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STATE OF THE DISCIPLINES

Postcolonial Studies and the Discourse of Foucault: Survey of a Field of Problematization

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ABSTRACT: This paper presents a critical survey of the use and interpretation of the work of Michel Foucault in the field of postcolonial studies. The paper uses debates about Foucault's legacy and his contributions (or lack thereof) to postcolonialism as a means of parsing out the main lines of contestation within the field—that is, as a means of tracing the contours of the space of questioning or field of problematization, in part to foreground what has been at stake and, more to the point, what has *not* been at stake. Part I provides a general survey of what "Postcolonial Studies" is: what its major questions and debates have been. Part II examines the ways in which Foucault has been taken up, interpreted and used within the field, and Part III comments on what aspects of Foucault's work have *not* been taken up, suggesting that this is most revealing about the state of postcolonial studies today.

Keywords: Postcolonial theory; postcolonial politics; postcolonial ethics; Foucault; Bhabha; Said; Spivak.

One of the most important intellectual movements of the last fifty years in the Western academy—if not *the* most important—is that which travels under the name “postcolonialism” or “postcolonial studies.” For better or for worse, postcolonial studies has not only become a major field of research in its own right, it has found its way into central debates in almost all disciplines of the humanities and social sciences: English, Comparative Literature, History, Political Studies, Sociology, Anthropology and so on.¹ Confusing this development, however, is the contested and at times contradictory employment of the term “postcolonial.” This paper explores some of the shifting and contested terrain of postcolonial studies, especially over the last thirty years, using another contested name as its vehicle for analysis: Michel Foucault. I use the debates about Foucault's legacy and his contributions (or lack thereof) to postcolonialism as a means of parsing out the main lines of contestation within the field—as a means of tracing the contours of the space of questioning or (in Foucault's own terminology) the field of problematization, in part to foreground what has been at stake and, more to the point, what has *not* been at stake. Part I provides a general survey of what “Postcolonial

¹ In its horizontal integration across a series of disciplines (to varying degrees), “postcolonialism” shares more with, for instance, feminism and queer theory than it does with any particular traditional academic discipline.

Studies" is: what its major questions and debates have been. In Part II, I examine the ways in which Foucault has been taken up, interpreted and used within the field. In this, my primary aim is not to "rescue" Foucault from erroneous readings (though, as a secondary project, I do hope to correct certain specific interpretive mistakes that have been made and taken hold generally within Foucault reception, particularly in North America). Rather, it is to use Foucault as a kind of barometer, as a measure of the changing pressures on and within the vast field known as "postcolonialism." I conclude, in Part III, with comments on what has *not* been taken up in Foucault's work, suggesting that this is most revealing about the state of post-colonial studies today.

PART I: The Polysemy of Postcolonialism

To understand any proposition it is first necessary to identify the question to which the proposition may be regarded as an answer.

- R.G. Collingwood

To first map the space of questioning, I propose to begin with a critical survey—or "per-spurious representation"—of the linguistic field in which the term "postcolonial" gains its significance and saliency.² Despite the confusion and perhaps frustration resulting from its polysemic nature, the contested and contradictory use of the moniker "postcolonialism" is nevertheless testimony to the force and importance of the field—if "postcolonialism" did not matter, then it would hardly be worth fighting over the designation. In order to get a handle on some of the different uses of the term, I propose three broad designations that have come to predominate within the western academy since at least the 1970s. These are, for the purposes of my discussion here, (a) postcolonial *politics*, (b) postcolonial *theory*, and (c) postcolonial

² My use of these terms and this method is owed to work by James Tully who, in turn, draws from the Cambridge School (particularly Quentin Skinner), Wittgenstein and Foucault himself to develop his methodological approach. See James Tully "Public philosophy as critical activity," in *Public Philosophy in a New Key, vol. I: Democracy and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), 15-38. David Scott has also self-consciously situated his work within this tradition, in his case drawing from R. G. Collingwood in addition to the thinkers above. One of the defining features of this tradition or school of thought is, according to Scott, the notion that "to understand any proposition it is first necessary to identify the question to which the proposition may be regarded as an answer." From this general interpretive-hermeneutic, the practice of criticism proceeds by asking "whether the moment of normalization of a paradigm is not also the moment when it is necessary to reconstruct and reinterrogate the ground of questions themselves through which it was brought into being in the first place; to ask whether the critical *yield* of the normal problem-space continues to be what it was when it first emerged; and, if not, to ask what set of questions is emerging in the new problem-space that might reconfigure and so expand the conceptual terrain in which an object is located." (David Scott, *Refashioning Futures* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1999), 5 and 8-9) My aim here, then, is to critically interrogate "postcolonialism" not as a static position which one could either be "for" or "against," but rather in terms of the "ground of questions" that have animated it as a practice over the last 25 to 30 years. In other words, I am attempting to ask: What are the (implicitly or explicitly held) questions to which "postcolonialism" is understood as a response?

ethics.³ Since part of my aim here is to demonstrate the variability and contestability of these terms in their different uses, it is important to note that the three broad headings I will be using are merely one means of gathering together and organizing these intellectual and political movements. These are not “ideal types,” but rather “practical linguistic systems,” that each makes a case for the dominance of one aspect of the concept as definitive while simultaneously clarifying the possible range of use of the term.⁴ There is important overlap between the three areas I hope to identify, as well as considerable diversity and contestability within them.

Postcolonial Politics

The first and most obvious way in which “postcolonialism” is deployed as a term within various fields of academic study is as a term of historical periodization defined in relation to a set of prevailing political developments. Often taking 1492 as an important historical marking point,⁵ academics have mapped the emergence of modern imperial power, centered first in the Western European powers but subsequently also in the European colonies, particularly the United States, and its global extension. Famously, by the early part of the 20th century, 90% of the Earth’s land mass was controlled by European states and their allied colonial powers.⁶ The global expansion of European power and subsequent reduction in the complex diversity of forms of life, modes of production, languages, cultures and ecological relationships is part of this process. There is, however, an equally long and complex history of the various strategies of resistance to these colonizing projects; anti-imperial politics are as old as European imperialism itself. Beginning with the period surrounding the First World War through to the 1970s and early 1980s, a new era in this ongoing struggle—or struggles—was entered. During this period, the colonial status of many of these peoples was formally ended, in many cases through wars of national liberation, in some cases through negotiation and legal settlement. If the period extending from 1492 to 1914 was predominately one of formalized colonialism, the

³ While not stated in precisely these terms, I have benefited from the analysis provided by the critical surveys of Barbara Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism* (London: Pearson, 2006); Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory: A critical introduction* (Columbia: Columbia UP, 1998); Ania Loomba, *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (London & NY: Routledge, 1998); Ali Rattansi, “Postcolonialism and its discontents,” *Economy and Society*, 26(4), 1997: 480-500; Patrick Wolfe, “History and Imperialism: A century of theory, from Marx to Postcolonialism,” *The American Historical Review*, vol. 102, No. 2 (April 1997): 388-420; Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) and Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2003). All of these works emphasize that “postcolonialism” is both a historical periodization and a particular form of theorization. Some distinguish the two by using “post-colonialism” vs. “postcolonialism,” while others prefer “postcolonialism” vs. “postcoloniality.” None of these works have, however, centrally taken up the prospect of the “postcolonial” as an ethical project of living that cuts across time-space.

⁴ Tully, 29.

⁵ Others see 1415, the establishment of the first Portuguese colonial post in Cueta, North Africa, after its capture from the Kingdom of Fez, as a more important historical marker.

⁶ Cited in Young, *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*, 2. Ania Loomba writes: “By the 1930s, colonies and ex-colonies covered 84.6 per cent of the land surface of the globe. Only parts of Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, Mongolia, Tibet, China, Siam and Japan had never been under formal European government.” (Loomba, 3).

period from 1914 to the 1970s might be said to be one of formalized decolonization. The first sense in which the term “postcolonial” emerges then is to describe the state in which one finds oneself “after” formal colonization.⁷ Thus, this use of the term (implicitly or explicitly) takes “colonialism” itself to have some analytic value as an explanatory construct, though often differing substantially on what precisely one is referring to when one invokes this construct and thus also how one could be “beyond” it.⁸ “Postcolonialism” in this first sense then is a historical, legal and political term—and a deeply contested one.⁹ Of course, as many have noted, to be “post-colonial” is not coterminous with “post-imperial.” In many cases, for instance, the manner in which decolonization took place, and is taking place, also serves to reinforce new structures and relationships of (neo)imperial governance. Thus, postcolonial political analysis has also been simultaneously served as the most important forum for the study of neo-imperialism.

If “postcolonialism” is understood in terms of a historical periodization in relation to a specific set of political struggles, then the kinds of questions that emerge from this understanding include: what is or was “colonialism?” How and when did this or that particular community of peoples become “post-” colonial? What is the difference between colonization (as, say, a particular practice), and imperialism (as, say, a structure of governance), and how does the manner of decolonization serve to undermine or, in some cases, even reinforce the logic of imperialism?

Finally, we must note that internal to this long history of contestation, many of those most directly affected by the struggle reflected upon and theorized about the nature of colonization, imperialism and the forms of resistance to it. Men and women concerned with these questions produced treatises, essays, histories, tactical manuals and the like, that slowly constituted a body of thought that might be called (post-)colonial or (anti-)imperial political theory. Thinkers in this tradition most often cited include Fanon, Gandhi, Nkrumah and Martí, to mention only a few.

⁷ Ali Rattansi argues this strongly: “the concept of the “postcolonial” should, in terms of historical periodization, be restricted to time-space inaugurated by the formal independence of former colonies of Western powers.” (Rattansi, “Postcolonialism and its discontents,” 490).

⁸ Chandra Mohanty’s definition, while useful, points to this ambiguity. She argues that “colonization almost invariably implies a relation of structural domination, and a suppression—often violent—of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question.” While all cases of “colonialism” might have this feature, it is surely also the case that not everything which “implies a relation of structural domination” can be classified as “colonialism.” Thus, the explanatory construct here is insufficiently precise to be of much use in differentiating colonialism as a specific *practice* (i.e., the establishment of permanent settlements abroad as a means of dispossessing other political communities from their land and as a strategy of securing political control over foreign peoples), say, from other kinds of “structural domination” such as those exhibited by modern states against “internal enemies.” See Chandra Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonial Discourses,” *boundary 2*, Vol.12, No.3 (Spring-Autumn, 1984): 333-358, p. 333.

⁹ As Barbara Bush notes, “There are thus debates about when the postcolonial began: this has been pushed back to the American Revolution, the decolonization of Latin America and the founding of Australia. It has been argued that postcolonialism begins with colonialism itself, perhaps as far back as 1492 with the earliest practices of resistance.” (Bush, 51). See also Aijaz Ahmad, “Postcolonialism: What’s in a Name?” in de la Campa, Kaplan and Spinkler (eds.), *Late Imperial Culture* (London: Verso, 1995), 14.

Postcolonial Theory

The second use of the term “postcolonial” is more specific. Beginning in the late 1970s and early 1980s, a field of academic study emerged, mostly associated with literary studies, which went by the name “postcolonial studies.” While recognizing a common heritage with and indebtedness to earlier critical reflective practitioners and postcolonial political thinkers such as Fanon and Gandhi, this new generation of theorists most often understood their project to be entering a new and different era. Instead of thinking of postcolonialism as primarily or exclusively a form of historical periodization, these thinkers began to use the term to also refer to a mode of theoretical analysis. Instead of primarily asserting an independent space for non-European peoples in a direct political sense—a space of self-determination—these new postcolonial theorists began to “invade” the history, culture and philosophy of the West in new ways. Their texts were often not about non-Western forms of life at all. Rather, their primary objective was to “provincialize,” “de-naturalize” or “de-transcendentalize” Western forms of knowledge and the universalist pretensions that came with them.¹⁰ Generally speaking then, postcolonial theorists were less interested in the “formal” struggle to decolonize land (such as India or Algeria) than in what happens after this process. They were and are predominantly concerned with questions of identity, representation, hybridity, diasporas, migration, etc., than with direct anti-colonial struggle.

