was old and cracked and little fit for any further use. Worse than that, it was not an empty dish. For it carried the junk and jumble of a century of colonial muddle and 'make do,' and this the new . . . ministers had to accept along with the dish itself. What shone upon its supposedly golden surface was not the reflection of new ideas and ways of liberation, but the shadows of old ideas and ways of servitude.
>
> (1973: 94)

For this reason, and because colonial structures were often simply taken over by indigenous élites after independence, the central idea of resistance rhetoric – that 'independence' would be the same thing as 'national liberation' – was inevitably doomed to disappointment.

But the striking thing about colonial experience is that after colonization post-colonial societies *did* very often develop in ways which sometimes revealed a remarkable capacity for change and adaptation. A common view of colonization, which represents it as an unmitigated cultural disaster, disregards the often quite extraordinary ways in which colonized societies engaged and utilized imperial culture for their own purposes. This book is concerned with how these colonized peoples responded to the political and cultural dominance of Europe. Many critics have argued that colonialism destroyed indigenous cultures, but this assumes that culture is static, and underestimates the resilience and adaptability of colonial societies. On the contrary, colonized cultures have often been so resilient and transformative that they have changed the character of imperial culture itself. This 'transcultural' effect has not been seamless or unvaried, but it forces us to reassess the stereotyped view of colonized peoples' victimage and lack of agency.

A common strategy of post-colonial self-assertion has been the attempt to rediscover some authentic pre-colonial cultural reality in order to redress the impact of European imperialism. Invariably such attempts misconceive the link between culture and identity. Culture describes the myriad ways in which a group of people makes sense of, represents and inhabits its world, and as such can never be destroyed, whatever happens to its various forms of expression. Culture is practised, culture is used, culture is made. 'Culture has life,' says Mintz, speaking of the Caribbean, 'because its content serves as resources for those who employ it, change it, incarnate it. Human beings cope with the demands of everyday life through their interpretative and innovative skills . . . not by ossifying their creative forms, but by using them

creatively' (1974: 19). All cultures move in a constant state of trans formation. The attempt to understand how post-colonial cultures resisted the power of colonial domination in ways so subtle that they transformed both colonizer and colonized lies at the heart of post-colonial studies.

In 1912 the leader of the French Socialist Party, Jean Jaurès, spoke out in Parliament at the acquisition of Morocco:

> I have never painted an idyllic picture of the Muslim populations, and I am well aware of the disorder and oligarchic exploitation by many chiefs which takes place. But, Sirs, if you look deeply into the matter, there existed [before the French takeover] a Moroccan civilization capable of the necessary transformation, capable of evolution and progress, a civilization both ancient and modern . . . There was a seed for the future, a hope. And let me say that I cannot pardon those who have crushed this hope for pacific and human progress – African civilization – by all sorts of ruses and by the brutalities of conquest.
>
> (cited in Aldrich 1996: 112)

The most interesting word in this speech is 'transformation'. Jaurès acknowledges that all cultures transform themselves, this is the natural movement of cultural existence. How they do so is another matter. He condemns the colonization of Morocco, and, by implication, all colonization, for its crushing of the hope of progress and, specifically, the hope for progress into an African civilization. According to him, Morocco had been robbed of its capacity to become what it might have become. If we think of the case of Morocco magnified many times over, we must see the European colonization of the world as a cultural catastrophe of enormous proportions. But what Jaurès did not expect, any more than the proponents of the *mission civilatrice*, was that colonial societies' capacity for transformation could not be so easily truncated. Although the European view of the civilizing process was nothing less than enforced emulation – colonial cultures should simply imitate their metropolitan occupiers – the processes of imitation themselves, the 'mimicry' of the colonizers, as Homi Bhabha has famously suggested (1994), became a paradoxical feature of colonial resistance. The ambivalence of post-colonial mimicry and the 'menace' which Bhabha sees in it are indicators of the complexity of this resistance.

This complexity is linked directly to the transformative nature of cultural identity itself. In his celebrated essay 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora' (1990), Stuart Hall

suggests there are two ways of conceiving such identity: 'The first position defines "cultural identity" in terms of one shared culture, a sort of collective "one true self", hiding inside the many other, more superficial or artificially imposed "selves", which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common' (1990: 223). Such identity searches for images which impose 'an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation' (224). Images of a shared 'Africanness', for instance, provide such a coherence, although that Africanness may exist far in the past. But there is a second view of cultural identity which explores 'points of deep and significant *difference*' (225) and which sees the longed-for, and possibly illusory, condition of 'uniqueness' as a matter of 'becoming' as well as being.

> Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in mere 'recovery' of the past, which is waiting to be found, and which when found, will secure our sense of ourselves into eternity, identities are names we give to the different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past.
> (225)

The struggle between a view of identity which attempts to recover an immutable origin, a fixed and eternal representation of itself, and one which sees identity as inextricable from the transformative conditions of material life, is possibly the most deep-seated divide in post-colonial thinking. Hall goes a long way towards arbitrating this divide when he suggests that cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all but a matter of *positioning* – 'Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendent "law of origin"' (226).

Positioning is, above all, a matter of representation, of giving concrete form to ideological concepts. Representation describes both the site of identity formation and the site of the *struggle* over identity formation. For the positioning of cultural identity has involved the struggle over the means of representation since colonized peoples first took hold of the colonists' language to represent themselves. Today the means of representing cultural identity includes the whole range of plastic and visual arts, film and television and, crucially, strategies for *consuming* these products. Hence, trans-

formation, which describes one way of viewing cultural identity, also describes the strategic process by which cultural identity is represented. By taking hold of the means of representation, colonized peoples throughout the world have appropriated and transformed those processes into culturally appropriate vehicles. It is this struggle over representation which articulates most clearly the material basis, the constructiveness and dialogic energy of the 'post-colonial imagination'.

Creative artists often seem to express most forcefully the imaginative vision of a society. But artists, writers and performers only capture more evocatively that capacity for transformation which is demonstrated at every level of society. 'When I was growing up in the 1940s and 1950s as a child in Kingston,' says Hall, 'I was surrounded by the signs, the music and rhythms of this Africa of the diaspora, which only existed as a result of a long and discontinuous series of transformations' (231). The imaginative and the creative are integral aspects of that process by which identity itself has come into being. Cultural identity does not exist outside representation. But the transformative nature of cultural identity leads directly to the transformation of those strategies by which it is represented. These strategies have invariably been the very ones used by the colonizer to position the colonized as marginal and inferior, but their appropriation has been ubiquitous in the struggle by colonized peoples to empower themselves. This suggests that 'resistance' can be truly effective, that is, can avoid simply replacing one tyranny with another, only when it creates rather than simply defends. Post-colonial writing hinges on the act of engagement which takes the dominant language and uses it to express the most deeply felt issues of post-colonial social experience. This form of 'imitation' becomes the key to transforming not only the imitator but the imitated. The engagement of post-colonial writing is one which had transcultural consequences, that is, dialectic and circulating effects which have become a crucial feature of the world we experience today.

Given the positive and productive effects of this capacity in post-colonial society, the question must be asked: does the fact of transformation, the capacity of colonized peoples to make dominant discourse work for them, to develop economically and technologically, to enjoy the 'benefits' of global capitalism, mean that the colonized have had a measure of 'moral luck' as philosopher Bernard Williams puts it (1981: 20– 39)? This would be comparable to saying that the political prisoner has been fortunate because he has been able to write, in prison, an auto-biography which caught the imagination of the world, as Nelson Mandela has with *Long Walk to Freedom*. One might even say that such imprisonment has even been a crucial factor

in the ultimate overthrow of the apartheid regime. How do we assess the moral dilemma of such a possibility? If we gained advantages from imperial discourse – even if it was only the pressure to focus on our own freedom, to concentrate on the things which we value most, not to mention the material and technological advantages of metropolitan society – was colonization ultimately good for us?

Or, to take another example: consider the human and social catastrophe caused by the colonial development of the sugar plantation economies of the Caribbean. The obliteration of the indigenous Amerindians, the capture and disinheritance of millions of Africans transported as slaves, the dislocation of hundreds of thousands of South Asian indentured workers, the wholesale destruction of the landscapes of islands turned into virtual sugar factories, the institution of endemic poverty and the destruction of economic versatility. The effects of the colonization of the Caribbean appear to be an unprecedented disaster. Yet the creole populations of the Caribbean proceeded to develop a culture so dynamic and vibrant that it has affected the rest of the world. How is one to judge the cultural effects of imperialism under these circumstances? Spivak calls this the deconstructive moment of post-coloniality.

> Why is the name 'post-colonial' specifically useful in our moment?
>
> Those of us . . . from formerly colonized countries, are able to communicate with each other, to exchange, to establish sociality, because we have access to the culture of imperialism. Shall we then assign to that culture, in the words of the ethical philosopher Bernard Williams, a measure of 'moral luck'? I think that there can be no question that the answer is 'no.' This impossible 'no' to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and everyday here and now named 'post-coloniality' is a case of it.
>
> (1993: 60)

The concept of 'moral luck' is a strategic suppression of the liberatory capacity of colonized societies. Much more interesting than the ethical conundrum, the 'deconstructive moment', in which the post-colonial subject lives within the consequences of imperial discourse while denying it, is the political achievement. In post-colonial engagements with colonial discourse there has been a triumph of the spirit, a transformation effected at the level of both the imaginative and the material, which has changed the ways in which both see each other and themselves. Agonizing over

the benefits of colonization is like asking what the society might have become without it: the question is unanswerable and ultimately irrelevant. This book focuses instead on the resilience, adaptability and inventiveness of post-colonial societies, which may, if we consider their experiences as models for resistance, give us insight into the operation of local engagements with global culture. By eluding the moral conundrum and simply investigating how transformation affected the imaginative and material dimensions of post-colonial life, we arrive at a form of resistance which is not so much deconstructive (or contradictory) as dynamic, not so much ethically insoluble as practically affirmative.

