



## **POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES**

Semester: 6 ; Group: C

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### **THE RHETORIC OF EMPIRE (3)** **by David Spurr**

#### 6. NATURALIZATION:

Nature has always been antonymous with culture and civilisation. Primitive peoples live in a state of nature according to natural laws, so they are naturally subjected to domination like their mother nature. Colonial discourse seems to naturalise other peoples in two senses: it identifies a colonised or primitive people as part of the natural world, and it presents this identification as entirely “natural”, as simple state of what is, rather than as a theory based on interest. Naturalisation is not only used in imperialist writings but also in western literature in general. Although some thinkers, like Rousseau, have shown an interest in nature and its values of freedom and absence of artifice and repression, they have expressed their consideration to that nature under the light of human progress and thus it should be surpassed by the European tradition of culture.

Man for many European thinkers no longer stands at the centre of the natural world, but his history is distinct from nature. In other words, human history follows natural laws while it also progresses away from natural origins. In this respect, nature is at the same time idealised and reviled; there is an ambivalence between man’s veneering state of nature and his will to subordinate it to his use and improvement. The primitive, like nature, is subject to ambivalence; he is shown to be the symbol of purity simplistic humanity but at the same time he should be disciplined and civilised. The Eurocentrism is actually one element among others comprising binarisms and polarities which explain history as a struggling between the opposing forces epitomised in orient vs west, primitive vs modern, nature vs civilisation and instinct vs reason. The western mission is that of amending to nature and civilising those races that have to free themselves from nature’s power. This moral philosophy which calls for the conquest of nature is founded upon an ideology of colonialism which also derives from 19<sup>th</sup> century’s scientific theories like Darwin’s natural selection. However, if naturalisation helps the colonial discourse and power to use nature as an ally in the colonising mission, there is still a danger of the white man’s extinction because due to the climatic and environmental reasons (which made the black African primitive) the white man’s successive generations in Africa will gradually degenerate to the condition of native Africans.

In the mass media also, there are representations of non-westerners as “children of nature” mainly when describing them as continuously “endlessly” violent and entering cycles of violence. Many examples naturalise war in the third world and make it look as if nature substitute history in human conflicts and thus becomes an inherent feature of the landscape dismissing any rational causality and realistic analysis.

7. EROTICIZATION: Foucault describes the female hysteria as a process whereby the female body is saturated with sexuality. The woman’s body is constructed as an erotic reproductive sign within the discourse of sexuality. The female body is not the concern of Foucault but it is the construct of that body rhetorically; in the same way, the colonial discourse represents the colonised world as the feminine and which assigns to subject nations those qualities conventionally assigned to women. The eroticisation of the colonised refers to the set of rhetorical instances – metaphors, seductive fantasies, expressions of sexual anxiety – in which the traditions of colonialist discourses coincide even after the colonial era in some newspapers and magazines which always tend to describe the third world countries as analogous to female characters or hysteria.

- Seduction: Edward Said says in Orientalism that the orient suggests not only fecundity but sexual promise, untiring sensuality, unlimited desire and deep generative energies. Seduction is manifested in the unveiling of the female body which serves as a metaphor for ideas of opening and discovering every place in the colonised land, and serialisation (repetition) of sexual intercourses which reveals the dehumanisation (from the part of the coloniser) of the colonised and rendering him/her as regulating machines deprived of any subjective personal identity. Unveiling also may seem to

provide the coloniser with tools to resist the gaze of the veiled female. As a subject who performs the gaze he finds himself looked at from beyond the veil and unable to see the whole picture of the face. Thus the business of unveiling seems to combine two contradictory impulses of the colonialist imagination: the domesticating force of illusion of initiation into a world of exotic sexuality; and the inspiration of a visionary alternative counteracted by language which reduces its objects to ritualised repetitions. Fanon describes this by saying that “unveiling this woman is revealing her beauty; it is baring her secret, breaking her resistance, making her available for adventure.”

- Fear and loathing: unveiling also provides a sensation of sexual danger, symbolic of erotic adventure and uncontrollable energies that stand synecdochic of Africa’s seductive and destructive characteristics. In the dynamic of the unveiling that gives form to the coloniser’s desire, the body of the wilderness is symbolically bound to the body of woman, while the impotence of the gaze amounts to a kind of castration. Danger is also concrete in the procreative energies that threaten the whites by outnumbering them. The colonised peoples’ infinite multiplication haunts the colonisers even in the post independence era when Africans and third world countries are shown to live only in order to procreate even in the poorest regions. They live in an endless cycle of overreproduction and starvation, a machine of sex and death.

#### 8. RESISTANCE: notes towards an opening

The colonial discourse is built upon some structures/principles that should be understood and resisted both from within and without in a critical tradition that (once produced colonialism) would call into question the classifications, analyses and objectifications of the colonial discourse. The act of resistance, that points to the dynamic of difference and alterity in this discourse, should not be seen as political opposition only, but as the effect of an ambivalence produced within the dominating discourse as it struggles with its own displacement and distortion throughout the highly differentiated scenes of colonial presence. (Bhabha) the discourse inevitably becomes transformed into a hybrid, into something other than the transparent manifestation of a uniform collective authority which theoretically constitutes its origins. Given the degree to which the colonising discourse penetrates western writings about non-western peoples, this discourse has its own seeds of resistance within itself as a discourse and to the totalising authority over the objects of representation. It may also be said to be ethnographically polyphonic or, using Bakhtin’s words, heteroglossic when it tries to share different texts by different cultures.

There is a possibility of resistance to colonial discourse that can come from the openness of the western stream of thought inspired by Heidegger, Derrida and others. Foucault calls it a perpetual principle of dissatisfaction, of calling into question, of criticism and contestation of what is “established”. Derrida considers thought itself as an opening into the indeterminate space where new meaning has yet to be decided and from which established meaning already belongs to a “past epoch ... that is open to view”. This openness allows new thoughts to challenge the dominant one (Colonial discourse) through exposing its logic to view and maintaining a perpetual openness to the unexpected. In this way, the difference in thought is all what remains to the west in order to oppose ethnocentrism, xenophobia or racism.

The text of Spurr seeks to study language as an act of resistance and attempts to destroy syntax, shatter tyrannical modes of speech, to turn words around in order to perceive all that is being said through them and despite them. Postmodernism, then, is the possibility for a new western understanding of Africans (others) because it is a natural and positive intellectual response to a world of fragmented and constantly reassembled environment, a pluralistic, open ended world subject to the free movement of the mind and the perpetual renewal of meanings. Yet, there are camps of critics concerning the debate on colonial discourse; Benita Parry distinguishes between those who seek to identify the ideologies embedded in texts as the expression of political forces themselves operating outside of language, and those who see discourse itself as the primary form of social practice and who seek to expose the nature of ideology by stirring up and dis parsing the sedimented meaning dormant in texts. In other words, the difference is basically between language and power; one sees language as the effect of power while the other sees them as practically the same. If both approaches seem to come to a closed path, the answer may come from the non west. For this to be accepted, there is need to transcend existing structures and replacing them with new ones that actually reflect dialogue between the west and non west; A. Khatibi observes that decolonising the thought of the third world would not simply mean a reversal of colonial power but an affirmation of difference, an openness to plurality and subversion of the powers that inhere in discourse.