Questions that arise from this use of the term include: How has the self-understanding and cultural representation of “the West” relied upon a constructed image of its antonym? Is this self-description and self-determination by way of contrast to one’s “Other” a general or universal feature of identity formation—at the individual and collective level—or is it a logic historically and culturally peculiar to, and locatable in, for example, the modern West? How does the desire for unity and stability of identity amongst a particular community serve to efface *internal* heterogeneity and thus facilitate the silencing of—or worse, actual violence against—marginalized peoples within (such as women of colour, sexual minorities, etc.)? Is there a means of representing—speaking *of* or even speaking *to*—these marginalized or subalternized peoples that does not conform to a logic of identity-desire, exteriorization and exclusion? Thinkers who spoke of “postcolonial studies” in this sense include Edward Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, the *Subaltern Studies* group, and the like.¹¹

¹⁰ It became possible, for instance, to meaningfully speak of a “postcolonial reading” of a text such as *Mansfield Park* in Said’s *Culture and Imperialism* (NY: Vintage, 1993).

¹¹ This is not to say, of course, that the question of representation was not important to thinkers prior to the emergence of “postcolonial theory” in the narrow and specifically academic sense in which I am using it here. For instance, Michel Leiris posed the question of anthropological knowledge and the practice of colonization in his work from the 1950s, and the negritude movement, often drawing directly from work by Aimé Césaire often centrally considered questions of (self)representation. Nevertheless, I think it is accurate to say that questions of representation were not as centrally featured in the work of these thinkers as was, say, the *political aims* to which re-presenting colonized subjects were put, namely: decolonization of their homelands. On this questions, see James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 255-256; Glen Coulthard, “Sartre and Fanon on Identity Politics and Decolonization,” *unpublished paper*.

Tensions between Politics and Theory

Since the above two prevailing ways of thinking about “postcolonialism” are not ideal types but rather limited and mutually implicated practical vocabularies derived for specific purposes, it makes sense that there would be points of complementary focus as well as sites of tension and contradiction. A few of these are worth mentioning briefly. First, postcolonial theory has often proceeded as though most peoples are, in fact, *post-* colonial in the formal political sense. While postcolonial theorists in the second group (above) have often taken for granted the end of formal colonization—perhaps because the field has been heavily dominated by thinkers from parts of the world where such formal rule was ended (e.g., India)—this is still not true of a significant percentage of the earth’s population. Perhaps nowhere is this disjuncture more salient than in the case of diasporic postcolonial theorists writing in major universities of the Americas (particularly the United States), while maintaining almost total silence on the fact that the land they write and think from is often unceded Indigenous territory, still under formal occupation by foreign powers.¹² This is further complicated by the fact that the struggle against formal colonial rule has often led to the establishment of free self-governing white European states—both a reversal and extension of colonial power. Thus, some have even argued that the United States is a “postcolonial” state, while admitting that the condition of being so is markedly different than in cases such as India.¹³

Secondly, against all this backdrop, people working in more “traditional” fields are changing the scope and nature of their work, thus blurring the distinction between “post-colonial theory” in the sense outlined above and traditional anthropology, history, political science, etc. An example of this is the way in which those who consider themselves to be

¹² One of the few studies to directly place the struggles of the indigenous peoples of North America in conversation with postcolonial studies is Kevin Bruyneel, *The Third Space of Sovereignty: The Postcolonial Politics of U.S.-Indigenous Relations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007).

¹³ See, for instance, Peter Hulme, “Including America,” *Ariel* 26.1 (Jan. 1995): 117-123. Leela Ghandi has commented on this application of “postcolonial” status to white settler communities: “This sort of semantic vacuum is most evident in the claim, made by some Australian and Canadian commentators, that settler societies stand in the same relationship to colonialism as those societies which have experienced the full force and violence of colonial domination. Such claims entirely neutralise, in the name of subject formation, the widely divergent logics of settlement and struggles for independence. Equally, they confer a seamless and undiscriminating postcoloniality on both white settler cultures and on those indigenous peoples displaced through their encounter with these cultures.” (Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 168-9). And, as Rosemary Jolly notes, in South Africa, where Afrikaners “continued to see themselves as victims of English colonisation... the imagined continuation of this victimization was used to justify the maintenance of apartheid.” See Rosemary Jolly, “Rehearsals of Liberation: Contemporary Postcolonial Discourse and the New South Africa,” *PMLA: Publications of the Modern Language Association of America* (January 1995), 110(1): 17-29, 22. Ania Loomba has called this last example (South Africa) “the most bizarre instance” of white settlers claiming status as “colonized peoples” vis à vis the imperial centers, which has not only effaced their active role in colonization but also served to facilitate the ongoing dispossession of land. (Loomba, 14) To this I would merely note that the case of South Africa is not “bizarre” at all if “bizarre” is taken to mean “unusual” or “exceptional.” In the Americas, for instance, the struggle against “British tyranny” on the part of the American revolutionaries was often understood as complementary to the wars of extermination and dispossession against Indigenous nations.

working within more canonical western political theory have attempted to contribute to the two fields above. It is clear that there is—indeed increasing—overlapping interest and concern. In the area of postcolonial politics, theorists, historians and philosophers increasingly work to situate their studies of the development of western forms of thought within its imperial context.¹⁴ There is also an increased interest in the study of canonical political theorists' writings on colonialism, slavery, non-Western nationalism, resistance, and the like. Recent work on Tocqueville, Burke, Mill and Marx that have brought to the fore their thoughts on the Americas, Africa or India stand out in this regard.¹⁵ There has also been considerable cross-fertilization of ideas between Euro-centric philosophy and postcolonial theory.¹⁶ Many have noted that the project of “provincializing Europe” from the standpoint of non-Western thinkers has considerable resonance in certain strands within European thought—perhaps no more famously than the whole host of counter-Enlightenment philosophers from Nietzsche onward.¹⁷ Hence the centrality of philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger, Derrida and (as I will elaborate upon below), Foucault in the development of postcolonial theory.

In each of these cases of crossover, however, I would argue that the primary task has been one of “locating.” By this I mean that the emergence of postcolonial political studies has been centrally about locating in its historical specificity the emergence of certain forms of governance, certain relationships of rule and certain theoretical formulations *within* the context of Euro-American imperialism. Taken up from the standpoint of postcolonial theory, the primary task has been to “locate” or “provincialize” the supposedly universal character of central philosophical and discursive formulations within Western knowledge and, in so doing, to “deconstruct” the totalizing or imperial function of these discourses. In both cases—whether one is engaged in “postcolonialism” as a form of historical periodization, or as a specific form of theorization and textual analysis—there is, I submit, a certain critical attitude driving the concern. Nevertheless, there has been little sustained reflection on this critical attitude, on whether it is just a subset of more general critique, or whether there is a specific and distinctive “postcolonial critical attitude.” Furthermore, there has been little investigation of the modes of living and daily practices that bring forth and sustain such an attitude. Another way to put this point would be to say that ‘postcolonial’ has been primarily used as an adjective—modifying a specific noun in relation to a spatio-temporal “thing” or “event.”¹⁸ It has not been used as an adverb, as modifier of our verbs, our actions.¹⁹ In short, though this

¹⁴ Here I am thinking of work in intellectual history by people such as David Armitage, Anthony Pagden and James Tully. In turn, this work is a continuation and modification of earlier work by people such as J.A. Hobson and Wolfgang Mommsen.

¹⁵ Recent work of this kind, by and about political theorists, includes Uday Singh Mehta, *Liberalism and Empire* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); Sankar Muthu, *Enlightenment Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2003); Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2006), and; James Tully, *Public Philosophy in a New Key, Vol. II: Imperialism and Civic Freedom* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2008), esp. Part II.

¹⁶ For an example of this, see Duncan Ivison, *Postcolonial Liberalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002).

¹⁷ Though this is certainly not limited to explicitly “counter-enlightenment” thinkers. For instance, see Charles Taylor, *Modern Social Imaginaries* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004).

¹⁸ For instance, we can meaningfully speak of a “postcolonial” era, event, theory, history, text, philosophy, etc.

¹⁹ For instance, I have never heard someone ask if there was a “postcolonial” way to eat, love, talk or reside.

third possible usage has been hinted at within literature of the first two varieties,²⁰ the prevailing semantics of “postcolonial” in the western academy has *not* been in relation to a specific ethical attitude, a manner of living or stance towards oneself and others—an *ethos*.²¹ Nor has “postcolonial” come to refer to a set of *practices* that might cultivate and sustain such a mode of living. To help map out the “empty space” of postcolonial ethics in this precise sense, I would now like to turn to the more specific topic of the use—and abuse—of Foucault in relation to postcolonial studies over the last thirty years.

PART II. The Discourse of “Foucault”

*The author is an ideological product, since we represent him
as the opposite of his historically real function.*

Foucault, “What is an Author?”

I now turn to a discussion of Foucault in postcolonial theory. I seek to track “Foucault”²² within postcolonial theory—the use of his name and works, the kinds of questions he seems to evoke and the debates surrounding him. I do this not merely in order to provide Foucault scholars with a thread with which they might navigate through this forest of literature. Nor do I do this because I am concerned with “saving” Foucault from an inadequate or unfaithful set of interpreters, as if there is a wholly pure reading that must be safeguarded against mutations. Rather, I seek to track “Foucault” in postcolonial studies because this name can be used as a means of studying what questions, concepts and methodologies are seen as particularly urgent at a specific time and place, and which of these questions, concepts and

²⁰ For instance, Robert Young suggestively defines postcolonialism as “a politics and *philosophy of activism*.” (Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: A very short introduction*, 4). Whether this links up with ethics as I am using the term here turns entirely on what one understands by “philosophy” however. Jorge Klor de Alva defines postcoloniality as an “*oppositional consciousness* emerging from either pre-existing colonial or ongoing subaltern relations,” as affecting Latin American mestizos, US Latinos or African-Americans with an aim to challenging and revising forms of domination, past and present. (Jorge Klor de Alva, “The Postcolonialization of the Latin American Experience,” in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995), 245-246 (emphasis added)).

²¹ A helpful analogue might be the use of “Marxism” as a term for a specific political struggle with an end state or *telos* and as a method of analysis but (more often than not) *not* as an ethic of living. The very possibility of Marxist ethics in this sense has been at the heart of such a long debate in that field I cannot but gesture to it here. It is worth noting in passing however that Althusser, for instance, once commented that “It is not easy to become a Marxist philosopher. Like every “intellectual,” a philosophy teacher is a petty bourgeois. When he opens his mouth, it is petty-bourgeois ideology that speaks: its resources and ruses are infinite... To become “ideologists of the working class” (Lenin), “organic intellectuals” of the proletariat (Gramsci), intellectuals have to carry out a radical revolution of their ideas: a long, painful and difficult re-education. An endless external and *internal* struggle.” (Louis Althusser, “Philosophy as a Revolutionary Weapon,” in *Lenin and Philosophy and other Essays* (NY: Monthly Review Press, 2001), 2).

²² I will periodically place the name ‘Foucault’ in quotations throughout this discussion as a means of reminding of the difference between the writer himself and the representation of him within a specific body of secondary literature. The point of course is that Michel Foucault himself did not directly intervene in “postcolonial studies,” thus one cannot track *him*.

methodologies are taken to be central to whatever it is one is doing when one is engaged in “postcolonial” work. My primary aim then is not to castigate postcolonial theorists for reading Foucault “improperly;” rather, it is to ask, *why* Foucault? Or rather, *which* Foucault? What does the name “Foucault” mean to postcolonial studies? What concepts, methodologies, and debates does it conjure?

My central claim is that “Foucault” has, firstly, meant something to postcolonial *theory*—specifically a space of questioning about “discourse” and related questions about the production of knowledge within colonial power. Secondly, and far after the fact, “Foucault” has meant something to postcolonial *politics*—in this case, the study of forms of governmentality in the modern West, roughly from the late 17th century to the present, and their implication with the rise of modern racism, colonialism, imperialism and neo-liberalism. More interestingly, however, is what “Foucault” has *not* meant: a point of reference for thinking about postcolonial ethics. This is particularly surprising since Foucault himself revisited his earlier “archeological” and “genealogical” works, substantially revised and reformulated his position and, in some cases, specifically repudiated some of his early work (such as his use of the term “discourse”). Foucault understood this late work to form part of an “auto-critique” of his early writings. The fact that this has largely gone unnoticed, or been passed over as unimportant, is, I suggest, more telling about a lacuna in contemporary postcolonial studies as it is practiced in the Western academy, than about an “inadequate” reading of any particular contemporary thinker.²³

Edward Said and the Discourse of Foucault

The person who firmly established Foucault as a central figure in postcolonial theory and therefore set much of the tone of Foucault-reception afterward was of course Edward Said. The 1978 publication of *Orientalism*, often taken to be the text which “effectively founded postcolonial studies as an academic discipline,”²⁴ explicitly references Foucault (along with Gramsci and Raymond Williams) as its main philosophical and methodological inspiration. The main theoretical move within *Orientalism* is Said’s proposal that colonialism and imperial governance of European powers and their allies over the remainder of the world has not only been a project of direct physical domination and control; rather, it has also involved a complex process of dominating the *representation* of non-Western peoples through the production of specific forms of knowledge about the non-West that have simultaneously served to (a) remove representational authority from non-Western peoples, (b) distort the images and forms of knowledge about them, (c) justify the ongoing physical-military colonization of their lands and resources, and, finally, (d) actually contribute to the *production* of a new object of

²³ One admission of failing on my part: I acknowledge that my survey of the use of Foucault in “post-colonialism” has almost entirely excluded work in Latin American studies. This is a failing that reflects my current expertise, but also the fact that postcolonial theory has its own geographic biases and preoccupations (particularly with North Africa and India). For some work in this area see Benigno Trigo (ed.), *Foucault and Latin America* (NY: Routledge, 2001) and Jorge Klor de Alva, “The Postcolonialization of the Latin American Experience,” in Gyan Prakash (ed.), *After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1995).