The term 'post-colonial'

This book uses the terms 'post-colonial' and 'transformation' quite deliberately, for the kinds of cultural and political engagements it examines are characterized by the unique power relationships operating within European colonialism. Post-colonial studies developed as a way of addressing the cultural production of those societies affected by the historical phenomenon of colonialism. In this respect it was never conceived of as a grand theory but as a methodology: first, for analysing the many strategies by which colonized societies have engaged imperial discourse; and second, for studying the ways in which many of those strategies are shared by colonized societies, re-emerging in very different political and cultural circumstances. However, there has hardly been a more hotly contested term in contemporary theoretical discourse. Since its entry into the mainstream in the late 1980s with the publication of *The Empire Writes Back* there has been a constant flood of 'introductions' to the field, most of them focusing on the work of the 'colonial discourse' theorists: Edward Said, Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak.

Post-colonialism means many things and embraces a dizzying array of critical practices. Stephen Slemon surveyed the situation evocatively when he remarked in 'The Scramble for Post-Colonialism' that the term has been used in recent times

> as a way of ordering a critique of totalising forms of Western historicism; as a portmanteau term for a retooled notion of 'class', as a subset of both postmodernism and post-structuralism (and conversely, as the condition from which those two structures of cultural logic and cultural critique themselves are seen to emerge); as the name for a condition of nativist longing in post-indepen-

> dence national groupings; as a cultural marker of non-residency for a Third-World intellectual cadre; as the inevitable underside of a fractured and ambivalent discourse of colonialist power; as an oppositional form of 'reading practice'; and – and this was my first encounter with the term – as the name for a category of 'literary' activity which sprang from a new and welcome political energy going on within what used to be called 'Commonwealth' literary studies.
>
> (1994: 16–17)

Even the term 'postmodernism' cannot claim to be a repository of such a wide and contradictory variety of critical practices. Those in least doubt about its meaning are invariably its opponents. Shohat and Stam's complaint is that 'Despite the dizzying multiplicities invoked by the term "postcolonial," postcolonial theory has curiously failed to address the politics of location of the term "postcolonial" itself' (1994: 37). One might well wonder where Shohat and Stam had been. For at times it seems as though no other contemporary discourse has been so obsessed with the politics of its location. This comment demonstrates the way in which a particular form of post-colonial study, one that focuses on the work of celebrated theorists operating from the metropolitan academy, can be assumed to *be* the whole of post-colonialism. Such a construction of post-colonial practice patently fails to address the emergence of the term in the cultural discourse of formerly colonized peoples, peoples whose work is inextricably grounded in the experience of colonization. Not all forms of post-colonial practice can be constituted as 'transformative', but that discourse which has developed the greatest transformative energy stems from a grounding in the material and historical experience of colonialism.

Arif Dirlik, while narrowing down the categories of the term, sees problems emerging from the identification of post-colonial intellectuals.

> The term *postcolonial* in its various usages carries a multiplicity of meanings that need to be distinguished for analytical purposes. Three uses of the term seem to me to be especially prominent (and significant): (a) as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents, as in postcolonial societies or postcolonial intellectuals; (b) as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is somewhat more abstract and less concrete in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term *Third World*, for which it is intended as a substitute;

> and (c) as a description of a discourse on the above-named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions.
>
> Even at its most concrete, the significance of *postcolonial* is not transparent because each of its meanings is overdetermined by the others. Postcolonial intellectuals are clearly the producers of a post-colonial discourse, but who exactly are the postcolonial intellectuals? . . . Now that postcoloniality has been released from the fixity of Third World location, the identity of the postcolonial is no longer structural but discursive. Postcolonial in this perspective represents an attempt to regroup intellectuals of uncertain location under the banner of postcolonial discourse. Intellectuals in the flesh may produce the themes that constitute postcolonial discourse, but it is participation in the discourse that defines them as post-colonial intellectuals. Hence it is important to delineate the discourse so as to identify postcolonial intellectuals themselves.
>
> (1994: 331–2)

The contention that 'the identity of the postcolonial intellectual is no longer structural but discursive' illuminates the need for some signifier of the difference between post-colonialisms which distinguishes the different locations and different orientations of its practice. If 'the conditions in formerly colonized societies' have any bearing on a 'global condition after the period of colonialism', this relationship needs to be analysed. Although Dirlik considers these to be simply variant meanings of the term, there are determinate, historical ways in which the material, political and cultural conditions of formerly colonized societies have impacted on global culture. Indeed, it is in assessing these that we may understand the transformative impact of post-colonial cultural strategies on global cultures.

