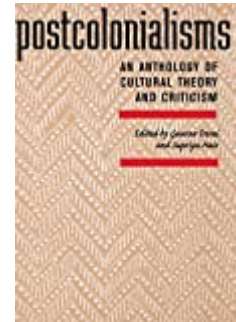




Gaurav Desai, Supriya Nair, eds. *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005. xii + 656 pp. No price listed (paper), ISBN 978-0-8135-3552-4.



Reviewed by Sonja Altnöder (University of Konstanz, Germany)

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What is New in the State of Postcolonialism(s)?

During the past decades, numerous studies, introductory surveys and edited collections have been published in the field of postcolonial studies and so it is to an already long list that Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair have added yet another new item: *Postcolonialisms*. An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism comprises 37 essays, both canonical and contemporary, which illustrate key themes in postcolonial studies. Considering the sheer abundance of works on the subject of postcolonialism, however, the first question any reviewer may feel inclined to ask him- or herself will probably be: What is new in this anthology and how does it differ from already existing works in this vast academic field? Preliminary answers may be discovered in the editors' detailed and easy-to-read introduction, which not only demarcates their own position within the area of postcolonial studies, but also lucidly summarizes the main goals envisaged in their collection of essays. As already suggested by the title, *Postcolonialisms* covers a plurality of global contexts decisively influenced by the experience of colonialism(s) and their aftermath; the subtitle underscores the variety of disciplinary perspectives represented in the anthology. So the selected texts simultaneously highlight similarities and overlaps as well as striking

particularities and differences both within the geographical area of postcolonialisms and the wide range of theoretical approaches emerging in the academic study thereof. Thus engaging in critical conversation with one another, these voices ultimately succeed in composing a controversial narrative of the diversely constituted postcolonial experience. As the anthology is primarily intended to be used in university classrooms of the U.S. academy, this book may thus successfully expose students to the numerous conflicting points of view in a field as diversely populated as postcolonial studies and, in consequence, stimulate vital classroom discussions. With regard to the complexities involved in the juxtaposition of diverse contexts and, at times, conflicting stances, the editors facilitate the students' perusal of the anthology by first delineating the field of postcolonialism in their introduction. To begin with, they provide a description of the early postcolonial phase (characterized, here, by a range of issues including the colonized people's struggle for independence, the issue of language and local cultures, as well as the problem of marginalization) and conclude with the field's contemporary institutional rise within the Western academia, as is taking place mainly in the fields of cultural studies and literary theory. Moreover, the edi-

tors illustrate two different—though, in the reviewer’s mind, related—projects of postcolonial studies: first, the project of rereading canonical texts, and second, the project of exploring the literary and cultural production of the colonized Other. It is important to note here that these projects are not novel inventions on the part of the editors but that both endeavors have been well under way for some time; accordingly, Gaurav Desai and Supriya Nair provide a useful overview of bibliographic references for further reading. In fact, as their anthology *Postcolonialisms* is designed to supplement both projects, it is the juxtaposition of diverse texts and voices emerging in the field of postcolonial studies that reveals some interesting and significant overlaps between these undertakings. Strikingly—and much to the reviewer’s surprise—though, the anthology opens with a number of essays dating from as early as the historical phase of imperialism and early colonization, which seem misplaced in an anthology titled *Postcolonialisms*. Before returning to this criticism in my conclusion, I will first examine the collection’s overall structure and then the texts’ contribution to the two postcolonial projects identified by the editors. Structurally, the anthology is subdivided into nine thematic sections: 1) “Ideologies of Imperialism”; 2) “The Critique of Colonial Discourse”; 3) “The Politics of Language and Literary Studies”; 4) “Nationalisms and Nativisms”; 5) “Hybrid Identities”; 6) “Gender and Sexualities”; 7) “Reading the Subaltern”; 8) “Comparative (Post)colonialisms”; and 9) “Globalization and Postcoloniality.” Each of these sections is preceded by a detailed and easily comprehensible introduction, setting the backdrop against which the following texts are to be read by locating the overall theme under discussion in the broader field of postcolonial studies and within the general framework of the anthology itself. Furthermore, perceptive summaries of the texts included in each of these sections offer incentives for critical and comparative study of these essays on two intertwined levels: not only do these introductions promote a critical conversation between the texts themselves by highlighting differences and similarities of the arguments proposed, but they also attempt to engage the (student) reader in dialogue with the textual material. Moreover, these introductory surveys uncover considerable overlaps between the key themes under discussion and thus highlight one more asset of the anthology in that its thematic sections cannot be rigidly divided. Rather, the texts to speak across the boundaries of sectional divisions and hence suggest an open reading of the anthology. Accordingly, the editors even provide a list of alternative orderings of the selected texts at the end of *Postcolonialisms* which may prove particularly helpful in a classroom situation, since they may facilitate the anthology’s use in a variety of classes cov-