²⁴ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 383.

study—in this specific case, the “Orient.” Using only the first three functions of colonial knowledge production Said’s analysis would not fit uncomfortably within the “critique of ideology.” It is, however, the last of these claims—the productive function of colonial discourse—that moves Said further away from Gramsci and Williams, for instance, and toward Foucault. It is also this final claim that troubles his account most persistently.

Said famously defined the aim of his landmark work to “examin[e] Orientalism as a discourse,” a notion he had taken directly from Foucault’s use of the term in *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish*. Said writes that

My contention is that without examining *Orientalism as a discourse* one cannot possibly understand the enormously systematic discipline by which European culture was able to manage—and even produce—the Orient politically, sociologically, militarily, ideologically, scientifically, and imaginatively during the post-Enlightenment era.²⁵

This formulation had, I submit, three main effects: First, it secured Foucault’s place as a central figure in postcolonial theory; second, it linked Foucault’s place within the field to the notion of discourse; and third, it provided an authoritative reading of Foucauldian discourse as a “textual attitude”²⁶ or a system of textual representation.²⁷ For Said, and much of “Colonial Discourse Analysis” to follow from him, Foucault thus represents a major conceptual and methodological innovation that allows one to study colonialism through the repetition of a set of linguistic and textual referents that draw their effective force from the authority of the system of textual representation itself rather than the actuality it purportedly describes.²⁸

Subsequent debate surrounding Foucault within postcolonial theory has tended to take the three-part formulation above as its starting point, with criticism taking two main forms. First have been critiques of Foucault via his representation and deployment in Said. The second kind of criticism is *with* Foucault, *contra* Said’s use of him. More often than not, interlocutors oscillate between those two, though there is a general prevalence of the former over the latter. I will attempt to summarize this broad field of debate and critique along four main lines of intervention, using some exemplary figures in the literature: Homi Bhabha, Aijaz Ahmad, Gayatri Spivak, Robert Young, and even Said’s own later reformulations.

Bhabha on the Difference of Discourse

The first critique of Foucaultian discourse as deployed by Said is that this form of analysis is too totalizing, that it gives too undifferentiated an account, one that leaves no room for diversity and conflict in the views expressed within the range of authors studied. In asserting

²⁵ Said, *Orientalism*, 3.

²⁶ Ibid., 92-93.

²⁷ On the importance of this formulation to the field, Gayatri Spivak writes that “the study of colonial discourse, directly released by work such as Said’s... blossomed into a garden where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for. It is an important part of the discipline now.” (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (NY & London: Routledge, 1993), 56.)

²⁸ This is a paraphrase of Said: “people, places, and experiences can always be described by a book, so much so that the book (or text) acquires a greater authority, and use, even than the actuality it describes.” (Said, *Orientalism*, 93.)

the existence of (a supposedly singular, homogeneous) “Orientalist discourse,” Said took insufficient account of the differences of time, place and authorial intent.²⁹ As Leela Gandhi puts it, “If *Orientalism* is a limited text, then it is so primarily because it fails to accommodate the possibility of difference within Oriental discourse.”³⁰ A good example of this kind of critique from within postcolonial theory³¹ can be found in work by Homi Bhabha. In his 1983 essay “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,”³² and again in an expanded form eleven years later in *The Location of Culture*,³³ Bhabha sought to demonstrate that “the construction of the colonial subject in discourse, and the exercise of colonial power through discourse, demands an articulation of forms of difference—racial and sexual.”³⁴ Bhabha’s own project, comprising the internal differentiation of colonial discourse along lines of “race” and sexuality, is repeatedly contrasted with Said’s “refusal to engage with the alterity and ambivalence in the articulation of these two economies which threaten to split the very object of Orientalist discourse as a knowledge and the subject positioned therein.”³⁵ He attributes the totalizing tendencies of Said’s notion of discourse to his “inadequate attention to representation as a concept,” which is “undermined by... the polarities of intentionality,” meaning that “the terms in which Said’s Orientalism is unified—the intentionality and unidirectionality of colonial power—also unify the subject of colonial enunciation.”³⁶ Bhabha goes on to argue for a revised notion of discourse, modifying Said and, at the same time, Foucault. He calls upon “Foucault’s post-structuralist concept of the *dispositif* or apparatus” as a means of correcting Said’s (and the earlier Foucault’s) earlier search for “discursive regularity.”³⁷ Bhabha then proceeds on to a reading of Fanon through the Lacanian schema of “the Imaginary,” which attempts to account for the “ambivalence... of “consent” in objectification,”

²⁹ As Said rephrased this critique of his work, many people took *Orientalism* to be claiming that “the phenomenon of Orientalism is a synecdoche, or a miniature symbol, of the entire West,” and that he had argued it “ought to be taken to represent the West as a whole.”(Said, “Afterword,” 330-331). He does not name him in this passage, but it is likely that Said is referring to James Clifford’s critique, wherein Said is chided for “transforming Orientalism into a synecdoche for a much more complex and ramified totality.” (James Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1988), 257). Clifford’s critique of Said was originally formulated in 1980 and was revised and republished in *The Location of Culture*. See his “Edward Said, *Orientalism*,” *History and Theory*, 19 (1980): 204-223.

³⁰ Leela Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 79.

³¹ I am putting aside for the moment the large body of criticism coming from more traditional historians who have also frequently argued that Said’s work was too totalizing with respect to differences between historical eras and cultural-national traditions (of, say, British vs. French or German Orientalism, as James Clifford points out in *The Predicament of Culture*, 267). For a survey and discussion of criticisms of this kind see Bush, *Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 57, and Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 391.

³² Homi Bhabha “Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme, Margaret Iverson and Diana Loxley (eds.), *The Politics of Theory* (Colchester: University of Essex Press, 1983), 194-211. Hereafter cited as “Difference.”

³³ Homi Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London & NY: Routledge, 1994), particularly Chapter 3, a revised version of the 1983 paper. Hereafter cited as *LC*.

³⁴ Bhabha, *LC*, 96; Bhabha, “Difference,” 194.

³⁵ Bhabha, “Difference,” 199.

³⁶ Bhabha, *LC*, 103; Bhabha, “Difference,” 200.

³⁷ Bhabha, “Difference,” 201.

which “Foucault asserts but... fails to explain.”³⁸ The resulting discussion of fetishism is used as a means of demonstrating that “racist stereotypical discourse, in its colonial moment, inscribes a form of governmentality that is informed by a productive splitting in its constitution of knowledge and exercise of power.”³⁹

What is interesting and important to note here, I think, is not merely that Bhabha critiques Said (rightly or wrongly) for his “inadequate” and totalizing notion of discourse. Rather, as I will explain in more detail below, what is worth highlighting is how, even in his critique, Bhabha confirms the centrality of (textual-literary) discourse as a central frame of reference for postcolonial studies, and simultaneously affirms that what is at stake in such work is “the mode of representation of otherness”⁴⁰ within this discursive field.

Ahmad on Idealism & Ideology

The second major group of criticisms of Said’s analysis of “colonial discourse” is that it is reliant upon a form of textual-linguistic idealism. This criticism can be further broken down into the two problems of (a) the use of literary texts as devices for the “expression” of a given period and (b) the (implicit or explicit) reliance upon the sovereign status of the speaking (or writing) author.⁴¹ In both variants, critics, particularly from Marxist and neo-Marxists traditions, have argued that Said—and, by association, Foucault—displaced more materialist concerns. A good example of this line of argumentation is work by Aijaz Ahmad.⁴² Although Ahmad has numerous complaints against Foucault⁴³—and, more precisely, Said’s use of him—I will focus on the one that is most pertinent to the matter at hand.

The charge of textual or linguistic idealism begins as an attack on the notion that a text (particularly a literary one) is an adequate or appropriate representation of a given era.⁴⁴ Deploying a longstanding Marxist critique of such assumptions, Ahmad argues that the

³⁸ Bhabha, *LC*, 109.

³⁹ Bhabha, *LC*, 118; “Difference,” 209.

⁴⁰ Bhabha, *LC*, 97.

⁴¹ This objection is made clearly by James Clifford, amongst others. Clifford notes that “discourse” analysis cannot safely be founded on redefined “traditions.” Nor can it be derived from a study of “authors.” Despite heavy criticism, Said (unlike Foucault) nevertheless relies upon “the essential (beginning and continuing) function of an authorial intention.” (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 268).

⁴² Others who would fall into this category include, for instance, Benita Parry and Patrick Wolfe. See Benita Parry, “Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse,” *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987): 27-58 and “Resistance Theory/Theorising Resistance, or Two Cheers for Nativism,” in Francis Barker, Peter Hulme and Margaret Ivison (eds.), *Colonial Discourse/Postcolonial Theory* (Manchester: Manchester UP, 1994): 172-96; Patrick Wolfe, *Settler Colonialism and the Transformation of Anthropology: The Politics and Poetics of an Ethnographic Event* (London & NY: Cassell, 1999) and Patrick Wolfe, “History and Imperialism.”

⁴³ In addition to the question of “textual idealism,” for instance, Ahmad is concerned to point out that the “Nietzschean” tradition within which Foucault is working and which Said draws upon is decidedly “anti-humanist,” is committed to the notion that “no true representation is possible because all human communications always distort the facts” and, unlike the Marxist tradition, which has been “notably anti-imperialist; the Nietzschean tradition had had no such credentials.” (Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory* (London: Verso, 1992), 193 and 222).

⁴⁴ For instance, the notion that in order to understand Elizabethan England, one should study Shakespeare (and not, say, the political economy of the era).

narrative of the convergence between colonial knowledges and colonial powers simply cannot be assembled within Cultural Studies itself, because histories of economic exploitation, political coercion, military conquest play the far more constitutive part; those other histories are the ones which provide the enabling conditions for the so-called “Orientalist Discourse” as such.⁴⁵

A familiar base/superstructure distinction is deployed here to argue that “discourse” is mere epiphenomenal effect to the substantive cause of economics and material interaction of political powers (such as in war).⁴⁶ Ahmad notes an irony in Said’s use of Foucault on this question. Because Said (supposedly) accepts Foucault’s critique of Marx,⁴⁷ but refuses to accept the anti-humanist presuppositions that come with this critique, he uncritically deploys a modified (and, for Ahmad, ultimately incoherent) humanist narrative of textual representations unified across space and time by a single general structure called “Orientalist discourse.” It is not merely that Said falsely unifies figures as diverse as Dante and Kipling as somehow representative of a similar “discourse,”⁴⁸ but, moreover, that the “specific set of beliefs and values” that they represent

remain immanent in—and therefore available for reconstruction through—the canon of [their] *great books*. Said subscribes to the *structure* of this idealist metaphysics even though he obviously questions the greatness of some of those “great” books. In other words, he duplicates, all those procedures even as he debunks the very tradition from which he has borrowed them.⁴⁹

Thus, Ahmad supplements the charges of ahistoricism with that of textual idealism. While recognizing that the first of these clearly cannot be attributed to Foucault himself and derives rather from Said’s reinterpretation of the notion of “discourse,”⁵⁰ Ahmad is more ambivalent

⁴⁵ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 164.

⁴⁶ Patrick Wolfe describes Said’s supposed idealism as “distinctly Cartesian... In producing its other as an object of thought and acting upon it, colonial discourse reproduces the familiar priority of mind over matter.” (Wolfe, “History and Imperialism,” 409).