An investigation of the emergence of the term 'post-colonial' reveals how and why such a range of meanings has come to surround its use. Employed by historians and political scientists after the Second World War in terms such as the post-colonial state, 'post-colonial' had a clearly chronological meaning, designating the post-independence period. However, from the late 1970s the term has been used by literary critics to discuss the various cultural effects of colonization. The study of the discursive power of colonial representation was initiated by Edward Said's landmark work *Orientalism* in 1978 and led to the development of what came to be called 'colonialist discourse theory' in the work of critics such as Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

However, the actual term 'post-colonial' was not employed in the early studies of colonial discourse theory, rather it was first used to refer to cultural interactions within colonial societies in literary circles. The second issue of *New Literature Review* in 1977, for instance, focused on 'post-colonial literatures', and this was the recognition of a widespread, though informal, acceptance of the term amongst literary critics. The term had emerged as part of an attempt to politicize and focus the concerns of fields such as Commonwealth literature and the study of the so-called New Literatures in English which had been initiated in the late 1960s. The term has subsequently been widely used to signify the political, linguistic and cultural experience of societies from the former British Empire.

A simple hyphen has come to represent an increasingly diverging set of assumptions, emphases, strategies and practices in post-colonial reading and writing. The hyphen puts an emphasis on the discursive and material effects of the historical 'fact' of colonialism, while the term 'postcolonialism' has come to represent an increasingly indiscriminate attention to cultural difference and marginality of all kinds, whether a consequence of the historical experience of colonialism or not. Perhaps more telling is the relationship of these forms of analysis to the contemporary European philosophical cultural discourses of poststructuralism and postmodernism. The spelling of the term 'post-colonial' has become more of an issue for those who use the hyphenated form, because the hyphen is a statement about the particularity, the historically and culturally grounded nature of the experience it represents. Grounded in the practice of critics concerned with the writings of colonized peoples themselves, it came to stand for a theory which was oriented towards the historical and cultural experience of colonized peoples, a concern with textual production, rather than towards the fetishization of theory itself. The hyphen in 'post-colonial' is a particular form of 'space-clearing' gesture (Appiah 1992: 241), a political notation which has a very great deal to say about the materiality of political oppression. In this respect the hyphen distinguishes the term from the kind of unlocated, abstract and poststructuralist theorizing to which Shohat and Stam object.

Admittedly the hyphen can be misleading, particularly if it suggests that post-colonialism refers to the situation in a society 'after colonialism', an assumption which remains tediously persistent despite constant rebuttals by post-colonialists. Anne McClintock suggests that

> the term postcolonial . . . is haunted by the very figure of linear development that

> it sets out to dismantle. Metaphorically, the term postcolonialism marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from 'the precolonial', to 'the colonial', to 'the post-colonial' – an unbidden, if disavowed commitment to linear time and the idea of development. If a theoretical tendency to envisage 'Third World' literature as progressing from 'protest literature' to 'resistance literature' to 'national literature' has been criticized for rehearsing the Enlightenment trope of sequential linear progress, the term postcolonialism is questionable for the same reason. Metaphorically poised on the border between old and new, end and beginning, the term heralds the end of a world era but by invoking the same trope of linear progress which animated that era.
>
> (1995: 10–11)

This seems to be a ghost which refuses to be exorcized. Undoubtedly the 'post' in 'post-colonialism' must always contend with the spectre of linearity and the kind of teleological development it sets out to dismantle. But rather than being disabling, this radical instability of meaning gives the term a vibrancy, energy and plasticity which have become part of its strength, as post-colonial analysis rises to engage issues and experiences which have been out of the purview of metropolitan theory and, indeed, comes to critique the assumptions of that theory.

More pertinently perhaps, the term has expanded to engage issues of cultural diversity, ethnic, racial and cultural difference and the power relations within them, as a consequence of an expanded and more subtle understanding of the dimensions of neo-colonial dominance. This expanded understanding embraces the apparently ambiguous situation of Chicano experience in the USA. Alfred Arteaga explains that

> Chicanos are products of two colonial contexts. The first begins with the explorer Colón and the major event of the Renaissance: the 'old' world's 'discovery' of the 'new.' Spanish colonization of the Americas lasted more than three centuries, from the middle of Leonardo da Vinci's lifetime to the beginning of Queen Victoria's. . . . The second colonial context begins with the immigration of Austin's group from Connecticut to Texas, Mexico.
>
> (1994: 21)

Engaging the actual complexity and diversity of European colonization, as well as the

pervasiveness of neo-colonial domination, opens the way for a wide application of the strategies of post-colonial analysis.

