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COLONIAL AND
POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE:
Cultural Critique or Academic Colonialism?*

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Commenting on Patricia Seed's well-informed and useful review essay (Seed 1991) within a limited number of pages requires selectivity. I will first offer a brief summary of my reading of the essay and then discuss specific issues that have been of concern to me in the past decade.

Seed's "Colonial and Postcolonial Discourse" raises two distinctive topics. The introduction and conclusion are devoted to placing colonial discourse into contemporary scholarship and tracing its debts, complications, and differences with poststructuralism, subaltern studies, new historicism, and feminist theory. In between, five books are discussed, three on Latin America and two on the Philippines. After discussing the five books in terms of current trends in history, anthropology, and literary criticism, Seed offers her overall conclusion:

What all these works do to varying degrees is to achieve one of the functions of a critique: to posit an idea about the humanities disciplines—history, literary criticism, cultural anthropology—as more than decorative knowledge, as knowledge critical of the relations of authority within a society. The aim of the critique in each of these disciplines is different—economic relations of authority, cultural relations of authority (the canon), conventional political relations of authority. But the basic target of critique remains the same—the relations of authority in colonial and postcolonial states—and it is thus an enterprise of cultural and political criticism being carried out in a resolutely postcolonial era. (P. 200)

Because the whole spectrum of contemporary trends mentioned by Seed (from poststructuralism to new historicism, from subaltern to colonial studies) takes a critical stance toward knowledge, the reader may wonder about the differences of colonial and postcolonial discourse from other forms of critical enterprises of authority and authoritative discourses. Seed's view is that while the "two fields" share an interest in colonial

*For insights incorporated in revising my original version of this comment, I am grateful to Fernando Coronil and the numerous student participants in "Beyond Occidentalism: Rethinking How the West Was Born," a seminar that Coronil and I cotaught at the University of Michigan in the fall of 1992. This essay is dedicated to the memory of Josephat Kubayanda.

discourse, the “new literary historicism is ultimately concerned with canonical literature, while colonial discourse writers seek to understand the dynamics of the colonial situation” (p. 199).

On the basis of this general summary, I would like to discuss several related concerns of my own in recent years (see Mignolo 1989a, 1989b, 1989c, 1992). The most compelling aspects of the review essay are those dealing with the notion of colonial and postcolonial discourse rather than the review of the five books in question. The first issue focuses on what kind of category “colonial (or postcolonial) discourse” is. Seed takes it to be a “field of study” when she compares it with the new literary historicism. Although it seems obvious to me that colonial discourse is a new or emerging field of study, new literary historicism is a new perspective (or method) rather than a field. Yet when Seed defines the colonial aspect, she seems to take it as both a perspective (comparable to new literary historicism) and a field of study: “Colonial discourse has therefore undertaken to redirect contemporary critical reflections on colonialism (and its aftermath) toward the language used by the conquerors, imperial administrators, travelers, and missionaries” (p. 183).

She further specifies that “whether the focus has been on the colonial or postcolonial situation, the central concern of these studies has been the linguistic screen through which all political language of colonialism, including reactions to it and liberation from it, needs to be read” (p. 183). Thus the method employed in analyzing colonial discourse seems to be similar to that used to approach any kind of discourse in any imaginable historical or social situation. We seem to be dealing with something like the “discursive turn” in various disciplines, fields of study, or even historical moments (such as poststructuralism).

My interest in delving into these distinctions focuses on a more fundamental question regarding the political implications of the scholarly decision to engage in research and teaching on colonial (or postcolonial) discourse. The issue I am trying to elucidate is addressed by Seed toward the end of her essay in discussing the questions of where these authors are writing, why, and about what. In doing so, Seed brings in the autobiographical dimension of the scholar vis-à-vis his or her academic pursuit:

Many anthropologists, historians, and literary critics writing of those who are lumped together as “Third World people” adopt a stance of advocacy for those they have been studying and working with. Hence they are reluctant to criticize post-independence forms of nationalism. . . . The early theoreticians of the colonial discourse field—Said, Spivak, and Bhabha—are themselves ambivalently located between the so-called First and Third Worlds: born and educated in places like Palestine and Bengal, they have nonetheless made their academic reputations in the West. They speak from the West but are not of it. Yet by virtue of reputation and lengthy residence in the West, they are no longer of the East. Hence their contribution to shaping the field has arisen within the same context of the internationalization that they are attempting to study. (P. 198)

The issue here is not whether one who is born in Holland should be a miller and one born in New York a stockbroker nor whether someone born in Holland or in New York has more authority when it comes to mills or the stock market but rather who is talking about what where and why. Certainly, most of the work discussed and cited by Seed has been published in the United States and addressed to an academic audience. There are at least two issues to be disentangled here. One is the political agenda of those of us (an empty category to be filled) born in North or South America, India, Iran, or Africa but writing and teaching *here* in the United States who are concerned with colonial discourse. The other issue is the agenda of those (an empty category to be filled) born or writing *there* in India, Iran, Africa, or South America who are struggling to resist modern colonization, including the academic one from *here*. I am aware that in the global village of a postmodern world, such distinctions may be viewed with suspicion. I believe nonetheless that they should be drawn not so much in terms of national identities but in relation to the locus of enunciation constructed by the speaker or writer. Once again, the basic question is who is writing about what where and why?

The critique of what today is grouped under the label of “colonial discourse” has a long tradition in Latin America, which can be traced back to the 1950s when the writings of German philosopher Martin Heidegger began to catch the attention of Latin American intellectuals. The most spectacular example to my mind is that of Mexican historian and philosopher Edmundo O’Gorman. His *La idea del descubrimiento de America* (1952) and *La invención de América* (1958, English translation 1961) represent the early dismantling of European colonial discourse. O’Gorman wrote much before the poststructuralist wave, although he had a similar foundation and perspective. His reading of one chapter of Heidegger’s *Being and Time* (1927) made him realize first that language is not the neutral tool of an honest desire to tell the truth, as nineteenth-century historiographers had assumed, but an instrumental tool for constructing history and inventing realities. Using these presuppositions, O’Gorman dismantled five hundred years of Western historiography—colonial and postcolonial discourse, as it were.

Another telling example is Uruguayan literary critic Angel Rama’s *La ciudad letrada* (1982). This magnificent little book offers a theory about the control, domination, and power exercised in the name of alphabetic writing. Poststructuralism no doubt reached Rama before he wrote the book, and the guidance of Michel Foucault is certainly visible and explicit. What Rama has analyzed is a complex, changing, and growing discursive formation in which power and oppositional discourses from the colonial period to the twentieth century constitute the two sides of the same coin. The power of the “lettered city” helps indirectly in understanding the silence inflicted by written language. One can even say that as far as

colonial (and postcolonial) discourse presupposed alphabetic writing, the corpus analyzed by Rama both as a discourse of power and an oppositional discourse obscured and suppressed oral traditions and nonalphabetic writing systems, which were forcibly repressed during the sixteenth century by the lettered city.

