Master 2 *Literary Postcolonialism*

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Objective:

The prime objective of this course is to draw the attention of Master’s students to postcolonial theory, construed as a hypothesis whereby formerly colonised societies seek to reconsider the derogatory, despicable image that colonialism had about them. Postcolonialism can therefore be seen as a response to that inferiorating perspective; this is the”writing back,” to borrow the words of Bill Ashcroft & al.

**Outline:**

-Preliminary Words

-The Colonial Discourse

-Basic Postulations

-The Holy Trinity

**Preliminary Words**

* Semantic Clarifications

I deem it important to delve into a bunch of words that are frequently used in connection not only with the course itself but also with theory per se.

Post-colonial: here the emphasis is simply on chronology as it refers only to time-frame, i.e. formerly colonised societies emerging in the wake of colonisation.

Postcolonial: here the emphasis is on the reading practice, an approach that pays attention to the strategies of resistance of formerly colonized societies.

Postcolonial literature: that body of literature dealing with responding to colonial ways, or what can be termed the inferiorating perception of non-Europeans

Postcolonial theory: it has to do with that theoretical approach that seeks to assert the voice of societies once living under the yoke of colonial rule.

Postcolonial criticism: it is an analysis leaning on postcolonial theory

**Colonial Discourse**

* Colony:

It is a territory subdued by a superpower (the metropole). This relationship expresses itself through economic, political and also cultural dominance. This relationship of hegemony is underpinned by barrage of reasons that can be seen as “colonial discourse.” We are referring here to asset of rules used to keep colonized societies subservient to colonial rule.

* The Discursive Construction

One can speak here of the Creation of the Other (non-European)

-This creation lies on a series of binary oppositions despising the native, non-European.

Civilised / barbaric

White/ Black

Mature/immature

Strong/ weak

Masculine/effeminate

Rational/emotional

Progressive/ primitive

The consequence of this discursive construction is the justification of imperialism.

* Political governance: they need the help of others to govern their own societies
* Economic exploitation: they are not able to exploit their own riches
* Cultural domination their culture is not praiseworthy. Hence the imposition of a foreign culture to erase their own.

In other words, the European mode of seeing and thinking must be imposed everywhere. Cecil Rhodes on British imperialism:” that we [the British] are the first race in the world and the more of the world we inhabit the better it is for the human race”

**Basic Postulations**

Postcolonial literary theory as a reading practice dwells on a series of principles aimed at reacting against the inferiorating discourse which lied at the core of colonialism. In the words of Robert Young, they want to be the”subject” of their own discourse. For Gayatri Spivak, “the marginal can speak, be spoken, even spoken for.”

-They reject the claims to universalism, which more than often, only means the adoption or imposition of Eurocentric norms and practices

-It draws attention to issues of cultural difference in literary texts and seems to assert what might be termed “cultural independence” (Nayar)

-It promotes what is known as “cultural polyvalency,” meaning the capacity to belong to two cultures, that of the colonizer and that of the colonized

-It focuses on the discursive construction of reality. The point is the discourse that depicted the native will also rule him

-The abrogation of the Centre within the text. Any discourse claiming to give dominance to the West will be questioned

-It shows colonial powers despised other peoples based on race

-It shows how colonial powers invented discursive formations to perpetrate their domination over peoples believed to be inferior

-It pays attention to pre-colonial wisdom and forms of knowledge to challenge their would-be inferiority

-It uses the coloniser’s language to criticize their ideological standpoints

**The Holy Trinity**

This biblical reference aims at emphasizing the centrality of these theorists in the field. Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha.

* Edward Said (1934-2003)

-Most influential thinker in the field with his book *Orientalism* (1978)

-Power can exercise itself through knowledge. In the case of colonization, knowledge about the Orient preceded actual colonial practices of political domination and economic exploitation

-Western imperialism sustained itself through an ideological creation of the Orient, i.e. Orientalism: (body of knowledge about Eastern cultures, religions and languages developed by western colonisers) which is far from being innocent

-Colonialism, like a power, relies on two main aspects:

1. traders & soldiers

2. scholars & missionaries

-In *Culture and Imperialism*, Said demonstrates the implication of such texts as *Heart of Darkness* in imperial discourse

-Contrapuntal reading: revising colonialist assumptions

-Cultural resistance

1. National culture: local narratives as responses to western official discourses

2. an alternative of conceiving human history in so much as it interrogates the imperialist discourse

-He warns against nativism. As he puts it, to accept nativism is “to accept the consequences of imperialism, the racial, religious and political divisions imposed by imperialism itself” Indeed, nativism reinforces the distinction (us / them). For him, postcolonial narratives must lay the emphasis on cultural autonomy in an “anxious partnership” with the West.

* Gayatri Spivak (1942)

-*Outside in the Teaching Machine* (1993) “where the marginal can speak and be spoken, even spoken for”

-She analyses the condition of the colonised, that is the subaltern, someone who does not belong to the colonial elite

-What is unsaid, silenced through representation. Indeed she pays attention to the imperialist tendency to silence the Other

-The concept of representation is understood at two levels:

1. understood in the context of political representation

2.re-presentation=portraying, depicting

In other words, who can speak for whom? Who listens? How does one represent the self and others?

-What has been lost, effaced from the colonial archive

* Homi Bhabha (1949)

-ambivalent, contradictory aspects of the colonizer-colonised relationships

\*colonial discourse is ambivalent with respect to the colonial subject, who is represented as someone to be nurtured, civilised as well as exploited

-Mimicry: colonial discourse encourages the colonised subject to “mimic” the colonizer by adopting the coloniser’s culture, language and values. But this is never complete since they are differences that cannot be eradicated. Mimicry involves similarity and difference (the colonised subject is not quite/ not white)

-hybridity: the heterogeneous aspects of cultural formation, the intermixtures of language, race

-the third space of enunciation: contacts result in the production of something new

**Bibliography**

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