However, one of the most curious and perhaps confusing features of post-colonial study is its overlap with the strategies of postmodern discourse. Asking the question, 'Is the post in post-colonialism the same as the post in postmodernism?' Anthony Kwame Appiah says:

> All aspects of contemporary African cultural life including music and some sculpture and painting, even some writings with which the West is largely not familiar – have been influenced – often powerfully – by the transition of African societies *through* colonialism, but they are not all in the relevant sense *post*colonial. For the *post* in postcolonial, like the post in postmodern is the *post* of the space-clearing gesture I characterised earlier: and many areas of contemporary African cultural life – what has come to be theorised as popular culture, in particular – are not in this way concerned with transcending – with going beyond – coloniality. Indeed, it might be said to be a mark of popular culture that its borrowings from international cultural forms are remarkably insensitive to – not so much dismissive of as blind to – the issue of neocolonialism or 'cultural imperialism'.
>
> (1992: 240–1)

This is an astute perception. But the post-colonial, as it is used to describe and analyse the cultural production of colonized peoples, is *precisely* the production that occurs *through* colonialism, because no decolonizing process, no matter how oppositional, can remain free from that cataclysmic experience. Once we determine that post-colonial analysis will address 'all the culture affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day' (Ashcroft et al. 1989: 2), our sense of the 'space-clearing gesture' of which Appiah speaks becomes far more subtle, far more attuned to the transformative potential of post-colonial engagements with imperial discourse. It is *quite distinct* from the space-clearing gesture in postmodernism. Post-colonial discourse is the discourse of the colonized, which begins with colonization and doesn't stop when the colonizers go home. The post-colonial is not a chronological period but a range of material conditions and a rhizomic pattern of discursive struggles, ways of contending with various specific forms of colonial oppression. The problem with terminology, the problem with the relationship between post-colonialism and postmodernism, lies in the fact that they are both,

in their very different and culturally located ways, discursive elaborations of postmodernity, just as imperialism and Enlightenment philosophy were discursive elaborations of modernity.

Crucially, words such as 'post-colonial' do not describe essential forms of experience but forms of talk *about* experience. If the term 'post- colonial' seems to be homogenizing in the way it brings together the experiences of colonialism in a wide variety of situations, it must also be remembered that these experiences are just as various *within* particular national or linguistic communities. Once we see the term 'post-colonial' as representing a *form of talk* rather than a *form of experience* we will be better equipped to see that such talk encompasses a wide and interwoven text of experiences. For instance, what is the *essential* experience of oppression, of invasion, of domination? These involve various forms of material experience, located in their specific historical and political environments. Just as the experiences of colonization within colonized societies have varied from the most abject suffering to the engendering of filiative feeling, the responses of those colonized societies to colonialism have occupied a continuum from absolute complicity to violent rebellion, all of which can be seen to be 'post-colonial'. If we see post-colonial discourse in the Foucauldian sense as a system of knowledge of colonized societies, a space of enunciation, the rules which govern the possibility of statements about the field, we must still confirm the discursive significance of language, of talk about experience. If it is the potential of the political subject to intervene, to engage the power of the modern imperial state, post-colonial writing testifies to discourse in which this may occur, and interpolation the strategy by which it may occur.

Modes of transformation

The following chapters address some of the fundamental issues which arise in post-colonial responses to imperial discourse. The Western control over time and space, the dominance of language and the technologies of writing for perpetuating the modes of this dominance, through geography, history, literature and, indeed, through the whole range of cultural production, have meant that post-colonial engagements with imperial power have been exceptionally wide-ranging. The one thing which characterizes all these engagements, the capacity shared by many forms of colonial experience, is a remarkable facility to use the modes of the dominant discourse against itself and transform it in ways that have been both profound and lasting.

The question of resistance lies at the forefront of this analysis because the concept of resistance has always dwelt at the heart of the struggle between imperial power and post-colonial identity. The problem with resistance is that to see it as a simple oppositionality locks it into the very binary which Europe established to define its others. Very often, political struggle is contrary to the modes of adaptation and appropriation most often engaged by post-colonial societies. This discussion reveals that 'resistance', if conceived as something much more subtle than a binary opposition, has always operated in a wide range of processes to which post-colonial societies have subjected imperial power. The most sustained, far-reaching and effective interpretation of post-colonial resistance has been the 'resistance to absorption', the appropriation and transformation of dominant technologies for the purpose of re-inscribing and representing post-colonial cultural identity.