⁴⁷ As Ahmad construes this critique, Foucault locates Marx “firmly within the boundaries of what he calls the “Western episteme,”” in which “Marx’s thought is framed entirely by the discourse of Political Economy as this discourse is assembled within that episteme.” From this first move comes Foucault’s denial that “that narratives of history can be assembled at the twin sites of the state and economic production, which he deems to be the exclusive originating sites of Marx’s historical narrative.” (Ahmad, *In Theory*, 165).

⁴⁸ This, the point made above via Bhabha about “discourse” as insufficiently internally differentiated.

⁴⁹ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 167.

⁵⁰ Ahmad notes, “Now, the idea that there could be *a* discourse—that is to say, an epistemic construction—traversing the whole breadth of “Western” history and textualities, spanning not only the modern capitalist period but all the preceding pre-capitalist periods as well, is not only an un-Marxist but also a radically un-Foucauldian idea... Foucault never spoke of a full-fledged discourse before the sixteenth century because what he then called “discourse” presumes, as coextensive corollary, a rationalism of the post-medieval kind, alongside the increasing elaborations of modern state forms, modern institutional grids, objectified economic productions, modern forms of rationalized planning. Said’s idea that the ideology of modern imperialist Eurocentrism is already inscribed in the ritual theatre of Greek tragedy—or that Marx’s passage on the role of British colonialism in India can be lifted out of the presuppositions of political economy and seamlessly

with respect to the source of the second problem. At times he traces this idealism back to Said's desire to preserve an "Auerbachian High Humanism."⁵¹ In other places, however, he attributes the avoidance of "material concerns" in favour of texts to the influence of "faddish" use of (particularly French) poststructuralist theory that reduces all conflicts of colonialism to "transhistorical" problems of Identity/Difference.⁵²

Three consequences flow from this supposed textual idealism. First, Said (and the Foucaultian-inspired students of "Colonial Discourse Analysis" in general), simply fail to understand the true causes of colonial and imperial power of Europe over non-European peoples. The sources of this domination can be found in—and are thus only analyzable in terms of—the political-economy of modern European societies. Contra Said's construal of imperialism, which at times "appears to be an effect mainly of certain kinds of *writing*,"⁵³ Ahmad argues that

What gave European forms of these prejudices their special force in history, with devastating consequences for the actual lives of countless millions and expressed ideologically in full-blown Eurocentric racisms, was not some transhistorical process of ontological obsession and falsity—some gathering of unique force in domains of discourse—but, quite specifically, the power of colonial capitalism, which then gave rise to other sorts of power.⁵⁴

Because the Discourse Analysis approach fails to apprehend the *source* of imperial and colonial power, it also fails to understand the possibilities of resistance to it. This is the second mistake. According to Ahmad, insofar as Said has included counter-hegemonic politics at all,⁵⁵

integrated into a transhistorical Orientalist Discourse—is not only ahistorical in the ordinary sense but also specifically anti-Foucauldian in a methodological sense." (Ahmad, *In Theory*, 166).

⁵¹ "Said uses Foucauldian terms as discrete elements of an apparatus, but refuses to accept the consequences of Foucault's own mapping of history. If Foucauldian pressures force him to trace the beginnings of "Orientalist Discourse" from the eighteenth century or so, the equally irresistible pressures of Auerbachian High Humanism force him to trace the origins of this very "discourse," in the conventional form of a continuous European literary textuality, all the way back to Ancient Greece. In a characteristic move, Said refuses to choose and, as we shall demonstrate below, he offers mutually incompatible definitions of "Orientalism" so as to deploy both these stances, the Foucauldian and the Auerbachian, *simultaneously*." (Ahmad, *In Theory*, 166).

⁵² "Alongside these large theoretical and political shifts was the matter of a certain transhistoricity which, in claiming that Europe establishes its own Identity by establishing the *Difference* of the Orient, and that Europe has possessed, since the days of Athenian drama, a unitary will to inferiorize and vanquish non-Europe, made it possible for Said to assert that *all* European knowledges of non-Europe are bad knowledges because they are already contaminated with this aggressive Identity-formation... surely, no writer with any sense of intellectual responsibility had ever accepted—that Europeans were *ontologically* incapable of producing any true knowledge about non-Europe." (Ahmad, *In Theory*, 178).

⁵³ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 181.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 184.

⁵⁵ It is clear that Ahmad thinks this question has not been sufficiently addressed: "In fact, it is one of the disagreeable surprises in *Orientalism* that it refuses to acknowledge that vast tradition, virtually as old as colonialism itself, which has existed in the colonized countries as well as among the metropolitan Left traditions, and has always been occupied, precisely, with drawing up an inventory of colonial traces in the

this is a politics of *writing*. Because Said understands imperialism to primarily be a “cultural phenomenon,” it is “to be opposed by an *alternative discourse*.⁵⁶ This “textual resistance” is not only inadequate,⁵⁷ it serves, in Ahmad’s view as an ideological mask for the elitism and conservatism of the academic community in the West of the late Cold War era. This is the third consequence of the move to “discourse”: a (self) concealing of the implication of “postcolonial theory” *within* imperial-capitalism itself. As he writes,

In this sort of formulation [Colonial Discourse Analysis] the “contest over decolonization” becomes mainly a literary and literary-critical affair, and the elite academic intelligentsia claims for itself, in an amazing gap between fact and self-image, the role of the world’s revolutionary vanguard.⁵⁸

The intellectual elite (exemplified by Foucault and Said) are able to assert the radical revolutionary potential of their “textual intervention”—elsewhere he writes that such thinkers assert “the centrality of *reading* as the primary form of politics”⁵⁹—and simultaneously mask the conditions of their own possibility as elites, namely the “unprecedented imperialist consolidations of the present decade”⁶⁰ and subsequent collapse of the traditional (Marxist) left. Ahmad insists on reading *Orientalism* and its reliance upon an “anti-humanist” and “textualist” philosophy such as Foucault’s as an *effect* of the “global offensive of the Right, global retreat of the Left, and retreat also of that which was progressive even in our canonical nationalism.”⁶¹

The notion that “discourse” is primarily about (literary) texts, that such texts are the best means for analyzing the political and economic configurations of an era and, finally, that strategies of counter-reading and counter-writing are the appropriate means to resist the domination of a given structure of governance (such as European imperialism) are all claims, I submit, which cannot be attributed to Foucault (as I elaborate upon below). However, for the moment at least, my aim is not to adjudicate on the veracity of Ahmad’s allegations. Rather, as throughout this section, I am more interested in their *function*. By this I mean to point to the fact that while Ahmad strongly disagrees with the Said of *Orientalism* (and through him, with

minds of people on both sides of the colonial divide.”(Ahmad, *In Theory*, 174) While such a charge might be made of *Orientalism*, it is clear that Said makes some attempt to address this question in *Culture and Imperialism* (discussed more below).

⁵⁶ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 204.

⁵⁷ “All such *systems* are rejected, in the characteristic postmodernist way, so that resistance can always only be personal, micro, and shared only by a small, determinate number of individuals who happen, perchance, to come together, outside the so-called “grand narratives” of class, gender, nation.”(Ahmad, *In Theory*, 200) The charge that a Foucaultian-inspired ethics of resistance must be fragmentary and personalized will be commented on in later sections.

⁵⁸ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 208.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 3.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 194-5.

⁶¹ Ibid., 192. Arif Dirlik has made a similar point, accusing Third World intellectuals of being complicit in the very imperial capitalism they purport to undermine. He asks, rather polemically, “When exactly... does the “post-colonial” begin? ...When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe.”(Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” *Critical Inquiry* 20 (1994): 328-29).

Foucault), the overall effect of this contestation is to solidify the same basic set of pre-suppositions established in the earlier text. Even a critic such as Ahmad implicitly accepts, and effectively reinforces and replicates, the notion that “Foucault” represents an “epistemological position”⁶² best summed up by the notion of “discourse” and that a primary task of postcolonial theory is to get clear on this epistemology, to supplant the textual-idealism with a historical-materialist frame of analysis.⁶³

Spivak on Re-presenting Foucault

A third group of criticisms interrogate the status of “representation” in Foucault and Said. One of the more controversial claims to flow from studying Orientalism as a “discourse” is the notion that the formation of a discourse is interwoven with techniques of disciplinary knowledge/power that, together, *establish and produce* the field of inquiry itself as a stable epistemic object. Specific techniques of governance—in this case, colonial power—may begin as localized acts aimed at constraining or prohibiting particular actions, movements, languages, and the like, but over time they contribute to the long-term formation of a general “discourse” that is actually productive of a new domain of study and range of thought and action. Said writes that,

my whole point is to say that we can better understand the persistence and the durability of saturating hegemonic systems like culture when we realize that their internal constraints upon writers and thinkers were *productive*, not unilaterally inhibiting. It is this idea that Gramsci, certainly, and Foucault and Raymond Williams in their very different ways have been trying to illustrate.⁶⁴

And elsewhere,

A text purporting to contain knowledge about something actual, and arising out of circumstances similar to the ones I have just described, is not easily dismissed... such texts can *create* not only knowledge but also the very reality they appear to describe. In time such knowledge and reality produce a tradition, or what Michel Foucault calls a discourse, whose material presence or weight, not the originality of a given author, is really responsible for the texts produced out of it.⁶⁵

⁶² Ahmad, *In Theory*, 3.

⁶³ Note that Ahmad does not contest Said’s *politics*—he repeatedly praises him for this—nor does he comment almost at all on questions of ethics. An exception to this can be found in the last two paragraphs of the chapter where Ahmad speaks suddenly of Marxism as an “ethical choice,” one that comes with its own particular losses and joys precisely because it is a *choice*, making it a foreclosure of other ways of living and being in the world: “The pain of any ethical life is that all fundamental bondings, affiliations, stable political positions, require that one ceases to desire, voraciously, everything that is available in this world; that one learns to deny oneself some of the pleasures, rewards, consumptions, even affiliations of certain sorts.” (Ahmad, *In Theory*, 219)

⁶⁴ Said, *Orientalism*, 14.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 94.

The reason why this claim is controversial, and has been the target of so many critiques, is that it appears to conflict with the other functions of colonial discourse production (listed above). How can discourse be said to both “create” its object of study *and*, at the same time, be a “misrepresentation” or “distortion” of the original object, thus serving to enable governance over the original? This tension strikes to the heart of the relationship between “Orientalism” and “the Orient,” something that Said never made entirely clear. If Orientalism can be accused of “misrepresenting” the Orient and, in so doing, justifying and enabling colonial governance over the latter, this implies at least that “the Orient” has an independent reality from Orientalism as a discourse. It would theoretically be possible to study the Orient through a non-Orientalist lens, but this is what Said specific rejects doing in his work (or even needing to do). Said states time again that “I have no interest in, much less capacity for, showing what the true Orient and Islam really are.”⁶⁶ But if this is the case, how can he know that Orientalism is a *false* representation of either the Orient or Islam?

The question of the possibility of true representation can be found in almost all debates that emerge from *Orientalism* and, more than this, it serves as one of the most important points of orientation around which “postcolonial studies” is constituted in the 1980s and 1990s. In fact, as the issue has been rehearsed by so many others, I will not belabor the point here. Instead, I will make a short detour away from Said’s specific formulation of this problem into work by another thinker.

Exemplary of the preoccupation with interrogating “representation”—another polysemic term⁶⁷—and its relationship to discourse is work by Gayatri Spivak. Although aware of and conversant with his work as early as her 1976 translation of Derrida’s *Of Grammatology*,⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Said, “Afterword [1994],” in *Orientalism*, 331.

⁶⁷ As argued in more detail below, I submit that postcolonial theory as exemplified by, for instance, Spivak, has been centrally concerned with “representation” in its two primary usages: in terms of governance and self-determination (the authentic representation of non-Western peoples in the institutions of rule) and in terms of re-presentation (the replication of knowledge about non-Western peoples in textual archives).