I mention these two examples not to claim nationalistic or patriotic right of speech but mainly to underscore the significance of the place of speaking, the locus of enunciation.¹ O'Gorman's and Rama's concerns with different forms of intellectual colonialism and cultural dependency in Latin America led them to construct postcolonial loci of enunciation in the very act of studying colonial discourses. Thus their work comprised an effort to displace field and voices: the Third World is not only an area to be studied but a place (or places) from which to speak. Both these thinkers have aided the growing realization that the "others" are not people and cultures with little contact with the First World but that "otherness" applies in disguise among equals, in what Carl Pletsch (1981) termed the apportionment of scientific (or scholarly) labor among the three worlds. Pletsch, however, was mainly concerned with the distribution of area studies from the perspective of social scientists and humanists located in and speaking from the First World. O'Gorman and Rama exemplify the perspective of social scientists and humanists located in and speaking from the Third World. They are in one sense contemporary examples of the "intellectual other," as were Inca noble Guaman Poma and Texcocan noble Alva Ixtlilxochitl in the early seventeenth century. For example, Tzvetan Todorov, at the beginning of *The Conquest of America* (1982), relegated O'Gorman to a footnote with a short comment placing him among those merely concerned with geographic aspects of the discovery. By quoting Edward Said (whose book Todorov had translated into French in 1978), Todorov suggested that his own description of the conquest of America could be read as some kind of "occidentalism," perhaps complementing Said's "orientalism." But in so doing, Todorov suppressed the fact that what O'Gorman had done in the late 1950s was very similar to what Said did two decades later. The subtitle of O'Gorman's Spanish edition of *La invención de América, El universalismo de la cultura de Occidente*, was not a celebration but a critical dismantling of such "universality." Examples like this make one suspect that there is little difference between yesterday's and today's discourses of colonialism.² For instance, Fray Juan de Torquemada's

1. One can also cite illustrious examples from Brazil. Antônio Cândido led the way in Brazil and has also provided a guiding example for a decolonizing critical discourse (Cândido 1959, 1973). Cândido also recognized Angel Rama's contribution to a Latin American decolonizing voice in Cândido (1991). Roberto Schwarz, Cândido's disciple, has been exploring the same kind of problems, most recently in his study of Joaquim Maria Machado de Assis (Schwarz 1990).

2. Here I am using Homi Bhabha's expression as a synonym for *colonial discourse* (Bhabha 1986).

printed version of the history of the Aztecs from a Franciscan point of view, *Monarquía indiana* (1615), was widely read, while the manuscript version by Texcocan historian Fernando de Alva Ixtlilxochitl was shelved in the archives and published only in the nineteenth century, when his account was approached as a historical document rather than as a political intervention.

Once again, my concern is with the locus of enunciation and with dislodging or multiplying its center, to use an expression coined by Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o.³ In his comparative analysis of Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and George Lamming's *In the Castle of My Skin*, Thiong'o concludes that although both writers were critical of colonial discourse, one spoke from the center of the empire while the other spoke from the core of resistance to the empire. Decentering the center or multiplying it provides new perspectives on colonial and postcolonial discourse: that of the locus of enunciation created in the very act of postulating the category of colonial discourse as well as the locus of enunciation created in the act not of studying or analyzing it but of resisting it.

Once the issue of colonial discourse is related to the locus of enunciation, my interest lies in the interplay among the configuration of the field of study, the rules of the methodological game, and the feelings and passions of the individual playing the game. I will explore these issues in relation to "colonial discourse" as a field of study, literary studies as a case of discourse-centered disciplines and an example of interpreting and theorizing semiotic interactions, and Latin America as a place where an alternative (colonial, postcolonial, or Third World) locus of enunciation can be constructed.

First, the field of study. Introduction of the term *colonial discourse* into the vocabulary of the humanities and the social sciences with a literary bent offered, in my view, an alternative approach to a field of study dominated by notions such as "colonial literature" or "colonial history." As defined by Peter Hulme (one of the authors reviewed by Seed), *colonial discourse* embraces all kinds of discursive production related to and arising out of colonial situations, from the *Capitulations of 1492* to William Shakespeare's *The Tempest*, from royal orders and edicts to the most carefully written prose (Hulme 1986, 1989). The advantage of the concept of colonial discourse was that it unified an interdisciplinary roster of scholars in history and anthropology who found the idea of "discourse" more appealing than "facts" or "information"—and in literary studies, more appealing than the restricted concept of literature or "literary discourse." Thus in the field of literary studies, the notion of colonial discourse also allowed schol-

3. This section is a summary of Thiong'o (1992). A more general perspective of his critical position can be found in Thiong'o (1973, 1986). For an alternative position on "decolonizing Africa," see Appiah (1992, 47-72).

ars to treat the concept of literature in relative terms, which is highly problematic, especially in colonial situations. "Colonial literature" implies a canon that depends on discursive criteria established in the metropolitan centers, which makes it doubly problematic: first because the "literary" production in the colonies and in the language of the colonized cultures is more often than not perceived as a runner-up to the literary production of the colonizing cultures; second, because "literature" is hardly a felicitous term to be applied to Amerindian discursive productions (which are mainly oral) and written interactions (which are mainly picto-ideographic).