One of the key features of this transformative process has been the entry, aggressive or benign, of post-colonial acts and modes of representation into the dominant discourse itself, an interpolation which not only interjects and interrupts that discourse but changes it in subtle ways. This term 'interpolation' ironically reverses Althusser's concept of 'interpellation' by ascribing to the colonial subject, and, consequently, to the colonial society, a capacity for agency which is effected within relationships that are radically unequal. Interpolation recasts our perception of the trajectory of power operating in colonization. Rather than being swallowed up by the hegemony of empire, the apparently dominated culture, and the 'interpellated' subjects within it, are quite able to interpolate the various modes of imperial discourse to use it for different purposes, to counter its effects by transforming them.

Language is the key to this interpolation, the key to its transformative potential, for it is in language that the colonial discourse is engaged at its most strategic point. With the appropriation of language comes the persistent question of how texts mean. For if the meaning were to be limited to either the writer or the reader, or indeed, somehow embodied in the language itself, then the radical communication, which post-colonial writing itself represents, could not occur. The question of transformation, and the phenomenon of communication between cultures, therefore, lead us into a recognition of the constitutive processes of meaning. The constitutive theory proposed here is one which emphasizes the acts of writing and reading as social rather than solitary, a sociality within which language is appropriated and transformed. It is upon the foundation of this particular transformation that post-colonial writing is

built. But its capacity to stand as a model for a wide range of appropriations is almost unlimited.

Historiography has been one of the most far-reaching and influential imperial constructions of subjectivity, and post-colonial histories, responding to the power of this discourse, have interpolated the narrativity of history while disrupting it by blurring the boundaries that would seem to separate it from literature. Representations of human time and human space have been the most powerful and hegemonic purveyors of Eurocentrism in modern times. History, and its associated teleology, has been the means by which European concepts of time have been naturalized and universalized. How history might be 're-written', how it might be interpolated, is a crucial question for the self-representation of colonized peoples. Ultimately, the transformation of history stands as one of the most strategic and powerfully effective modes of cultural resistance. By interpolating history through literary and other non-empirical texts, post-colonial narratives of historical experience reveal the fundamentally allegorical nature of history itself.

The issues surrounding the concept of place – how it is conceived, how it differs from 'space' or 'location', how it enters into and produces cultural consciousness, how it becomes the horizon of identity – are some of the most difficult and debated in post-colonial experience. Where is one's 'place'? What happens to the concept of 'home' when home is colonized, when the very ways of conceiving home, of talking about it, writing about it, remembering it, begin to occur through the medium of the colonizer's way of seeing the world? The Eurocentric control of space, through its ocularcentrism, its cartography, its development of perspective, its modes of surveillance, and above all through its language, has been the most difficult form of cultural control faced by post-colonial societies. Resistance to dominant assumptions about spatial location and the identity of place has occurred most generally in the way in which such space has been inhabited.

Habitation describes a way of being in place, a way of being which itself defines and transforms place. It is so powerful because the coercive pressures of colonialism and globalization have ultimately no answer to it. Whether affected by imperial discourse or by global culture, the local subject has a capacity to incorporate such influences into a sense of place, to appropriate a vast array of resources into the business of establishing and confirming local identity. To what extent is inhabiting a place not only a statement of identity but also a means of transforming the conditions of one's life? The conceptual shift from 'space' to 'place' which occurs as a result of

colonial experience is a shift from empty space to a human, social space which gains its material and ideological identity from the *practices* of inhabiting. Habitation, in its reconfiguration of conceptions of space, also engages the most profound principles of Western epistemology: its passion for boundaries, its cultural and imaginative habits of enclosure.

It is, ultimately, in the capacity to transcend the trope of the boundary, to live 'horizonally', that post-colonial habitation offers the most radical principle of transformative resistance. It is in horizonality that the true force of transformation becomes realized, for whereas the boundary is about cultural regulation, the horizon is about cultural possibility. The concept of 'horizon' proposes a theoretical principle for that movement beyond epistemological, cultural and spatial boundaries to which post-colonial discourses aspire. The horizon is a way of reconceiving the bounded precepts of imperial discourse, a principle which defines the dynamic and transformative orientation of those myriad acts by which post-colonial societies engage colonial power.

The question which must be faced ultimately is: does the concern with colonization involve an intellectual orientation that is inescapably backward-looking? Do we find ourselves looking back to the effects of power relationships which no longer seem relevant? The answer to this is twofold: the effects of European imperialism and the transformative engagements it has experienced from post-colonial societies are ones that have affected, and continue to affect, most of the world to the present day. This engagement has come to colour and identify the very nature of those societies in contemporary times. But the other answer suggests that the very *dynamic* we are analysing here, the dynamic of the power relationships which characterize colonial experience, has now achieved a global status. The issue of globalization recasts the whole question of post-colonial identity. Both imperialism and globalization are consequences of the onrushing tide of European modernity. But while we cannot see globalization as a simple extension of imperialism, a kind of neo-imperialism, as early globalization theory proposed, the engagement of imperial culture by post-colonial societies offers a compelling model for the relationship between the local and the global today.