⁶⁸ Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, “Translator’s preface,” in Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* (Baltimore & London: The Johns Hopkins UP, 1976), ix-lxxxvii. Spivak’s “preface” is, as we might expect from such a unique thinker in her own right, something more than a preface though less than a full statement of her own position. Thus, it is with some trepidation that one could attribute to this essay Spivak’s full understanding of Foucault in this period. Her brief comments are nevertheless illuminating. Spivak surveys the Derrida-Foucault debate (especially pp. lix-lxii), arising from the former’s critique of *The History of Madness* (particularly Foucault’s reading of Descartes therein). She then notes: “This is a dated Foucault, the Foucault of the sixties. Even then he was violently unwilling to be called a structuralist, and he gets into this section of my preface because he diagnoses an age in terms of its *episteme*, the self-defined structure of its knowing. This particular characteristic of Foucault’s work has not disappeared. To diagnose the epistemic structure, he has had, with repeated protestations to the contrary, to step out of epistemic structures in general, assuming that were possible. To write his “archaeologies,” he has had to analyze metaphors privileged by a particular age in which Derrida would call “meta-metaphysics.” By describing grammatology as a “history of the possibility of history that would no longer be an archaeology,” (43, 28), Derrida seems to declare an advance over Foucault. And by denying the status of a positive science to grammatology, he “erases” the advance.” (Spivak, “Translator’s preface, lx.) Even in this quick statement, a few noteworthy themes come to light. First, in the early 1970s Spivak is aware of and conversant with Foucault and Foucauldian scholarship—mediated as it may be by Derrida and the debate between the two; second, that the heart of her

Spivak's first extended discussion of Foucault comes in her famous 1985 essay "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In this work, Spivak turns more centrally and substantively to Foucault and explicitly connects his work to postcolonial studies. While paying due respect to "the most import contributions of French poststructuralist theory,"⁶⁹ Spivak nevertheless argues that Foucault—and Deleuze—"systematically ignore the question of ideology and their own implication in intellectual and economic history."⁷⁰ This general problematic derives, moreover, from a series of related errors within their work.

First, both thinkers fail to "consider the relations between desire, power, and subjectivity" that "renders them incapable of articulated a theory of interests."⁷¹ Neither Foucault nor Deleuze properly differentiate between desire and interest; they conflate the "libidinal economy"—the production and expression of desire—with the development of interest.

This leads, second, to "an unquestioned valorization of the oppressed as subject, the "object being."⁷² Foucault in particular is accused of simplistically asserting that "the masses know perfectly well, clearly... they know far better than [the intellectual] and they certainly say it very well (FD, 206, 207)."⁷³ Since desire is supposedly the "determining interest,"⁷⁴ the oppressed subject who expresses her desire is one who has immediately grasped her true or objective interest, insofar as there is such a thing. Far from the radical critique of the subject it purports to be, this form of French poststructuralism "reintroduces the constitutive subject on at least two levels: the Subject of desire and power as an irreducible methodological presupposition; and the self-proximate, if not self-identical, subject of the oppressed."⁷⁵

Third, the reintroduction and valorization of the (oppressed, desiring) subject, paradoxically reasserts the European intellectual in a position of epistemic privilege. Because Foucault and Deleuze denounce the need to "represent" the oppressed, according to Spivak—stating that such people can "speak for themselves"—they constitute themselves as mere

concern with Foucault is his notions of *episteme* and discourse, both of which Spivak finds problematic and superseded by Derrida; third, Spivak highlights the temporal situatedness of this reading, referring to Foucault's analysis as "dated", "of the sixties" and developed in relation to French structuralism of the time. Note that Spivak is speaking of Foucault as presented in the original 1961 publication of *Folie et Déraison* (Paris: Librairie Plon) through to *L'archéologie du savoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1969). The distance of "dating" here is, at most, fifteen years. This will become relevant to my later discussion of Spivak's *A Critique of Post-colonial Reason* in which the 1972 conversation with Deleuze (some twenty-seven years earlier) is used as the primary textual referent which, in Spivak's estimation, "has not necessarily been superseded." (Gayatri Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1999), 248, fn.78.)

⁶⁹ "first, that the networks of power/desire/interest are so heterogeneous that their reduction to a coherent narrative is counterproductive—a persistent critique is needed; and second, that intellectuals must attempt to disclose and know the discourse of society's Other." (Gayatri Spivak, "Can the subaltern speak? [1985]," in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds.), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271-313, at p. 272. Hereafter cited as CSS).

⁷⁰ Spivak, CSS, 272.

⁷¹ Ibid., 273.

⁷² Ibid., 274.

⁷³ Ibid., 274.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 278.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 279.

observers, as describing struggles and strategically intervening in them as allies, but not as interpreting or helping to constitute them. This is, to Spivak, a covert form of positivism masquerading as its inverse. Foucault and Deleuze “overlook the category of representation in its two senses... how the stating of the world in representation—its scene of writing, its *Darstellung*—dissimulates the choice of a need for “heroes,” paternal proxies, agents of power—*Vertretung*.⁷⁶

Finally, this positivism is practically-politically dangerous (perhaps more so than the overt forms of positivism practiced by classical Marxism, for instance), because it (a) “foreclose[es]... the necessity of the difficult task of counterhegemonic ideological production,”⁷⁷ and (b) it prevents the European intellectual (in this case Foucault and Deleuze) from recognizing that his claims to “a monist and unified access to a conception of “power” (methodologically presupposing a Subject-of-power) is made possible by a certain stage in exploitation, for his vision of geographical discontinuity is geopolitically specific to the First World.⁷⁸ Thus, not only are the tactics of Foucault and Deleuze insufficient to a critique of imperialism, they actually serve to practically reinforce the problem.

Against this Foucault-Deleuze position,⁷⁹ according to which “the oppressed, if given the chance (the problem of representation cannot be bypassed here), and on the way to solidarity through alliance politics (a Marxist thematic is at work here) *can speak and know their conditions*,” Spivak poses her famous question: Can the subaltern speak? Her answer, well-known now, is unequivocally “no.”⁸⁰ The answer to this question is “no” because “For the “true” subaltern group... identity is its difference, there is no unrepresentable subaltern subject that can know and speak itself.”⁸¹ This means, for Spivak, that “the intellectual’s solution is not to abstain from representation,”⁸² but rather to participate in “counterhegemonic ideological production.”⁸³

Let us step back for a moment and consider the contours of this debate as Spivak sketches them. On the one side stands a kind of “explicit positivism,” a kind of scientific Marxism that aspires to, if not claims to achieve, absolute knowledge of history. This, of course, has been implicated within European imperial projects for some time now. Contrasted with this is Spivak’s reformulation of the “post-representationalist” and “post-structuralist” Deleuze and Foucault. They advance a critique of “explicit positivism” in the name of a more radical de-centring of the subject. In so doing, however, they nevertheless reconstitute an “implicit positivism.” That is to say, Deleuze and Foucault advocate a return to the un-

⁷⁶ Ibid., 279.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 275.

⁷⁸ Ibid., 289. This criticism is very similar to the one made by Ahmad. See Ahmad, *In Theory*.

⁷⁹ Against, it is hard to know what one is referring to here. Do the above statements form a “theory”? If so, whose? Foucault’s? Deleuze’s? “French poststructuralism,” whatever that might be?

⁸⁰ “The subaltern cannot speak. There is no virtue in global laundry lists with “women” as a pious item. Representation has not withered away. The female intellectual as intellectual has a circumscribed task which she must not disown with a flourish.” (Spivak, *CSS*, 308).

⁸¹ Spivak, *CSS*, 285.

⁸² Ibid., 285.

⁸³ Ibid., 275.

differentiated experience of the subaltern subject, which they do not purport to speak for (to represent), but rather merely run alongside and observe (re-present). This (covertly) reinscribes a positivism, a privilege of the intellectual *qua* observer, and a (Eurocentric) subject-centred philosophy.

Finally, we have Spivak's position. Spivak's solution, as is well known now, is to turn to Derrida as a figure who

marks radical critique with the danger of appropriating the other by assimilation. He reads catachresis at the origin... [and] calls for a rewriting of the utopian structural impulse as "rendering delirious that interior voice that is the voice of the other in us."⁸⁴

Spivak laments the crystallizing of a set of tropes around Derrida and Foucault amongst U.S. academics and students in which it is assumed that "Foucault deals with real history, real politics, and real social problems; Derrida is inaccessible, esoteric, and textualistic."⁸⁵ (It is clear that Spivak has, among others, Said in mind.⁸⁶) While conceding that Derrida is "hard to read" and that "his real object of investigation is classical philosophy," Spivak nevertheless concludes that he is "less dangerous" than Foucault, "the first-world intellectual masquerading as the absent nonrepresenter who lets the oppressed speak for themselves."⁸⁷ Given that Foucault's "substantive concern for the politics of the oppressed" can "hide a privileging of the intellectual and of the "concrete" subject of oppression that, in fact, compounds the appeal,"⁸⁸ Spivak supports Derrida's

Nietzschean, philosophical, and psychoanalytic, rather than specifically political, choices to suggest a critique of European ethnocentrism in the constitution of the Other. As a post-colonial intellectual, I am not troubled that he does not *lead* me (as Europeans inevitably seem to do) to the specific path that such a critique makes necessary. It is more important to me that, as a European philosopher, he articulates the *European* Subject's tendency to constitute the Other as marginal to ethnocentrism and locates *that* as the problem with all logocentric and therefore also all grammatical endeavors (since the main thesis of the chapter is the complicity between the two). *Not* a general problem, but a *European* problem.⁸⁹

A host of questions emerge from this, each of which could be followed up on. Is our goal to be "less dangerous?" How does Derrida not make "political choices?" How does he "not lead," even while acknowledging that "Europeans inevitably seem to do" this? How does he merely "articulate" and "locate" a specifically *European* problem without helping to constitute "European" and "Europe?" In short, how is this (deconstructive) theory not an action? How-

⁸⁴ Ibid., 308.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 291.

⁸⁶ "Consider, finally, Said's plangent aphorism, which betrays a profound misapprehension of the notion of "textuality": "Derrida's criticism moves us *into* the text, Foucault's *in and out*." (Spivak, CSS, 292).

⁸⁷ Spivak, CSS, 292.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 292.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 293.

ever, again, my interest at this point is not in disputing Spivak's characterization of Marx, Derrida, Deleuze or Foucault (though I will have more to say about Foucault later). Rather, I am interested here in mapping the intellectual space into which Spivak makes her intervention—what are the central questions, the stakes involved, what matters for discussion and what does not—and the use of the other figures as crucial to creating this space, to which her own work can appear as central and less problematic.

To help further disclose this problem-space, perhaps it is more interesting to examine those passages where Spivak speaks highly of Foucault. One in particular is telling as it speaks to the question of postcolonialism as a form of problematization that remains silent on questions of ethics. She writes,

what I find useful is the sustained and developing work on the *mechanics* of the constitution of the Other; we can use it to much greater analytic and interventionist advantage than invocations of the *authenticity* of the Other. On this level, *what remains useful in Foucault is the mechanics of disciplinarization and institutionalization, the constitution, as it were, of the colonizer*. Foucault does not relate it to any version, early or late, proto- or post-, of imperialism. They are of great usefulness to intellectuals concerned with the decay of the West. Their seduction for them, and fearfulness for us, is that they might allow the complicity of the investigating subject (male or female professional) to disguise itself in transparency.⁹⁰

We see in this formulation the same “Foucault” emerge—one cut down the middle by a dichotomous position on subject constitution. When it comes to an analysis of the constitution of the *colonizer* (or, more generally, the governor), Foucault is praised for his detailed work on the mechanics of disciplinarization and institutionalization. This (as it is here with Spivak’s text), is contrasted to Foucault’s naïve, simplistic and neo-positivist invocation of the resistance of the colonized (or governed). Foucault either relies upon a quasi-structuralist account of subject constitution through governmentality, or he posits a theory of the subject in its historical invariability. What is missing is an analysis of the mechanics of self-constitution within which the governed modify themselves and, in so doing, exploit the space of possibilities left open by the mechanics of disciplinarization. This is, I submit, precisely what Foucault engaged in throughout his late writings.

Finally, it is worth mentioning that this discussion as a whole is troubled by a constant question of the extent to which it can truly be speaking for Foucault the man, or merely a single set of statements made by him at a specific time for a specific purpose. In the above encounter, Spivak relies almost exclusively on a single piece: “Interrogation of Intellectuals and Power: A conversation between Michel Foucault and Gilles Deleuze.”⁹¹ This causes immediate problems, however. Spivak shifts her invocation of the voice of the text, occasionally citing it as a statement of Foucault’s position, occasionally of Foucault and Deleuze together, sometimes as representative of “French poststructuralist theory”⁹² and even “the French scene

⁹⁰ Ibid., 294 (emphasis added).

⁹¹ This discussion was originally held on March 4, 1972 and is published in Michel Foucault, *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell, 1977), 205-217.