Introduction of the alphabet in some sectors of the Amerindian population during the sixteenth century did not change the situation drastically. Whatever had been "captured" in alphabetic writing (such as the *Popul Vuh*, the *Chilam Balam*, and the *Huarochiri Manuscript*) was executed by members of a population who (toward the middle of the sixteenth century) were forced to change their writing habits or by Spaniards interested in understanding Amerindian cultures (such as the Huehuetlattioli or the Huarochiri). None of these writings transformed oral narrative into literature. The denial of "literary" qualities to Amerindian discursive production is neither a negative value judgment nor a suggestion of their cultural inferiority. It is merely the recognition that literature is a regional and culture-dependent conceptualization of a given kind of discursive practice, one that is not universal to all cultures. This perspective also invites inquiry into the nature and function of discursive practices in their "original" environment.

When pushed to the limit, however, the concept of "colonial discourse," desirable and welcome as it is, is not the most comprehensive idea possible for understanding the diversity of semiotic interactions in colonial situations in the New World experience. Hulme made it clear that in the area he was studying, the main documentation was European in origin. If instead we focus on the entity that in the sixteenth century was called the New World (mainly by non-Castilian Europeans) and the "Indias Occidentales" or West Indies (mainly by Spaniards involved in exploration and colonization), we must take into account a large range of semiotic interactions beyond alphabetic written documents in European languages. The idea of discourse, although it embodies oral as well as written interactions, may not be the best alternative to account also for semiotic interactions between different writing systems. The Latin alphabet introduced by the Spaniards, the picto-ideographic writing systems of Mesoamerican cultures, and the *quipus* in the Andes each delineate particular systems of interactions that took place during the colonial period. If we were to limit use of the term *discourse* only to oral and reserve the idea of *text* for written interactions, we would still need to expand the latter term beyond the range of alphabetical written documents in order to embrace all material sign inscriptions. In doing so, scholars would honor the etymological

meaning of text (as “weaving” or “textile”) and justify including the quipus into a system in which writing was always understood as scratching or painting on solid surfaces but not as weaving.

Because in the field of colonial literary studies, scholars must account for a complex system of semiotic interactions embodied in the discursive (oral) and the textual (material inscriptions in different writing systems), we need a concept such as *colonial semiosis*. This term escapes the tyranny of the alphabet-oriented notions of text and discourse, even though it adds to a large and already confusing vocabulary. On the positive side, *colonial semiosis* defines a field of study in a parallel and complementary fashion to existing terms such as *colonial history*, *colonial art*, and *colonial economy*. Furthermore, the concept of colonial semiosis includes the locus of enunciation, a dimension thus far absent from the current colonial fields of study. For instance, the field of colonial history presupposes an “objective” understanding subject and a locus of enunciation from which a series of interrelated events could be mapped. Briefly, the concept of colonial semiosis reveals that language-centered colonial studies could move (at least in Latin America and the Caribbean) beyond the realm of the written word to incorporate oral and nonalphabetic writing systems as well as nonverbal graphic systems. This concept could also open up new ways of thinking about colonial experiences by bringing to the foreground the political, ideological, and disciplinary agenda of the understanding subject.