The ways in which local communities consume global culture continually disrupt the 'development' paradigm which has characterized the representation of the Third World by the West since the Second World War. Whereas 'development' acts to force the local into globally normative patterns, 'transformation' acts to adjust those pat-

terns to the requirements of local values and needs. This capacity to adjust global influences to local needs disrupts the simple equation of globalization and Westernization, the idea that globalization is a simple top-down homogenizing pressure.

Post-colonial transformation emerged from a power relationship – between European imperial discourse and colonial societies – that was in many ways unique. Different colonies were inevitably oriented towards a particular empire, a particular metropolitan centre and language, and led to particular kinds of discursive transformations. But the range of strategies which has characterized those transformations can be seen to operate on a global scale. It is tempting to suggest that this is because the consequences of European imperialism itself have ultimately reached global proportions. But it is the range of strategies, the tenacity and the practical assertiveness of the apparently powerless with which we are most concerned, not with the relationship between imperialism and globalism. When we project our analysis on to a global screen we find that the capacity, the agency, the inventiveness of post-colonial transformation help us to explain something about the ways in which local communities resist absorption and transform global culture itself. In the end the transformative energy of post-colonial societies tells us about the present because it is overwhelmingly concerned with the future.

1 Resistance

In her celebrated *testimonio*, *I, Rigoberta Menchú*, the author gives an account of an appalling atrocity in the 1970s in which Guatemalan government soldiers force villagers from several villages to watch as their relatives, arrested on suspicion of subversion, are systematically tortured, degraded and burnt alive. The incident stands as a symbol of that cruelty and abuse, that terrorism of power, which colonized societies have continually resisted. It also focuses some exceptionally complex, and controversial, questions of truth and representation, as we shall see in Chapter 5. Yet what it means to resist effectively is a key question, perhaps *the* question to emerge from her account. When we compare Menchú's response with that of her father, we discover two models of resistance between which post-colonial societies have continually alternated in their reaction to colonial dominance.

Observing her father's response Menchú says: 'My father was incredible; I watched him and he didn't shed a tear, but he was full of rage. And that was a rage we all felt' (1983: 178). Her father's stoicism during this act of barbarity was like a rock against the power of the government's terror, and the passage offers him as an example of the Indians' spirit of resistance. '[I]f so many people were brave enough to give their lives, their last moments, their last drop of blood,' he says, 'then wouldn't we be brave enough to do the same?' (181). The experience politicized him completely. He became an organizer of resistance groups throughout Guatemala but was killed in the occupation of the Spanish embassy. But we are left with lingering doubts about what he achieved. If Menchú's father was a rock, then the rock was smashed by the sledgehammer of the state, along with all resistance which reduces the struggle to one of brute force.

On the other hand, Rigoberta Menchú's resistance was more elusive and covert, as she organized communities of Indians against the government. In this respect her

testimonio demonstrates the fine balance between resistance and transformation in revolutionary activity – opposition is necessary, but the appropriation of forms of representation, and forcing entry into the discursive networks of cultural dominance, have always been a crucial feature of resistance movements which have gained political success. The co-operation of the Indian groups was made possible only by using the colonizing language as well as other culturally alien structures of organization. But Menchú's most effective resistance to the overt brutality of the state, the most resilient opposition to material oppression, is the discursive resistance which gained her a global audience, the resistance located in her *testimonio* itself. Rigoberta Menchú and her father shared a deep anger against the terrorism of power. But the radically different strategies emerging from that anger compel us to examine the concept of resistance itself.

Resistance has become a much-used word in post-colonial discourse, and indeed in all discussion of 'Third World' politics. Armed rebellion, inflammatory tracts, pugnacious oratory and racial, cultural and political animosity: resistance has invariably connoted the urgent imagery of war. This has much to do with the generally violent nature of colonial incursion. In all European empires the drain on resources to fight wars of rebellion was great. Algerians, for instance, fought a sustained war against French conquest for two decades after 1830, led by Abd ElKhader. Although colonial wars were usually of shorter duration, such protracted hostilities were not uncommon, and often led to profound cultural consequences, such as the Treaty of Waitangi in 1840 in New Zealand which concluded the Maori wars, falsely ceding Maori *mana* to the Crown.[1] Armed rebellion began in the Caribbean as early as 1501, and, according to Julio Le Riverend, the Governor of Cuba, Ovando, 'asked for the complete prohibition of the [slave] trade, for, in previous years, the Negroes had shown an open tendency towards rebellion and conspiracy' (Riverend 1967: 82). The often unabashedly exploitative nature of colonial economic ventures, the actively racist attitudes of colonists – even those from France, which was determined to assimilate colonial societies into French political and administrative structures – and the overweening assumption of moral authority for colonial expansion, meant that political resentment, the motive for armed resistance, was constant. Indeed, such armed rebellion, from the 'Indian Mutiny' to the resistance movements in Kenya, Zimbabwe and other African states, became the very focus of indigenous demands for self-determination.

