

Postcolonial Criticism and Migration

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The aspects of the disharmonious globalization, which we experience as an ambivalent space of socio-economic inequality and cultural imposition, is also reflected in the presence of postcolonial criticism in large cities. Postcolonial criticism can be interpreted as a discursive expression of a global contradiction, which grasps the conditions of its own origin as an opportunity for reflection. Just as it is important to not lose sight of the overall global context, it is also important to take into consideration the micro-political processes, as well as the question of the formation/development of the subject as a requirement for critical thinking. Postcolonial analysis assume a relational, dynamic, and contextual understanding of inequality, power, and dominance, which are under permanent “negotiation”. The incompleteness of societal power structures, as well as the inevitable involvement of the subjects in these structures, require locating one’s own position in discourse, as well as in society, and to challenge this position through strategies of self-representation.

Postcolonial Sensibilities

A reflection of self-placement and self-analysis which takes into consideration the initial conditions of every act of speech and each speaking position, contains a practice which emancipates itself from the construct of apparently neutral, timeless, and objective term of science or knowledge. Instead of focusing on the mainstream, postcolonial critics concentrate on the underrepresented and encoded expressions of marginalized subjects. They are determined to valorize those perspectives and topics, which receive no attention in the established system. In this way, they are supporting the displaced and repressed in their struggle to achieve standing for the multitude of their varied voices and their histories, which have been made invisible. It’s no coincidence that Gayatri Spivak’s underlying question, “Can the subaltern speak?”, belongs to one of the most discussed topics of postcolonial discourse. Postcolonial criticism can be characterized by its own self-conception as a political project, which feels obligated to repressed subjectivities. It makes the alternating permeation and historical entanglement of differing dynamics of power to a starting point for political intervention.

Although there is no general definition of postcolonial criticism, and the heterogeneous character of this discourse makes standardization practically impossible, there are never the less common starting points that can be determined:

- Deconstruction of a hegemonial “West” (Whiteness) and the devalued “Others” (Otherness, Blackness, people of color, Jews and Jewesses, Muslims, postcolonial subjects, migrants), which have developed into binary opposites in the historical process through alternating configurations and inequality in structural power
- A focus on the power relations, exploitation, hierarchies, in- and exclusion, which are stabilized by cultural representation and political control.

- Colonization as a violent process of subjugation, which is achieved by the domesticated and objectified “others” through pedagogic and performative practices.
- Strategies and methods of control through the knowledge industry, which is implemented by the power of definition and establishment of euro-centric regimes of truth
- Researching academic discourses and cultural productions (i.e. literature, images, language) as expressions and effects of articulations of power and foreign constructs;
- Ambivalence between humanitarian ideals of the Enlightenment and the colonial modernity
- Exposure of the “western” claims to superiority as a colonial model of order, which implies a societal development pyramid and legitimizes the process of colonizing. Therefore, postcolonial discourses are just as interested in making apparent the dynamics of domination as well as the acceptance, the measures of construction, and the implementation processes of differences. These discourses attempt to analyze the simultaneous nature of exclusion and connectedness through a contextually conscious determination of differences and similarities. In this process, admiration and disesteem go hand in hand, while attribution from others competes with attempts of self-attribution and equality. One approach that demonstrates the controversial and inconclusive complexity of societal categories opens up new possibilities to rethink cultural spaces, similarities in historical experiences, and political identities. Instead of continuing to understand these categories as homogenous, static, and closed, openness and diversity are recognized as constitutive elements of cultural identity, which are in a continual process of change, and are defined by external, as well as internal differentiations. A change of perspective of this magnitude is inevitably associated with destabilization and uncertainty, because this radically goes against the existing perception of culture and identity. The goal of such a challenge is to exert the presence of the non-represented and those on the outside of society.

What does “postcolonial” mean?