The next issue is the question of method, its philosophical justification, and the construction of the loci of enunciation. Viewed in this perspective, the idea of colonial discourse invites rethinking of the hermeneutic legacy in the context of colonial semiosis. If the term *hermeneutics* is defined not only as a reflection on human understanding but as human understanding itself, then the “tradition” in which hermeneutics was founded and developed (Mueller-Vollmer 1985) must be recast in terms of the plurality of cultural traditions and cultural boundaries (Panikkar 1988). Thus colonial situations and colonial semiosis present a hermeneutical dilemma for the understanding subject. Historically, the study and analysis of colonial situations have been performed from the perspectives prevailing in different domains of the colonizing cultures, even when the interpreter favored certain aspects of the colonized cultures. The term *colonial semiosis* brings to the foreground the following question: what is the locus of enunciation from which the understanding subject perceives colonial situations? In other words, in which of the cultural traditions to be understood does the understanding subject place himself or herself? Such questions are relevant not only when broad cultural issues like colonial situations and colonial semiosis are being considered but also when more specific issues like race, gender, and class are being taken into account.

Edmundo O’Gorman’s *The Invention of America* led the way in directing attention to this issue. As a Mexican historian and philosopher of

history, O’Gorman’s engagement with colonial situations went beyond the usual relevant disciplinary issues. What propelled his research was a political and ideological concern relevant in Mexico in the 1950s along with a reassessment of historiographical goals prompted by his reading of Heidegger. O’Gorman’s demolition of four hundred years of historiographical writing about the so-called discovery was achieved from the point of view of a “creole” and a historian. Although he ignored the role of Amerindians in analyzing this process, he relativized the universal understanding subject assumed by the historiography of the discovery and changed the cultural perspective from which the discovery had been construed.

Whenever I raise the issue addressed by O’Gorman, I am accused of giving priority to the ethnic and cultural situation of the understanding subject. According to this argument, a woman or a Mexican is in a better position to understand women’s issues or colonial situations respectively. Yet this is not the point I am trying to make. Rather, I am concerned with the tension between the insertion of the epistemological subject within a disciplinary (or interdisciplinary) context governed by norms and conventions as well as with its being placed in a hermeneutic context in which race, gender, and class compete with and shape the goals, norms, and rules of a given disciplinary game. Disciplinary norms and conventions are thus permeated by hermeneutic needs and desires.

The point is that scholars studying the culture to which they belong (whether national, ethnic, or gender cultures) are not necessarily subjective just as scholars studying cultures to which they do not belong are not necessarily objective. In my view, theories are not instruments for understanding something that lies outside of the theory: rather, theories are instruments for constructing knowledge and understanding. Hence my use of the word *subjective* applies to examples, not to epistemological statements. Within a constructivist epistemology, subjectivity implies knowledge and understanding in which the personal and social situation of the knowing subject prevails over disciplinary rules and procedures. The inverse holds for *objective*: rules of disciplinary cognition will prevail over personal desires, biases, and interests. Accordingly, neither approach guarantees attaining a “better” (deeper, more accurate, more trustworthy, more informed) knowledge or understanding. For if we approach knowledge and understanding from the perspective of a constructivistic epistemology and hermeneutic, the audience being addressed and the researcher’s agenda are as relevant to the construction of the object or subject being studied as the subject or the object being constructed. Thus the locus of enunciation is as much a part of knowing and understanding as it is of the construction of the image of the “real” resulting from a disciplinary discourse (whether sociological, anthropological, historical, semiological, or some other kind). Consequently, the “true” account of a sub-

ject matter in the form of knowledge or understanding will be transacted in the respective communities of interpretation as much for its correspondence to what is taken for “real” as for the authorizing locus of enunciation constructed in the very act of describing an object or a subject. Furthermore, the locus of enunciation of the discourse being read would not be understood in itself but in the context of previous loci of enunciation that the current discourse contests, corrects, or expands. In other words, it is as much the saying (and the audience involved) as what is said (and the world referred to) that preserve or transform the image of the real constructed by previous acts of saying and previous utterances.