⁹² Spivak, CSS, 272.

generally.”⁹³ Further complicating this question is the fact that although “Can the subaltern speak?” is written in 1985, its interlocutor in this case is a *conversation* (not a monograph) Foucault had with Deleuze in 1972 (four years before even *Of Grammatology* and Spivak’s original preface remarks). Spivak seems to sense the problems of this and attempts to defuse it in an early footnote, writing

It is important to note that the greatest “influence” of Western European intellectuals upon U.S. professors and students happens through collections of essays rather than long books in translation. And, in those collections, it is understandably the more topical pieces that gain a greater currency. (Derrida’s “Structure, Sign, and Play” is a case in point.) From the perspective of theoretical production and ideological reproduction, therefore, the conversation under consideration has not necessarily been superseded.⁹⁴

A few things of note here: First, Spivak partially sidesteps the question of whether her reading of Foucault and Deleuze is a correct or accurate one by taking up the “perspective of theoretical production and ideological reproduction.” She is thus more concerned with the *influence* of these thinkers and their ideas on the production of knowledge within a specific site (the U.S. academy) than with elucidating what they “actually” said. This question of influence and reception is interesting and important in its own right and there is nothing to say that Spivak should not engage in such a study. However, she might be accused of contributing to the very problem she identifies—the undue influence of “topical essays” rather than careful analysis of more fully considered texts—insofar as she does not stop to consider whether this particular piece is actually a fair statement of Foucault or Deleuze’s body of thought taken as a whole. Given the datedness of the piece, the fact that it is a conversation between two people, and that (at least in the case of Foucault), the speakers seek later to contextualize, critique and modify their own positions, Spivak can be fairly questioned as to whether the heavy (near exclusive) reliance on this one dialogue can support the weight of her claims.

Independent of these final considerations, however, we can see a familiar pattern emerge. Even in asserting her own work against Foucault, Spivak helps to confirm the centrality of questions of representation and, in particular, discourse. The crux of the issue—for Spivak as for Said before her—is the representational authority of “Western” intellectuals in relation to the West’s “Other.” This preoccupation permits Spivak to bypass almost entirely Foucault’s late writings⁹⁵ and, more generally, the question of ethics.

Said *contra* Foucault

It is perhaps in response to criticism of the kind described above that Said began to distance himself from Foucault after the publication of *Orientalism*. To find the fourth line of critique

⁹³ Ibid., 286. Spivak seems (inexplicably) to exclude Derrida from either “French poststructuralism” or the “French scene” generally, as she later uses him as a foil against Foucault and Deleuze.

⁹⁴ Spivak, CSS, 309, ft.3. As noted above, in note 68, this proviso is reiterated in later work, included again in the 1999 publication of *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*.

⁹⁵ An exception to this is the later essay Gayatri Spivak, “More on power/knowledge,” in *Outside in the Teaching Machine* (NY & London: Routledge, 1993), 27-57. I will discuss this in a later section when I take up exceptions to the general field as outlined here.

against Foucaultian discourse then—what I will call the critique of counter-hegemonic possibilities—we can look to later writings by Said. There are two main tracks along which this proceeds. First, Said begins to argue that the notion of discourse as derived from Foucault and formulated in *Orientalism* was too focused on “textuality” as a meta-theory which places Foucault in a camp with other “postmodern” thinkers, to be contrasted with the “postcolonial” theorists.⁹⁶ Secondly, Foucault is accused of a rather unidirectional and monolithic account of power, one that leaves no space for resistance and counter-hegemonic knowledge production.

On the first issue, Said is keen to draw a sharp distinction between “postcolonial” perspectives—which are purportedly driven by more specific, concrete and “real” historical and political concerns—and “postmodern” perspectives, derived as they are largely from continental philosophy—largely concerned with “grand” theorizing on questions of epistemology, textuality and language. In later work Said argues that “postmodern” theory is characterized by “a much greater Eurocentric bias,” and

a preponderance of theoretical and aesthetic emphasis stressing the local and the contingent, as well as the almost decorative weightlessness of history, pastiche, and above all consumerism. The earliest studies of the post-colonial were by such distinguished thinkers as Anwar Abdel Malek, Samir Amin, and C.L.R. James, almost all based on studies of domination and control done from the standpoint of either a completed political independence or an incomplete liberationist project... This crucial difference between the urgent historical and political imperatives of post-colonialism and post-modernism's relative detachment makes for altogether different approaches and results, although some overlap between them (in the technique of “magical realism,” for example) does exist.⁹⁷

He is increasingly critical of the use of such theory, elsewhere arguing that instead of contextualizing the subject (as it purports to do), so-called “postmodern” theory.⁹⁸

⁹⁶ Thus, accepting much of the kind of critique deployed against him by Aijaz Ahmad for instance, but simultaneously deflecting this by attributing the “textual idealism” to Foucault and “postmodernism.”

⁹⁷ Said, “Afterword,” 349.

⁹⁸ Although Lyotard is mentioned by name here, and not Foucault, it is clear that Said came to see both as associated with “postmodernism” in the sense in which it is characterized here. For instance, in *Culture and Imperialism*, he writes, “The later Jean-François Lyotard and Michel Foucault, eminent French philosophers who emerged during the 1960s as apostles of radicalism and intellectual insurgency, describe a striking new lack of faith in what Lyotard calls the great legitimizing narratives of emancipation and enlightenment.... Foucault also turned his attention away from the oppositional forces in modern society which he had studied for their undeterred resistance to exclusion and confinement—delinquents, poets, outcasts, and the like—and decided to concentrate on the local micro-physics of power that surround the individual. The self was therefore to be studied, cultivated, and, if necessary, refashioned and constituted. In both Lyotard and Foucault we find precisely the same trope employed to explain the disappointment in the politics of liberation: narrative, which posits an enabling beginning point and a vindicating goal, is no longer adequate for plotting the human trajectory in society. There is nothing to look forward to: we are stuck within our circle. And now the line is enclosed by a circle. After years of support for anti-colonial struggles in Algeria, Cuba, Vietnam, Palestine, Iran, which came to represent their deepest engagement in the politics and philosophy of anti-imperialist decolonization, a moment of exhaustion and disappointment was reached. One began to hear and read how futile it was to support revolutions, how barbaric were the new regimes that came to power, how—this is an extreme case—decolonization had benefited “world communism.””(Said,

with its aesthetic of quotation, nostalgia, and indifferentiation, stands free of its own history, which is to say that the division of intellectual labor, the circumscription of praxes within clear disciplinary boundaries, and the depolitization of knowledge can proceed more or less at will.⁹⁹

With respect to the second issue, Said argues that the Foucaultian notion of discourse, even as formulated in *Orientalism*, leaves too little room for the self-reflective activities of subaltern subjects and therefore cannot account for resistance to dominant formations of knowledge/power.¹⁰⁰ At times, Said attempts to account for this transition by arguing that at the time of writing *Orientalism* the forms of resistance to colonial discourse had not yet been made sufficiently manifest. He writes, for instance, in the Afterword to the 1994 printing that,

It is now very strikingly no longer the case that the lesser peoples—formerly colonized, enslaved, oppressed—are silent or unaccounted for except by senior European or American males. There has been a revolution in the consciousness of women, minorities, and marginals so powerful as to affect the mainstream thinking worldwide. Although I had some sense of it when I was working on *Orientalism* in the 1970s, it is now so dramatically apparent as to demand the attention of everyone seriously concerned with the scholarly and theoretical study of culture.¹⁰¹

Culture and Imperialism, 29-30). Dipesh Charkrabarty (*Provincializing Europe* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2000), 6) has recently echoed this association as well: "Writings by poststructuralist philosophers such as Michel Foucault have undoubtedly given a fillip to global critiques of historicism. But it would be wrong to think of postcolonial critiques of historicism (or of the political) as simply deriving from critiques already elaborated by postmodern and poststructuralist thinkers of the West. In fact, to think this way would itself be to practice historicism, for such a thought would merely repeat the temporal structure of the statement, "first in the West, and then elsewhere." Or, Barbara Bush (*Imperialism and Postcolonialism*, 57-58): "Although influenced by postmodern thinkers like Foucault, [Said] was not entirely convinced by their anti-Marxism, emphasized the importance of history and was motivated by political, not theoretical concerns. Postcolonial theory, however, has located itself "everywhere and nowhere," eclectically borrowing from other theories and disciplines (Lacan, Derrida, Foucault), regardless of their relevance to the colonial and post-colonial context. Theoretical analyses of concepts related to colonial "otherness," such as subalternity, hybridity and mimicry, have taken the place of real-life struggles against ongoing injustices (Goldberg and Quayson, 2002). The postcolonial "turn" was pioneered by "third world" intellectuals writing from a diasporic status in the West, mainly within North American universities, and preoccupation with "identities" and dismantling of the ideological and cultural legacy of colonialism have masked the continuing dominance of global capitalism (Dirlik, 1994, 328-9, 343). Bush implies here that Foucault did not emphasize "the importance of history" and that he was motivated by "theoretical" not "political" concerns. These claims are not, however, sufficiently explained or defended.

⁹⁹ Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors [1988]," in *Reflections on Exile and other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2002), 312-313.

¹⁰⁰ Even in the original formulation of *Orientalism*, there was some hint that Said wanted to distance himself from Foucault in this regard: "Foucault believes that in general the individual text or author counts for very little; empirically, in the case of Orientalism (and perhaps nowhere else) I find this not to be so. Accordingly my analyses employ close textual readings whose goal is to reveal the dialectic between individual text or writer and the complex collective formation to which his work is a contribution." Said, *Orientalism*, 23-24.

¹⁰¹ Said, "Afterword," 348. Elsewhere, he writes, "Imperialism, the control of overseas territories and peoples, develops in a continuum with variously envisaged histories, current practices and policies, and with

We might question Said's claim that his position has substantially shifted due to changes in the world (rather than in relation to academic criticism). Whatever the reasoning behind his shift—from largely praising Foucault and his notion of discourse to an increasingly pointed critique—it is clear that by the mid-1980s, Said began to see Foucault as part of the problem. In a series of essays from the early to mid 1980s,¹⁰² Said is increasingly critical, if not hostile. In these works, he accuses Foucault of being held in the grip of a “profoundly pessimistic view,” one that sees modern society as reducible to

an unremitting and unstoppable expansion of power favoring the administrators, managers, and technocrats... Power, [Foucault] writes in his last phase, is everywhere. It is overcoming, co-opting, infinitely detailed, and ineluctable in the growth of its domination.¹⁰³

In a later essay, he is even more unequivocal. In this work what is remarkable is not only that Said distances himself from Foucault but, moreover, from the notion of “discourse” which had been so central to his analysis in *Orientalism*:

what Foucault called *discourse*... takes on and acquires the appearance of a social authority so complete as to legislate the practice of saying what there is to say, exactly and fully. What is excluded is unthinkable, in the first place, illegal and unacceptable in the second... Foucault’s determinism is partially the result of a kind of political hopelessness which he renders in that extraordinarily heightened style of his as the sadism of an always victorious logic... For Foucault then the banishment of silence and with it, the sovereignty of statement, amount only to a discipline that is enforced continuously, interminably, monotonously. What puzzles me is not only how someone as remarkably brilliant as Foucault could have arrived at so impoverished and masochistically informed a vision of sound and silence, but also how so many readers in Europe and the United States have routinely accepted it as anything more than an intensely private, deeply eccentric, and insular version of history.¹⁰⁴

Thus, in subsequent work, Said takes upon the task of thinking about and representing not only the formation and deployment of disciplinary power via discourse, but also the forms of resistance and counter-representation to this, reminding us as he does in *Culture and Imperialism* that

differently plotted cultural trajectories. Yet *there is by now* a sizable literature in the Third World addressing an impassioned theoretical and practical argument to Western specialists in area studies, as well as to anthropologists and historians. The address is a part of the revisionist postcolonial effort to reclaim traditions, histories, and cultures from imperialism, and it is also a way of entering the various world discourses on an equal footing.” Edward Said, “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors [1988],” in *Reflections on Exile and other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2002): 293-316, 309 (emphasis added).

¹⁰² See especially Edward Said, “Michel Foucault, 1927-1984 [1984],” “Orientalism Reconsidered [1985]” and “Foucault and the Imagination of Power [1986]” all in *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 2002).

¹⁰³ Edward Said, “Foucault and the Imagination of Power [1986],” 240-241.

¹⁰⁴ Edward Said, “From Silence to Sound and Back Again: Music, Literature and History [1997],” in *Reflections on Exile and other Essays*, 522-523.

Never was it the case that the imperial encounter pitted an active Western intruder against a supine or inert non-Western native; there was *always* some form of active resistance and, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the resistance finally won out.¹⁰⁵

Perhaps symbolic of this is the fact that the last two chapters of *Culture and Imperialism* are devoted to "Resistance and Opposition" and "Freedom from Domination in the Future."