ering any of the naturally diverse topics within the field of postcolonial studies. Bearing these productive structural ambiguities in mind, the subsequent reading will nonetheless focus on the primary ordering suggested by the editors and will deal with the question as to how the texts mirror (or engage in) the postcolonial projects of rereading canonical texts and of exploring the production of the colonized Other. As has previously been stated, the first section contains first and foremost authentic texts from the imperial and the colonial period, which cover global contexts as diverse as the Americas, Africa, and India. Notwithstanding the reviewer’s initial surprise to find these texts in an anthology titled *Postcolonialisms*, these texts illustrate the language and argumentation of the colonizers and might thus be considered a valuable contribution to the project of rereading early and authentic texts. Although it might further be argued that the inclusion of such early texts provides a worthwhile background for the following contemporary texts, on a more critical note, this reiteration of imperial and colonial ideologies seems out of place—especially with regard to the editors’ dismissal of the “once-popular bracketing gesture” (p. 2) of postcolonialism in favor of the invocation of an explicitly “postcolonial” discourse. The critique of colonial discourse provided in section 2 also highlights the anthology’s historical range and, moreover, its theoretical scope: opening this section, once more, with a text depicting the aim of global Christianization envisaged by Europe’s major colonizing powers, the editors then add two canonical texts by Aimé Césaire and Edward Said dealing with the construction of the colonized Other and further juxtapose these already diverse voices and approaches, notably, with two inside perspectives on the lasting influence of the colonial experience in Cuba and New Zealand. Thus covering a significant range of global contexts and a variety of perspectives within a historical timeframe, this section not only contributes to both postcolonial projects, but draws attention to striking overlaps between them, thus engendering an interesting and controversial conversation between these diverse voices. Addressing political issues of language and literary studies, section 3 also engages in the endeavors of rereading both early (Thomas Babington Macaulay, Alexander Crummell) and canonical (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o) texts while simultaneously depicting the literary and cultural production of the colonized Other through the politics of language and literature (Carolyn Cooper). After all, the use of language (and consequently, the writing of literature) has been decisively influenced by the European languages introduced by the colonial powers; nonetheless, even these European languages have gradually come to be means to explore and redefine the literary and cultural production of the colonized Other. Following this line of

argument, section 4 then explores the development of nationalisms and “nativisms” in the encounter with the European colonizers (as has been persuasively illustrated by Leopold Senghor and Frantz Fanon and, more recently, by Paul Gilroy) and reveals considerable overlaps and intersections both with the thematic outline and the texts of section 3. This is best illustrated in the only non-canonical text in section 4, “The African Novel and its Critics (1950?–1975),” in which Nigerian scholars Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa Jemie and Ihechukwu Madubuike use literary criticism to portray their version of an African consciousness and identity. The following sections of the anthology concentrate on the postcolonial project of investigating the literary and cultural production of the colonized Other along the lines of the notions of “Hybrid Identities” (5), “Gender and Sexuality” (6), and the “Subaltern” (7), all of which represent pertinent topics developed mainly in the 1980s and 1990s that continue to significantly influence postcolonial studies to this very day. Section 5 highlights not only the colonized subjects’ innovative ways of coping in an increasingly, yet fundamentally, contingent world as depicted in canonical texts by renowned authors in the field of postcolonialism (represented here by Homi Bhabha), but also in those other, less well-known essays included in this section. At this point, it may be interesting to draw attention to newly emergent concepts of postcoloniality which conceive of Great Britain, for instance, as a postcolonial country and thus widen the notion of “hybridity” so as to include contemporary changes within the formerly colonizing countries themselves. Section 6 emphasizes the heterogeneity of gender categories—focusing chiefly on the category of the colonized woman—by exploring their (re)production at the interface of the paradigms gender, race, class and religion, and sexuality in diverse postcolonial contexts. Encompassing such pertinent topics as “The Discourse of the Veil” (Leila Ahmed), the impact of colonialism on the establishment of gender categories within otherwise un-gendered societies (Oyá rÁ nkÁ Oy?wÁ mÁ) and women’s writing (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak), this section covers a wide range of contemporary issues in the field of gender studies. Indeed, three of the seven texts by women authors included in the anthology under review—as scarce as they are!—appear in this particular section, thus rendering the compilation’s general structure vulnerable to the critique of establishing a “woman’s corner” in which gendered voices may be heard. However, this criticism is immediately countered by the inclusion of one male voice writing about homophobia in contemporary postcolonial culture (Timothy Chin) and by a text speaking eloquently across sectional divides—Rey Chow’s study of the position of women’s studies within the broader discourse of Chinese studies. Never-