One example can be found in Michael Taussig’s remarkable book on terror and healing, *Shamanism, Colonialism, and the Wild Man* (1987), which helps clarify the tensions between the understanding subject and the subject to be understood in colonial semiosis. Construction of the locus of enunciation in Taussig’s study articulates beautifully his oppositional practices in relation to the disciplinary tradition in anthropology. At the same time, he constructs a cultural space in which Taussig, the Australian anthropologist, attempts to find a place within a Latin American intellectual tradition via his careful attention to essays and novels written by Latin Americans condemning colonialism and oppression (including Jacobo Timerman, Ariel Dorfman, José Eustasio Rivera, Alejo Carpentier, and Miguel Angel Asturias). This approach indicates Taussig’s openness to hearing and rehearsing the voices of the other in the oral tradition of the Putumayo and in the written tradition of Third World intellectuals whose locus of enunciation Taussig attempts to join.

A second example can be found in a statement made by Mexican-American artist Guillermo Gómez-Peña, several years ago in *L.A. Weekly*: “I live smack in the fissure between two worlds, in the infected wound: half a block from the end of Western Civilization and four miles from the start of the Mexican-American border, the northernmost point of Latin America. In my fractured reality, but a reality nonetheless, there cohabit two histories, languages, cosmologies, artistic traditions, and political systems which are drastically counterposed” (Gómez-Peña 1988).

The interrelations of colonial semiosis as a network of processes to be understood and the locus of enunciation as the network of places of understanding demand a pluridimensional or multidimensional hermeneutic at the same time that they reveal the significance of the disciplinary as well as cultural (gender, race, class) inscription of the subject in the process of understanding. Anthropologist Taussig—born and educated in Australia, trained in London, and teaching in the United States—places himself between a disciplinary tradition (anthropology) and in a personal and social situation outside the discipline (certain constructions of Latin American history and culture, indicated by the names he cites and seconds’ or critiques). Meanwhile Gómez-Peña, a Mexican-American artist

living in San Diego, illustrates both the survival of colonial semiosis and the need for a multidimensional hermeneutic to account for it. While understanding and constructing “our own tradition” implies a unidimensional hermeneutic, understanding and constructing colonial semiosis (the dialectic between official stories and suppressed voices, between signs from different cultural traditions) implies a plurality of conflictive and coexisting worlds and requires a multidimensional hermeneutic.⁴

Finally, I wish to cite a few examples of voices emerging from colonial semiosis that are constructing alternative (postcolonial) loci of enunciation. When Barbadian poet Edward Kamau Bratwaite recounts the story of his search for a rhythm that would match his living experience in the Caribbean, he highlights the moment when skipping a pebble on the ocean gave him a rhythm that he could not find by reading John Milton. Bratwaite also highlights a second and subsequent moment when he perceived the parallels between the skipping of the pebble and Calypso music, a rhythm that he could not find in listening to Beethoven.⁵ If Bratwaite found a voice and a form of knowledge at the intersection of the classical models he learned in a colonial school with his life experience in the Caribbean and consciousness of African people’s history, his poetry is less a discourse of resistance than a discourse claiming its centrality. Similar claims could be found indirectly in the writings of Jamaican novelists and essayist Michelle Cliff, who states that one effect of British West Indian colonial discourse is “that you believe absolutely in the hegemony of the King’s English and the form in which it is meant to be expressed. Or else your writing is not literature; it is folklore and can never be art. . . . The anglican ideal—Milton, Wordsworth, Keats—was held before us with an assurance that we were unable, and would never be enabled, to compose a work of similar correctness. . . . No reggae spoken here” (Cliff 1985). While Thiong’o, Lamming, and Bratwaite simultaneously construct and theorize about alternative centers of enunciation in what have been considered the margins of colonial empires, Latinos and Black Americans in the United States are demonstrating that either the margins are also in the center or (as Thiong’o expresses it) that knowledge and aesthetic norms are not universally established by a transcendent subject but are universally established by historical subjects in diverse cultural centers. Chicano writer Gloria Anzaldúa, for instance, has articulated a powerful alternative aesthetic and political hermeneutic by placing herself at the crossroad of three traditions (Spanish-American, Nahuatl, and Anglo-Ameri-

4. For an example of the hermeneutic “infiltration” within disciplinary structure, see Keller (1985). To the extent that the social sciences and the humanities have been constructed on the basis of the combination of certain hermeneutical configurations, they tend to restrain those who would gravitate toward the authoritative configuration of the disciplinary structure.