It is important to point out, however, that Said's subsequent reformulation continues to take as its point of departure a use of Foucault's work centred around the concept of "discourse" understood in terms of a linguistic and textual structure of representation. Said's periodization of Foucault's work is also quite telling. Note (above) that Said understands Foucault's "pessimistic" position on power to be derived from his "last phase."¹⁰⁶ He repeatedly cites *Surveiller et punir* (1975) and *La volonté de savoir* (1976) as evidence of this (though rarely quoting passages, most often merely citing the text as a whole), and remains consistent in his appraisal of the 1970 lecture *L'Ordre du discours* as Foucault's "pivotal work."¹⁰⁷ In those rare instances when work from after 1976 is mentioned, it is seen as an *extension* of the worst aspects of earlier phases (rather than a critique or reversal), and little or no elaboration is given.¹⁰⁸

The irony of this position is that the "interactionist-resistance" model of imperial governance presented in *Culture and Imperialism* is actually much *closer* to Foucault's own final position than the earlier formulation, centered as it was upon discourse *qua* system of textual representation.¹⁰⁹ That Said takes himself to be working *against* Foucault when he begins to

¹⁰⁵ Edward Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (NY: Vintage, 1993), xii.

¹⁰⁶ Said, "Foucault and the Imagination of Power," 240-241.

¹⁰⁷ Edward Said, "Michel Foucault, 1927-1984 [1984]" in *Reflections on Exile*: 193.

¹⁰⁸ For instance, in a later essay, in reference to the last two volumes of *The History of Sexuality*, Said has only this to say: "What caused this particular and overdetermined shift from the political to the personal, was, among other things, the effect of some disenchantment with the public sphere, more particularly perhaps because he felt that there was little he could do to affect it. Perhaps also his fame had allowed a considerable relaxation in the formidable, and the formidably public, regimen of erudition, production, and performance he had imposed on himself." (Said, "Michel Foucault, 1927-1984," 194).

¹⁰⁹ For instance, in *Culture and Imperialism*, Said proposes to read the "cultural archive" of the West "not univocally but *contrapuntally*, with a simultaneous awareness both of the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts. In the counterpoint of Western classical music, various themes play off one another, with only a provisional privilege being given to any particular one; yet in the resulting polyphony there is a concert and order, an organized interplay that derives from the themes, not from a rigorous melodic or formal principle outside the work. In the same way, I believe, we can read and interpret English novels, for example... It should be evident that no one overarching theoretical principle governs the whole imperialist ensemble, and it should be just as evident that the principle of domination and resistance based on the division between the West and the rest of the world... runs like a fissure throughout." (Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, 59-60) This, I submit, maps very nicely onto the analysis Foucault first notes, in a preliminary way, in *Discipline and Punish*, in which he argues that power relations are not "univocal," but rather "define innumerable points of confrontation, focuses of instability, each of which has its own risks of conflict, of struggles, and of an at least temporary inversion of the power relations. The overthrow of these "micro-powers" does not, then obey

study practices of resistance within and against prevailing structures of governance is testimony not only to how insufficiently theorized the “ethical turn” in Foucault’s late writings is in relation to postcolonial theory, but also to the hegemony of the original formulation of “Colonial Discourse Analysis.”

Robert Young and the return to Foucault

I will consider now one final intervention into these debates: that of Robert Young, as formulated in this 1990 book *White Mythologies*¹¹⁰ and then again in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* from 2001. Similar to the argument I am advancing here, Young points out that

many of the problems that have generated such intense critical activity around Said’s text result directly from the way that Said formulates the idea of a discourse in *Orientalism*. Despite becoming a fundamental concept deployed in postcolonial theory, colonial discourse has never been fully theorized, or indeed historicized, and in particular it has not been substantively theorized in relation to the work of the theorist to whom it is conventionally affiliated, via Said: Michel Foucault.¹¹¹

Young points out that there are two main solutions to this purported problem. The first is to take up Said’s use of the notion of discourse, critique and modify it, thus bringing us closer to a more cogent formulation. This appears to be the path taken by almost all of Said major interlocutors (Bhabha, Ahmad, Spivak, and Said himself in his later writings). Alternatively, Young proposes “to return to Foucault, to see whether some of the problems arise from Said’s use of Foucault, and whether Foucault’s own account of discourse can be reworked less problematically.”¹¹² This “return to Foucault” was hinted at in Young’s early publications¹¹³ but was significantly refined and reformulated in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*. Young suggests that most of the problems associated with Said’s early use of discourse (the four critiques discussed above) can be corrected by going back to Foucault’s original work. In this manner, Young seeks to show that Foucault himself would not subscribe to Said’s notion of discourse, at least as articulated in *Orientalism*, and thus, most of the subsequent debate and reformulations were, at best, unnecessary. He writes,

the law of all or nothing; it is not acquired once and for all by a new control of the apparatuses nor by a new functioning or a destruction of the institutions; on the other hand, none of its localized episodes may be inscribed in history except by the effects that it induces on the entire network in which it is caught up.” (Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 27) It even more closely matches the “interactionist” model of power given by Foucault in “The subject and power” and it is precisely the opening up to this question that lead Foucault to think in terms of ethics. More on this below.

¹¹⁰ Robert Young, *White Mythologies*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2004) [First ed. 1990].

¹¹¹ Robert Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 385.

¹¹² Ibid., 385.

¹¹³ Young notes Said’s indebtedness to Foucault and that the former’s use of the latter is problematic, but does not attempt to correct this through direct reference to Foucault’s own work. See, for example, Young, *White Mythologies*, 166.

Although Said here suggests that Foucault's *The Archaeology of Knowledge* and *Discipline and Punish* are the source of his own concept of discourse, the account he develops is only loosely affiliated to Foucault's theory of discourse as most fully developed in *Archaeology* (Foucault 1972). Many of the problems that have been subsequently identified in the notion of a colonial discourse derived from Said's work, in particular what is widely regarded as too determining and univocal a notion of discourse, too restrictive and homogenizing, would not be relevant to a theory of colonial discourse more directly from Foucault's *Archaeology*.¹¹⁴

Young concludes from all this not only that Foucault's original formulation of discourse does not conform to Said's use of the term in important ways but, more significantly, that Foucault's "idea of discourse is almost the very opposite to Said's as elaborated in *Orientalism*."¹¹⁵ While recognizing that Young has returned to Foucault in a unique manner, one which is much more careful with the primary texts and aspires to a more faithful reconstruction of what Foucault actually said,¹¹⁶ nevertheless, it certainly cannot be said that he is the first person to notice that what Said meant by "discourse" is decidedly different than what Foucault meant and that some of the problems associated with "Colonial Discourse Analysis" might be corrected by returning to the source so to speak. As I have already noted above, Homi Bhabha, as early as 1983 suggested that Said failed to take into account some of Foucault's revisions on the notion of discourse,¹¹⁷ and even a commentator as unsympathetic to supposedly "postmodern" approaches as Aijaz Ahmad could, in his critique of Said, refer to *Orientalism* as "radically un-Foucaultian" and "specifically anti-Foucaultian," to its detriment.¹¹⁸

Conclusion to Part II: Postcolonial Iterations of Foucault

To this point, I have attempted an admittedly selective and non-comprehensive survey of the deployment and circulation of Foucault in postcolonial theory, drawing particularly from Said (both early and later works), Bhabha, Ahmad, Spivak and Young. While I have commented along the way on specific issues arising in each of these thinkers' interpretations of Foucault, I have primarily been interested in mapping the contours of the debate, the space of problematization. Seen from this vantage point, a generalizable pattern is noticeable: Whether one is largely "for" Foucault or primarily "against" him, the epicenter of theoretical and political concern remains the notion of "discourse," questions of epistemology and representation.

On the one side, defenders of Foucault (such as early work by Said and later work by Young), deploy him in the name of "discourse," understood as the horizontal integration of a system of representation across a broad set of disciplines (literature, philosophy, social sciences, art, etc.), that contribute to the formation of colonialism and imperialism not merely as a

¹¹⁴ Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*, 386.

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 405.

¹¹⁶ In order to remain on track with my argument, I can only mention in passing that, in my estimation at least, Young's formulation of discourse is much closer to Foucault's than the one first presented by Said.

¹¹⁷ Bhabha, "Difference," 201.

¹¹⁸ Aijaz Ahmad, "Orientalism and After," 166. James Clifford, from a different perspective and to different ends, echoes this when he writes that, at times, "Said could not be farther from Foucault's austere pages," (Clifford, *The Predicament of Culture*, 270).

physical invasion and occupation of land, nor a formal system of governance, but as a colonization of the imagination, of forms of possible knowledge, of the representation of other times and places.

On the other hand, critics of these notions of discourse and *episteme* that organize the above analysis point to problems, tensions, contradictions or lacunae in the understanding of representation, ideology, power, etc., as in Ahmad, Spivak and later work by Said. In all cases, however, the issue of postcolonialism tends to hinge upon representation and knowledge production with "Foucault" serving a particular position within this space of questions or form of problematization. In other words, what critics and defenders alike share is the notion that Foucault serves as a crucial point of conflict within the form of problematization of post-colonialism, understood as a problem of knowledge. Also of note is that the primary texts for all these thinkers are *The Order of Things*, *The Archeology of Knowledge*, *The Discourse on Language* and the interview "Intellectuals and Power." The most recent of these texts is the last, originally formulated in 1972.

What I think we can see here is the formation of Foucault as a discourse (at least in Said's sense of the term). I am interested in demonstrating how "Foucault" has become a name that stands in for and evokes a position within a general field of questions and problems. "Foucault" comes to serve as a point of reference within the field of postcolonial studies that one can variously be for or against. This position is associated with discourse, the ubiquitous circulation of power, the "production" of knowledge, the total scripting of subjects (and, paradoxically, the exhalation of their total emancipation), etc. In each of the cases discussed above the theoretical insufficiency of "discourse" as a frame of analysis is the ground of questions from which subsequent debates in postcolonial theory emerged. While various commentators have positioned themselves as either for or against Said's early formulation—including Said himself—they have almost without exception taken his to be an accurate representation of "discourse" as a concept derived from Foucault. In this way, *Foucault himself has become a discourse*—at least in Said's sense of the term: a tradition of representation held together by the linguistic iterations within a specified domain of study rather than any truth-value in relation to an external referent. Once Said set in place the underlying premise that postcolonialism is, as Bhabha phrases it, an interrogation of the "mode of representation of otherness," many other thinkers come to inhabit the field marked by such a position. In many cases, these thinkers do not refer to almost any texts in their declarations of what "Foucault" stands for, or they freely move between speaking of "Foucault," "Foucaultian analysis" and "Colonial Discourse Analysis." When they do return to Foucault himself (as, say, with Robert Young) the Foucault who matters is captured almost entirely by texts from the late 1960s and early 1970s. My worry in this is not, however, that this "postcolonial Foucault discourse" is an inaccurate representation of what Foucault actually said (though it may also be that), but mainly that it has become a field of thought with no external referent and thus many of the problems within are pseudo-problems, created because all positions take as their point of departure a similar set of background presuppositions. In almost all cases—Said, Bhabha, Ahmad, Spivak, Young—the three basic underlying presuppositions are held in place, namely, that (a) Foucault is central to "postcolonial studies," (b) the centrality of his work is attributable to his notion of discourse

and, (c) that discourse is best understood as a system of textual representation synchronically organized across a series of texts. This leads to all kinds of debates, criticisms and reversals of course. One might argue that Foucault should *not* be central to postcolonial studies (*pace* Ahmad or Spivak at times). One might hold that “discourse” as originally formulated is too undifferentiated a concept (*pace* Bhabha). One might even hold that “discourse” must also include features outside of mere textual representation (*pace* Young).¹¹⁹ While the answers vary and conflict with each other depending on the thinker here, the *ground of questions* remains substantially the same.¹²⁰

Another way of putting the issue is to ask: if someone were to only read work from this wide variety of postcolonial theorists, work spanning nearly 25 years, and then were to try and answer the question “Who is Michel Foucault?” what kind of reply would they be likely to give? I suggest that working out from within the literature of postcolonial theory, one could only come to the conclusion that Michel Foucault was a thinker almost entirely preoccupied with questions of representation, texts and “discourse” who stopped writing sometime in the early to mid 1970s. In short, this “Foucault” might be reduced to a “textual attitude” or an “epistemological position”¹²¹ and that, since postcolonial studies is mostly about getting clear of such questions, Foucault matters to this field.