As divergent and contradicting as the local, cultural, and social positions of the “postcolonial” are, the more incomplete and unsatisfying is every attempt to fully capture the postcolonial discourse – let alone to clearly define it. To clarify the nature of this discourse opens up a set of fundamental problems. How fundamental this non-uniformity and diversity is, can be demonstrated on the various ways of writing “postcolonial” as “post-colonial”, “post/colonial” and “post/-colonial”, and their different levels of meaning. This debate relates without a doubt also to the discourses own self-image. As with other post-isms, the seemingly clear prefix “post” opens a series of tensions and confusion. The term can actually be translated in certain contexts as “after colonial”. In this case, postcolonial signifies the era of formal political independence of previously colonized societies after attaining international sovereignty. To what extent this societies become truly decolonialized through this process is a central field of Postcolonial Studies, which evokes a less definite spelling. Currently, a new dimension of meaning is arising within the framework of globalization, in which the “postcolonial” conveys a form of cultural globalization. Such globalized localities of the socio-economic and media/information-technological pervasiveness increasingly characterize the trans-cultural living conditions in the daily life of urban centers. Transnational spaces and hybrid cultures are formed in these centers by transcontinental migration movements and cultural circulation, which cross ethnic and national/cultural borders. In addition to a descriptive use, the adjective “postcolonial” and its derivatives are also used normatively and politically. This causes contradicting perceptions to arise, according to the ideological perspective. While many critics claim postcolonial, i.e. decolonialized, forms of society to be

unfinished projects, some, mostly conservative, powers see this goal as already accomplished and doubt the relevance and political justification of Postcolonial Studies. Within the critical discourse, the term “postcolonial” is primarily used in terms of late- or neocolonial as a critical-analytical category. This should refer to a perspective or a constellation, which is formed by coming to terms with historical entanglements, as well as simultaneous colonial dominance, after colonial dependence, and emancipation movements. Also within this category belong the transformations of meaning, which develop from the reception and further branching out of postcolonial criticism. When postcolonial criticism becomes discovered and received primarily as an academic fad and an intellectual consumer good, then its critical-analytical meaning will doubtlessly be neutralized in the process of a culturalized usage with the fading of dynamics of power and oppression.

Intellectual References

The writers of the Négritude movement are considered to be the intellectual and political forerunners of the modern postcolonial discourse. Lingering till today are the impulses from Frantz Fanon’s works like *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) and *The wretched of the Earth* (1961). As a theorist and political activist, he has inspired not only anti-colonial freedom movements in Trikont, but also the Black Panther Party in the United States. His original ideas were a combination of an exact observation of the colonial condition together with Marxism and psychological analysis. Fanon knew that the colonization was an alternating process between the colonizers and the colonized. His focus on the alternating, as well as lingering permeation of colonial-racist relations and their inscription in political culture mark the postcolonial vision into the present.

Although the emphasis on a singular event more often leads to founding myths, the actual originating point of modern postcolonial criticism is often equated with the publication of Edward Saïd’s underlying work *Orientalism* (1978). *Orientalism* can however also be read as a creative combination and advancement of different intellectual movements. Saïd uses literature, poststructuralist and discourse-analytical functions to make apparent the imaginary “Orient” as a European code for “the absolute other”. His study of *Orientalism* founded and established the Colonial Discourse Analysis as an academic discipline. Since then, postcolonial criticism as developed itself into a highly differentiated academic discourse. It’s practically impossible to name every area of postcolonial discussion. It deals with, among other things, the following topic complexes, and their interrelationship: colonialism, racism, nationalism, ethnicity, migration, cultural identity, the body and performativity, feminism, sexuality and gender studies, textual representations, discourse analysis, stereotyping and socio-cultural constructions, resistance, universality and difference, postmodern culture, globalization, language, pedagogic, history, space, production, consumption, music, fashion, the culture of daily life, and much more. This unfathomable openness is to be understood as a trans-disciplinary accessibility, which consciously puts itself in contrast to the usual academic boundaries and attempts at clear definitions. Because of the power-critical cognitive interests, the political activism and the theoretical premises, there exist overlaps in personnel as well as content with the related Cultural Studies.

The different fields of Postcolonial Studies are often connected with an overall political perspective, that engages in coming to terms with the past and present colonial practices. Because postcolonial criticism views itself as a partisan and intervening scientific practice, the search for a beginning of comprehensive liberation from all forms of hegemony becomes the duty of the authority-critical knowledge industry. The theoretical background of this study is however not unified. Mostly postcolonial approaches move undogmatically in a theory frame that falls back on anti-imperial, feminist, neo- and post-marxist, post-structural, and

psychoanalytical positions, as well as methods from the Literature and Culture Studies. Despite suspicious dismissal from, and criticism of euro-centrism, the discourse and power analysis from Michel Foucault, the Lacanian reading from Freud, the differentiated philosophy from Jacques Derrida and the nomadic thinking of Gilles Deleuze are unmistakable starting points of postcolonial criticism.