5. I am referring here to Bratwaite (1992). His general position regarding poetic practices in colonial situations has been articulated in Bratwaite (1983, 1984).

can) and by creating a locus of enunciation where different ways of knowing and individual and collective expressions mingle (Anzaldúa 1987).

The influential question asked several years ago by Gayatri Spivak was “Can the subaltern speak?” (Spivak 1985; O’Hanlon 1988). This query could be answered by saying that the subaltern have always spoken, although scholars and social scientists were not always willing to listen (Coronil 1993; Wald 1992). The question of whether the colonized can be represented may no longer be an issue, and it could be reframed in terms of dialogues from different loci of enunciation rather than as an academic monologue performed in the act of “studying” colonial discourse and not “listening” to politically engaged persons (whether inside or outside academe), writers from colonial, postcolonial, or Third World countries producing alternative discourse. Perhaps in the intellectual arena, efforts to invent an “other” from afar and long ago disguises new forms of colonization. Jean Paul Sartre pointed out that all non-Western cultures have been reduced to the status of objects by being observed and studied by Western scholars according to Western concepts and categories. Thus although the concept of colonial discourse has opened up new areas of inquiry and helped in rethinking the discursive dimension of colonial (and postcolonial experience), it may unwittingly misguide social scientists and humanists into a new form of intellectual colonization.

I wish to close by citing an example of mimicry, postcoloniality, and academic colonialism. On reading an essay like Roberto Schwarz’s “Brazilian Culture: Nationalism by Elimination,”⁶ one realizes that the question of “postcolonial discourse” seems far from the center of his intellectual and political agenda. One could argue that in Brazil, the new trend has not yet arrived because it takes time for new theories to make their way to peripheral regions. But that is precisely what Schwarz’s essay criticizes—the cultural internal colonialism and the mimetic actions taken by institutions and intellectuals in Brazilian postcolonial history and in many other countries. For those in postcolonial or Third World countries who believe that a sign of progress is to consume exported theories, the question of colonial and postcolonial discourse has not yet arrived. For those interested in critically examining the cultural dependency of postcolonial countries (which Schwartz terms “the peripheries of capitalism”), the issue has to be rethought in the context of mimicry and dependency as well as in terms of intellectual interventions and research programs feeding the traditions and needs of the country. For those of us in exile, when negotiating the intellectual production in our places of origins (whether Latin America, Africa, or Asia) and the intellectual conversation in our place of residence (the United States or Western Europe), the question arises of whether our function should be that of go-betweens, promoting the impor-

6. See Schwarz (1989), 29–48.

tation of “new theories” into our “backward” countries, or whether we should “think from” the postcolonial experiences in which we grew up. How this “thinking from” (which implies a “thinking in between”) could be constructed is a subject that cannot be developed here.⁷ My concern is to underscore the point that “colonial and postcolonial discourse” is not just a new field of study or a gold mine for extracting new riches but the condition of possibility for constructing new loci of enunciations as well as for reflecting that academic “knowledge and understanding” should be complemented with “learning from” those who are living in and thinking from colonial and postcolonial legacies, from Rigoberta Menchú to Angel Rama. Otherwise, we run the risk of promoting mimicry, exportation of theories, and internal (cultural) colonialism rather than promoting new forms of cultural critique and intellectual and political emancipations—of making colonial and postcolonial studies a field of study instead of a liminal and critical locus of enunciation. The “native point of view” also includes intellectuals. In the apportionment of scientific labor since World War II, which has been described well by Carl Pletch (1982), the Third World produces not only “cultures” to be studied by anthropologists and ethnohistorians but also intellectuals who generate theories and reflect on their own culture and history.

7. Some of the recent contributions along this line are Anzaldúa (1990), Mora (1993), Coronil (1992), Minh-Ha (1989), Appiah (1992), and Bhabha (1992).

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