theless, it is only in overlaps with other sections, for instance at the interface of sections 5 and 6, that vital overlaps in the projects of racializing and gendering the colonial Others may be discovered. Nonetheless, it is this kind of critical conversation that may reveal the increasing instability of the category of the Other within the postcolonial world and I would expect that an observation as important as this would be subjected to further and more rigorous scrutiny in an anthology in the field of postcolonial studies. Section 7 at least highlights another aspect of the instability just outlined by introducing the Subaltern Studies group’s Marxist approach to theorizing the postcolonial Other. Underlining the people’s—rather than the elite’s—experience in the two postcolonial projects outlined by the editors, this approach seems applicable to a wide range of contexts, as is shown by the inclusion of Irish historiography; moreover, it covers a wide range of topics stretching from initial studies in historiography to current projects dealing not only with subaltern agency in Latin America and its impact on the U.S. academy, but also with the construction of white identity through the construction of the “primitive”—colonized—Other. Interestingly, in the following section on “Comparative (Post)colonialisms” (8), the texts invert the postcolonial project of constructing the colonized Other by focusing instead on the impact upon the colonizers. The section includes a legal document issued by the U.S. Congress which illustrates U.S. imperial and colonial involvement in Hawai’i, thus moving from the previous portrayal of North America as a colonized country to its contemporary status as a dominant power on the global stage. Further extending this approach not only to so-called settler colonies like Australia (Pal Ahluwalia) but even to the post-Soviet situation (David Chioni Moore), this section resumes the project undertaken in conceptualizing Ireland as a postcolonial society in the preceding section and further leads on the following, final, section, “Globalization and Postcoloniality” (9). Here, postcoloniality is elevated to the position of a global phenomenon. The first of the texts included adopts a diasporic vantage point and accomplishes a rereading of the colonial experience: while “Africa” was “invented” by the colonizer, it is now to be reinvented by the African intellectual in the diaspora (Stuart Hall). Proceeding, further, to a critique of the current vagueness and potential contingency of the term “postcolonial”—as it may even be applied to an ever widening geographic scope as well as to such countries as Great Britain—this chapter not only includes a critique of global capitalism as one of the lasting and current hegemonic effects of colonialization and Western dominance (Arif Dirlik), but also a rereading of globalization against the backdrop of its significant (terminological) overlaps with postcolonial theory in their blurring of bi-

nary oppositions (Simon Gikandi). In the context of globalization and postcolonialism, Chow's dense and multilayered essay elaborates on the "precarious relation between 'minority discourse' and 'women'" (p. 591) in the field of Chinese studies and at the interface of Western imperialism and Chinese paternalism, thus emphasizing both the chasm between and the influence of the position of Third World intellectuals in the diaspora and the lived-material-reality in the "home" areas they study. In conclusion, the texts succeed in covering a broad geographical field of postcolonial studies spanning across various regions of the globe such as the Caribbean, India, Africa and Australia, even including Ireland and the former Soviet Union. Moreover, the contributors' voices also encompass a wide range of positions within the field of postcolonial studies as portrayed in the perspectives both of canonical texts and in newly emergent voices in the academia. It might have been useful here to find meaningful background information on the authors and their position within the academia or in the diaspora so as to facilitate the (student) readers' understanding of who is saying what and from which position. Even though the interdisciplinary compilation of texts and voices in cultural theory and criticism generates a vital conversation

between the lines of argument proposed not only within the sectional confines but also across their boundaries, I would like to point out, on a critical note, that this dialogue emerges most clearly between the colonial texts and authentic documents expressing the colonizers' (racist) stance and the postcolonial discourse of postcoloniality as the overcoming of colonial segregation and the obscuring of (persistent) boundary lines. Notwithstanding the editors' considerable effort and success at compiling a range of perspectives as broad as those included in *Postcolonialisms: An Anthology of Cultural Theory and Criticism*, the question remains why the editors decided to emphasize this kind of dialogue between past and present rather than to engage in a more productive—and equally controversial and diverse—postcolonial conversation as introduced in sections 3 and 4. This latter conversation emerges, albeit subtly, in those texts speaking across the sectional boundary lines (at the interface of sections 5 to 9). Besides the minor critical points noted in this review, this is my only major criticism of an otherwise helpful resource for studying and teaching contemporary (post)colonial studies.

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