

Provincializing Europe From Within

M. do Mar Castro Varela, and N. Dhawan, *Postkoloniale Theorie – Eine kritische Einführung*, 2nd ed., Bielefeld: Transcript Verlag, 2015, 369 pages.

In the German academic context, postcolonial theory has finally arrived to stay, as the introduction to the second edition confirms. Undoubtedly, this is in part due to the publication of Castro Varela's and Dhawan's book *Postkoloniale Theorie*, two leading theorists of postcolonial feminist theory. This new, second edition is greatly expanded focusing on new texts by the late Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, and Homi Bhabha and an engagement with critiques of their works as well as presenting new developments in postcolonial theory with pressing contemporary global social justice issues. This important primer presents a detailed and extensive overview of key discourses on colonialism, imperialism, and modernity. With each chapter extensively revised and over two hundred additional pages, this is almost a completely new book, not merely a second edition.

Castro Varela and Dhawan skillfully bring up contemporary debates on German colonialism, thus providing an important corrective to what continues to be treated as an afterthought in mainstream discourses about genocide, reparations, and the like. The call for apologies and reparations for the first genocide of the twentieth century against the Herero and Nama has come to a head in the year of the hundredth anniversary of Namibia's liberation from German colonialism. So a publication on postcolonialism in 2015 couldn't be more timely.

Aimé Césaire's magisterial *Discourse on Colonialism* (1955) sets the stage for emergence of postcolonial studies. The field as such is established after Edward Said's intervention with *Orientalism* (1978), which is labeled as the »foundational document of postcolonial theory« (p. 96).¹ Similarly, V. Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa* (1988) serves as foundational text for postcolonial studies in African Studies and Walter Mignolo's *The Idea of Latin America* (2005) for

¹ Unless otherwise specified, all translations are mine.

decolonial studies in Latin American Studies (p. 95, n. 6). Castro Varela and Dhawan contend that Said (and, I would add, Frantz Fanon) takes a special role in charting the course regarding »anticolonial resistance, strategies of decolonization and critiquing eurocentrism« (p. 94).

Why focus (critically) on Said, Spivak, Bhaba? Does the impetus come from Robert Young's (1995) famous categorization of them as the »Holy Trinity«?² Why not choose a Latin American author? *Postkoloniale Theorie* notes the far-reaching impact of conceptual interventions like Said's orientalism, Spivak's subaltern, and Bhabha's hybridity. All of them are inspired by »high theory« French theorists, notably engaging in an ambivalent fashion with Michel Foucault, especially in the case of Said and Spivak. While Said heavily draws on Foucault's discourse analysis in his early work and later turns against him, Spivak moderates her early poignant critique of Foucault in her later work.

The familiar charge of »high theory« raised against Spivak and Bhabha's affinity for poststructuralist thought is deftly addressed. And what is especially noteworthy is that the authors are able to write in an accessible jargon, rather than replicating the dense and obfuscating rhetorical styles of Spivak and Bhabha. A particular concern is the aspect of complicity of being elite intellectuals in elite (Ivy League) universities, which practically haunts Said. Ironically, Bhabha is least concerned with complicity and practical applications of his literary analysis while he faces more critique than Spivak or Said for having little to say about material conditions of the peoples he writes about (p. 250). Castro Varelo and Dhawan tellingly highlight this dispute with the suggestive subtitle »Bhabha in the crossfire of critique« (p. 268).

Castro Varela and Dhawan carefully lay out overlapping interests among diverse thinkers such as Spivak, Said, and Bhabha. Befitting a primer on postcolonial theory, they explain the »post« in postcolonial. After all, Spivak's and Bhabha's ideological commitments couldn't be more different, even though both critique eurocentrist philosophy while drawing on poststructuralist insights. Castro Varela and Dhawan conclude their book with a sharp critique of Vivek Chibber's *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (2013) which in

² R. Young, *Colonial Desire: Hybridity in Theory, Culture, and Race*, London and New York: Routledge, 1995.

turn accuses the *South Asian Subaltern Studies Group* of ignoring the universalizing tendencies of capital and reinscribing orientalism (pp. 326–327).

Even though the authors note that the postcolonial thinkers mentioned above do not focus on a specific region, postcolonial theory as such tends to be identified with India and scholars of *South Asian Subaltern Studies* in particular. By contrast, Latin Americanist intellectuals (e.g., *Latin American Subaltern Studies Group*) have branded their own school of thought as a »decolonial option« (Mignolo). Helpfully, Castro Varela and Dhawan discuss the competing postcolonial and decolonial schools of thought and fault Mignolo and Grosfoguel for mischaracterizing postcolonial theory and being mired in contradictions. For instance, Mignolo and Grosfoguel charge that members of the South Asian collective rely on high theory of French poststructuralists, yet they do not problematize the fact that prominent decolonial theorists are also western educated and draw on Marxist theory (pp. 318–326). Mignolo and Grosfoguel hold that postcolonial theorists such as the *South Asian Subaltern Studies* focus merely on literary texts and not on social reality, which Castro Varela and Dhawan claim is clearly false (pp. 322 and pp. 85). This fallacy can only »stick« as true if postcolonial theory were indeed an exposition of a singular ideological perspective. This is not the case because it draws on »multidirectionality,« e.g., in its critique of global capital, austerity measures as part of structural adjustment programs, intellectual property rights and biopiracy, as well as other excesses of neocolonialism, working with critical race theory, feminist theory, Marx, Foucault, and Derrida.

With its focus on Said and South Asian subaltern studies, *Postkoloniale Theorie* gives a nuanced account on the diverse ideological commitments within the larger postcolonial studies context. Therefore, it is understandable, that the few representative decoloniality scholars of Latin American and Caribbean scholars are perhaps too quickly labeled as belonging to a specific group, when in reality they may not share common intellectual agendas.

Postkoloniale Theorie briefly engages with representatives of the Black Atlantic. For those readers who are not familiar with Fanon's work, it would be helpful to explain the logical discrepancy between noting Fanon's well-known antipathy of essentialized notion of négritude (p. 137, n.19) and his defense of négritude in context of Spivak's strategic essentialism (p. 308).

M. Nagel

For a primer or an introductory text, it would have greatly helped having at least an author index. However, the authors present a good compilation of biographical material with a focus on primary and secondary texts concerning writings by Spivak, Said, and Bhaba.

Overall, this primer on postcolonial theory is an excellent introduction and should be of interest to undergraduates as well as experts in cultural studies; area, diaspora and ethnic studies; and literary studies (to name a few). Importantly, it serves as a key foundational text to the project of provincializing Europe from within Europe.

—Mechthild Nagel, SUNY Cortland, USA