But we might well ask whether this armed or ideological rebellion is the only possible meaning of resistance, and, more importantly, whether such a history leaves

in its wake a *rhetoric* of opposition emptied of any capacity for social change. Observing the way in which colonial control was often ejected by national liberation movements only to be replaced by equally coercive indigenous élites, we might well ask: What does it really mean to *resist*? Does the term 'resistance' adequately describe cultural relationships, cultural oppositions or cultural influences in the era of globalization? Given the widespread feelings of opposition in colonized communities, 'resistance' enacted as violent military engagement, a national liberation struggle, or, for that matter, even as a programme of widespread social militancy, is surprisingly rare. Ultimately, 'resistance' is a word which adapts itself to a great variety of circumstances, and few words show a greater tendency towards cliché and empty rhetoric, as it has become increasingly used as a catch-all word to describe any kind of political struggle. But if we think of resistance as any form of defence by which an invader is 'kept out', the subtle and sometimes even unspoken forms of social and cultural resistance have been much more common. It is these subtle and more widespread forms of resistance, forms of saying 'no', that are most interesting because they are most difficult for imperial powers to combat.

One question this raises is: can one 'resist' without violence? Can one even resist without obviously 'opposing'? The answer to this is obviously 'yes!' Gandhi's 'passive resistance' to the British Raj is a famous and effective example. But the most fascinating feature of post-colonial societies is a 'resistance' that manifests itself as a refusal to be absorbed, a resistance which engages that which is resisted in a different way, taking the array of influences exerted by the dominating power, and altering them into tools for expressing a deeply held sense of identity and cultural being. This has been the most widespread, most influential and most quotidian form of 'resistance' in post-colonial societies. In some respects, as in the debate over the use of colonial languages, it has also been the most contentious. Consequently, this engagement with colonial discourse has rarely been regarded as 'resistance', because it is often devoid of the rhetoric of resistance. While the soldiers and politicians have gained most attention, it is the ordinary people – and the artists and writers, through whom a transformative vision of the world has been conceived – who have often done most to 'resist' the cultural pressures upon them. In most cases this has not been a heroic enterprise but a pragmatic and mundane array of living strategies to which imperial culture has no answer. In this respect 'transformation' is contrary to what we normally think of as 'resistance' because the latter has been locked into the party-political imagery of opposition, a discourse of 'prevention'. But post-colonial transformation has been the most powerful and active form of resistance in colonized societies

because it has been so relentless, so everyday and, above all, so integral a part of the *imaginations* of these societies.

Resistance which ossifies into simple opposition often becomes trapped in the very binary which imperial discourse uses to keep the colonized in subjection. As Coetzee's protagonist, Dawn, puts it in *Dusklands*:

> The answer to a myth of force is not necessarily counterforce, for if the myth predicts counterforce, counterforce reinforces the myth. The science of mythography teaches us that a subtler counter is to subvert and revise the myth. The highest propaganda is the propagation of new mythology.
>
> (1974: 24–5)

The most tenacious aspect of colonial control has been its capacity to bind the colonized into a binary myth. Underlying all colonial discourse is a binary of colonizer/colonized, civilized/uncivilized, white/black which works to justify the *mission civilatrice* and perpetuate a cultural distinction which is essential to the 'business' of economic and political exploitation. The idea that 'counterforce' is the best response to the colonialist myth of force, or to the myth of nurture, both of which underly this civilizing mission, binds the colonized into the myth. This has often implicated colonized groups and individuals in a strategy of resistance which has been unable to resist *absorption* into the myth of power, whatever the outcome of their political opposition. Dependency theorists who re-write the story of Europe as 'developer' into the story of Europe as 'exploiter' remain caught in the binary of Europe and its others. The subject of the new history is still Europe. Ironically, the concept of 'difference' itself may often be unable to extricate itself from this binary and thus become disabling to the post-colonial subject.

Intellectuals who set so much store by independence in the post-war dissolution of the British Empire were uniformly doomed to disappointment. National élites simply moved in to fill the vacuum. In most cases 'resistance' has meant nothing less than a *failure to resist* the binary structures of colonial discourse. But a difference which resists domination through the transformative capacity of the imagination is one which, ultimately, moves beyond these structures. The importance of transformation should not be regarded as diminishing the struggle for political freedom and self-determination, or refuting the active 'resistance' to imperial power. Nor should it be regarded as contrary to the spirit of insurgence. Rather it demonstrates the fascinating capacity of ordinary people, living below the level of formal policy or active rebellion,