In Germany postcolonial perspectives entered the academic level and in cultural circles relatively late during the 1990s. Postcolonial approaches have been used in Germany especially by young academics, who usually search for local transfer possibilities from people of color, feminist, and migrant perspectives. The continuation and adaptation of postcolonial criticism in the German context will without a doubt proceed. The exciting question is, which forms of reception and transfer will be able to assert themselves institutionally and discursive under the banner of postcolonial criticism.

Postcolonial Migrations and Cultural Hybridization

Approaches of postcolonial criticism structurally embed migration questions in a context linked with complex historical, global, socio-economical, ethnic-national, cultural-religious, and gender specific dynamics of power and inequality. These dynamics generate contradicting forms of exclusion and superposition. The full consequences of today's postcolonial migration of people of color can only therefore be fully understood when it is oriented in its historical context. Global mass-migrations are – as a specific phenomenon of modern times – often bound to colonial experiences. In these migrations, the interests of control, dispersal, and exploitation take on a colonizing form through displacement, conquest, settlement and enslavement. Since modern times, the economic and politically motivated transfer of soldiers, slaves, settlers, colonial administrators, missionaries and traders etc. has become racially tinged and arranged to be the knowledge and power base of a global regime. The implementation of migration and biopolitics thereby becomes a requirement as well as a result of the global expansion of European power and capitalist production. While the expansion initially expresses itself through forms of external colonization, internalization and assimilation of the colonized Others have been increasing in western Europe since the 19th century as a result of economic growth and labor shortages. Since then, labor migration policy has been nationally organized in internal abroad, and conceived as a means of value absorption, in order to win a location advantage in the contest of globally competing national economies. To what extent the self-colonization of western societies and their institutions will effect the future, and what consequences this historical heritage will have on the cultural scene and the prevailing paradigms, is still unknown and hardly researched due to a lack of awareness of this problem.

It is in this context that we are now experiencing a two sided, complimentary discussion about immigration, which is mirrored in the current selection criteria: on the one hand, border regimes have attained an almost military precision through the expansion of national and international border monitoring technology to prevent unwanted crossings. On the other hand, all western industrialized countries have already been intercultural immigration societies for the last decades because of postcolonial “guest workers”(migrants). However, calls for a national “mainstream culture” and xenophobia are still capable of swaying the majority. Racial convictions therefore maintain a position in the center of society, as they are concepts that influence not only daily interactions put also political life. In this political conflict of interests, isolation strategies go along with questions regarding equal rights in political and social branches as well as the acceptance of cultural differences. Just as certain is the fact that the increasing existence of illegalized people will make issues of social marginalization and exploitation more important than ever.

Although objectifying people of color as “useful human capital” or as a threat are defining aspects of postcolonial migration, immigration also acts as a cultural rewriting for the goal culture. These innovative processes not only strengthen the self-image of the immigrants, but also shift the significance of migrant cultures. Previously, migrant cultures were almost exclusively narrowed to the folkloric representation of their national cultures of origin or seen as a pedagogic means of social work for overcoming alleged culture conflicts and socialization deficits. In recent years, the production of a cultural mix has experienced a boom in the recognized culture scene as well as in popular culture. Transborder processes have increased in significance over ethnic-national and cultural borders. In German-speaking countries, Ursula Biemann’s film essays (*Performing the Border* 1999) and the video works from Hito Steyerl (*Die leere Mitte* 1998 and *Euroscapes*, 2004) are especially noteworthy. These works examine through film the historical, cultural, and political entanglement of migration and border spaces. But also the unmanageable, continually self-reinventing music culture, which is often combined with visual performances, has become a none to insignificant part of postcolonial articulation.

Accordingly there is currently a special interest directed to cultural hybridization. Through a shortened perception, hybridism is treated however much too often as a harmonizing magic word and is accompanied with problematic functionalizing and the fading of power dynamics. Hybridization is usually understood simply as a dynamic and continuous mixing of cultures, which enables the existence of a new productive mix-culture. Logically, migration cultures are not perceived as nationalized or assimilated cultures, but as cultures in motion. Migration leads to the development of local diaspora cultures, which open transnational spaces. These post-national discourses are interested in openness and innovation. Thereby new cultural languages and forms are made possible which move across the binary constructs of ethnic national cultures and isolation principles. There is however the danger that mix discourses often refer back to the essential origin of culture and identity, just as the national economic instrumentalization and late capitalistic exploitation “cultural differences” consumption.