PART III: Foucault beyond Discourse: Governmentality and Ethics

By way of concluding, it is important to note two important caveats to the portrait I have been painting above. In the sketch provided, it will be noted that I have focused on the use and circulation of Foucault within postcolonial *theory* primarily, even in the occasional case that these theorists use Foucault as a means of elucidating aspects of postcolonial *politics* in the sense in which I am using those terms. In other words, I have not focused attention on those authors who have taken Foucault seriously in terms of his historical studies of race, imperialism, biopolitics, etc. Part of my justification for this lies in precisely the argument given above: that Foucault has been cited within postcolonial studies almost exclusively as a resource for theory—as a contributor of key methodological tools mainly—but not as a source of substantive insights into the historical formation of imperialism. However, it is not that there has been *no* use of Foucault in this second sense. We must also acknowledge that from the late 1990s to the present a new “Foucault” has emerged in postcolonial studies, taking the 1995 publication of *Race and The Colonial Order of Things* by Ann Laura Stoler as a watershed.¹²² In

¹¹⁹ Robert Young, as I have tried to demonstrate, is almost unique in terms of his *solution* to the problem, insofar as he advocates a “return” to Foucault’s original texts, suggesting most strongly that Said misread Foucault. Nevertheless, while Young’s answer is unique, the question to which it is addressed—namely the theoretical sufficiency (or lackthereof) of the notion of “discourse”—remains the same.

¹²⁰ One further example of this: In a recent introductory text to the field, Jane Hiddleston includes a chapter entitled “Foucault and Said: Colonial Discourse and Orientalism,” in which she collapses the critical potential of Foucault’s work for the study of postcolonialism into the concept of “discourse,” and specifically Said’s use of it. See Jane Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2009), Chapter 4.

¹²¹ Ahmad, *In Theory*, 3.

¹²² Stoler’s work begins with a similar analysis to that given above. She notes that although “no single analytic framework has saturated the field of colonial studies so completely over the last decade as that of

this intervention, Stoler certainly disrupts the “discourse of Foucault” as discussed above and spurs on a new field of studies around questions of colonial governmentality.¹²³

In this other body of work, what might be called the “colonial governmentality school,” note that we have an almost entirely “new” Foucault. Here the central questions are about the historical periodization of the emergence of modern racism, its connection to questions of sexuality, biopolitics and modern state formation. While postcolonial theorists of the first group focused almost exclusively on texts such as *The Order of Things* and *The Archeology of Knowledge*, work in the colonial governmentality school has seen Foucault’s contributions as exemplified by *Discipline and Punish*, *The History of Sexuality, vol. I* and, to a much lesser extent, lectures at the Collège de France from the mid 1970s (especially those collected and published as *Society must be defended*¹²⁴). My focus (above) on postcolonial theory in the narrow sense is nevertheless justified, I think, by the fact that this second body of work comes much later (near twenty years after *Orientalism*), is working against the prevailing understanding of Foucault already established by the Said-discourse frame of reference,¹²⁵ and has remained relatively isolated from the first.¹²⁶ Furthermore, even incorporating the colonial governmentality litera-

Foucault,” nevertheless these readings, for the most part, have been of a particular kind: by and large, applying the *general principles* of a Foucauldian frame to specific ethnographic time and place, drawing on the conceptual apparatus more than engaging the historical content of his analysis. She then goes on to interrogate Foucault’s account of the history of sexuality in relation to his understanding of the rise of modern racism and colonialism, demonstrating the inadequacy of the connections made between the two by Foucault. (Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham & London: Duke UP, 1995), 1 and 2) Stoler does not mention the postcolonial theorists I have discussed above, instead citing the Subaltern Studies collective, particularly work by Partha Chatterjee and David Arnold, as examples of work whose engagement with Foucault is “conceptual, not historical.” (Stoler, *Race and The Eduction of Desire*, 2, ft.4).

¹²³ Notwithstanding Stoler’s assessment (above, ft. 120), Partha Chatterjee’s work is an excellent example of longstanding (critical) engagement with Foucault on questions of “discourse-representation” and governmentality. See, Partha Chatterjee, “More on Modes of Power and the Peasantry,” in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds.) (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1988); *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1993) and; *The Politics of the Governed* (NY: Columbia UP, 2004).

¹²⁴ Michel Foucault, “*Society must be defended*” (NY: Picador, 1997). Stoler also makes (considerably less) use of the lectures from 1974-75, *Abnormal* (NY: Picador, 1999), 1977-78, *Security, Territory, Population* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2007) and 1978-79, *The Birth of Biopolitics* (NY: Palgrave MacMillan, 2008). More recently, Ladelle McWhorter has presented a modified Foucauldian genealogy that incorporates the influence of colonial Anglo-America on the development of “race discourse” and modern state racism in ways that Foucault himself did not. See McWhorter, *Racism and Sexual Oppression in Anglo-America: A Genealogy* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana UP, 2009).

¹²⁵ Amongst the postcolonial “theorists,” for instance, the notion that Foucault had nothing much to say about colonial governmentality, racism, or liberal (neo)imperialism is still prevalent. As an example, Leela Gandhi’s claim that “It is only in an early essay, “George Canguilhem: philosopher of error,” that Foucault explicitly equates European knowledges and the mirage of Western rationality with the “economic domination and political hegemony” of colonialism” is just factually incorrect. (Ghandi, *Postcolonial Theory*, 26) The Foucault quote can be found in his “Introduction” to George Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (NY: Zone Books, 1997), 7-23, at p. 12.

¹²⁶ Other more recent texts that take up Foucault in relation to substantive issues of colonialism and imperialism, albeit in very different and conflicting ways, include Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and*

ture would not invalidate my general claim regarding the “empty space” of *ethics* in post-colonial studies.

Even incorporating this caveat then, I think we are still justified in characterizing the use and interpretation of Foucault within postcolonial studies by its overwhelming preoccupation with: (1) On the one hand, what Foucault called the “modes of objectification” of the subject in scientific knowledge—in this case colonial discourse—and a corresponding project to uncover and recover those forms of “subjugated knowledge”¹²⁷ displaced by the prevailing modes of thinking and acting. This is what I am referring to here as postcolonial *theory*. And, on the other hand, (2) what Foucault called “governmentality”: The critique of formations of power understood as a unitary system and an analysis of power as a domain of strategic relations between individuals and groups, relations whose strategies were to govern the conduct of these individuals. This is what I am referring to here as postcolonial *politics*. A certain lacuna remains with respect to what Foucault referred to as “ethics.”

Even this claim must, however, be carefully qualified. The second caveat to my general picture is all the small, marginal (but perhaps growing) use of Foucault specifically in terms of postcolonial ethics that does exist. I will cite two instances of this.¹²⁸ In his 1999 work, *Refashioning Futures*, Anthropologist David Scott expresses similar dissatisfaction with the prevailing space of questioning in postcolonial studies, preoccupied as it is with epistemological claims. He situates himself not “against” the use of “poststructuralist” thinkers such as Foucault, but rather argues that these thinkers need to be used to illuminate “ethical and political—as opposed to *only* cultural and epistemological (that is to say, *rationality*)—questions.”¹²⁹

In asking about the possible use of Foucault with respect to questions of ethics—the kind of ethical self-fashioning that might disclose a new horizon of thinking and acting—and by suggesting that *this* might be the primary aim of “postcolonialism” today, Scott is breaking important ground. As he phrases,

Because for Foucault power is—most importantly anyway—*productive* rather than repressive (that is to say, because power produces a *reorganization* of subjectivity and a

Imperial Power (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Janet Afary and Kevin B. Anderson, *Foucault and the Iranian Revolution* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), and; Elizabeth Povinelli, *The Empire of Love* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006).

¹²⁷ This is Foucault’s term, referring to “knowledges that have been disqualified as inadequate to their task or insufficiently elaborated: naïve knowledges, located down on the hierarchy, beneath the required level of cognition or scientificity.” (Michel Foucault, “Two lectures,” in *Power/Knowledge* (NY: Pantheon, 1980), 82) This is elaborated upon in “*Society must be defended*,” especially lecture 1, January 7, 1976, 1-21.

¹²⁸ Another interesting and important study that might be characterized as contributing to “postcolonial ethics” in this broad sense is Leela Gandhi’s *Affective Communities* (Durham & London: Duke, 2006). This work focuses on the “politics of friendship” in the context of anti-colonial struggle, specifically how affective bonds between individuals working within disparate communities (for instance, early “homosexual rights” activists in Europe and Indian anti-colonial movement) helped to build capacities for undermining imperial power. I leave a more detailed discussion of this aside as Gandhi draws upon Foucault in framing this study only marginally.

¹²⁹ Scott, *Refashioning Futures*, 134.

reorganization of the games of truth rather than a repression of essential ones), a different and more useful set of questions animates his concern: what is the relation between the colonized/postcolonized subject and the games of truth into which s/he is inserted, through which s/he has been produced as a colonized/postcolonized subject? What are the apparatuses, disciplines, and institutions through which colonial/postcolonial subjectification has been enacted? Moreover (and I shall return to this whole set of questions), *what are the practices of self-formation in which the colonized/postcolonized subject is engaged? How do these practices operate in relation to the hegemonic practices of colonial/postcolonial power?*¹³⁰

Scott then moves on to consider the *Ruud Bwai* (or *ruudi* [rudie]) culture in Jamaica through the lens of Foucaultian ethics, i.e., as a creative project of (self-)transformation initiated through the modification of one's *mode of living* which brings about new forms of sociality—"as aspects of a *practice of self-cultivation*: the cultivation of a certain mode of being that I shall call '*ruud bwai* self-fashioning'."¹³¹

Another example of this work is Saba Mahmood's recent, highly commendable work, *The Politics of Piety*. Here Mahmood reads the women's piety movement in Cairo mosques in terms of daily ethical practices that do not conform to an account of agency that locate its actualization only

in terms of subversion or resignification of social norms... [or] locate agency within those operations that resist the dominating and subjectivating modes of power. In other words... [where] agency is conceptualized on the binary model of subordination and subversion.¹³²

Against this liberation model of politics, Mahmood finds in Foucault's late work a vocabulary that, "instead of limiting agency to those acts that disrupt existing power relations," also

encourages us to think of agency: (a) in terms of the capacities and skills required to undertake particular kinds of moral actions; and (b) as ineluctably bound up with the historically and culturally specific disciplines through which a subject is formed.¹³³

The Foucaultian language of ethics permits us to rethink, along with Mahmood, what a "post-colonial" project might look like: a study of those techniques and practices by which subjects aim not to discover their "true," interior selves, but rather to hone rational and emotional capacities so as to bring oneself into alignment with the model of the pious self (which one is *not yet* and perhaps never fully will be) and, in so doing, disclose a new ethical horizon or space of questioning (a "world"). This would remain a *postcolonial* ethics, moreover, insofar as these practices of the care of the self are situated in the larger context of systems of colonial governance.

Whether one agrees with the particular accounts given either by Scott or Mahmood in these two texts, whether they are correct to identify the *Ruud Bwai* or the Egyptian piety movement as projects of *ethical* (self-)transformation is not my concern, nor within my exper-

¹³⁰ Ibid., 206 (emphasis added).

¹³¹ Ibid., 212 and 208-215.

¹³² Saba Mahmood, *The Politics of Piety* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2005), 14.

¹³³ Ibid., 29.

tise to comment on. What I *am* interested in, however, is in how they have used Foucault to shift the spacing of questioning (what Scott calls the “problem-space”) away from questions of representation and identity (on the one hand), or governmentality and colonial rationalities (on the other) towards issues of ethics, spirituality and disclosive transformation. It is revealing to me that, for these two thinkers at least, the most interesting and useful features of Foucault are not to be found in his earliest archaeological works, nor in his middle genealogies, but rather in his late *ethics*—this, despite the fact that in his late works Foucault is not speaking directly to issues of colonialism or imperialism at all. What this suggests to me is not that the previous fields of questioning (postcolonial politics¹³⁴ and postcolonial theory¹³⁵) were wrongheaded, but that they must be supplemented and perhaps even modified in light of a third vocabulary that is emerging: postcolonial *ethics*.

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¹³⁴ Asking questions such as: “Did Foucault contribute interesting and important work to the study of racism, colonial governance, imperialism?”; “Was Foucault too Eurocentric in his outlook?”; or “What was Foucault’s political stance vis-à-vis the wars of liberation in French Africa?”

¹³⁵ This, asking questions such as: “What is Foucault’s understanding of “discourse?”; “Does it make sufficient room for individual agency?”; “What is his stance on the possibility of “true” representation?”