South Africa Passes the Posts

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In 1990, shortly after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the unmourned demise of orthodox Communism in Eastern Europe and the U.S.S.R., the Nationalist Party Government in South Africa announced the unbanning of the ANC and PAC, initiating a process of reform which soon outstripped their control. Painstakingly, and not without much conflict, the process of gestation of a 'new South Africa' toward a more inclusive, democratic, polity began: a framework which allows all of its citizens access to voting rights and at least the possibility of economic and social advancement.

It is against this background that one must view the applications of 'colonial discourse' and 'post-coloniality' in the local academy. Their impetus can be seen in the burgeoning intellectual influence of French post-structuralism (initially that of Althusser in the late 1970s and Foucault in the early 1980s, but from the mid-1980s increasingly through its linguistic and psychoanalytic formulations) in the white Afrikaans-, and later English-speaking universities; and also in a growing interest in the work of cultural theorists such as Spivak, Said, and Bhabha. More recently, 'post-colonial' historians of South Africa such as Crais and the Comaroffs have also had their effect. However, more specific attempts to ground these new theories in a 'post-colonial' framework appertaining to local conditions were first apparent in the final chapter of Teresa Dovey's (1988:330-413) Lacanian study of J.M. Coetzee, and in an article published by Annemarie Carusi (1989) in a Canadian journal.

It is nevertheless in the intellectual ambience of new-found freedom and celebration since 1990 that attitudes favourable towards post-modernism, 'post-coloniality' and French post-structuralism have flourished, in various ways which have tended to deeply interweave the effects of these terms[1]. At present a desire to indigenise colonial

[1] Locally, 'postcolonial' critics have been heavily influenced by the philosophies of post-structuralism and the politics of post-modernism as these have developed in the metropole. While these three terms cannot be used interchangeably, Dirlik's point that 'Postcolonial critics readily concede the debt they owe to postmodernist and post-structuralist thinking ... [it] represents a response to a genuine need ... to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world' is a basic assumption underlying this essay (Dirlik 1994:352).

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discourse and 'post-colonial' approaches prevails. To David Attwell, the fact that South Africa does not share the 'experience of post-1968 disillusionment' with 'master-narratives' which informs metropolitan post-modernism does not mean that post-modernist techniques and viewpoints do not percolate through local literary culture, 'taking on new forms and acquiring a different animating spirit' (Attwell 1993a:21). He and Leon de Kock in particular have spent considerable time acting as the proponents of a South African 'post-coloniality' informed by the spirit of post-structuralism[2] and post-modernism.

Almost without exception, South African critics eager to use his new orientation were little involved in the nationalist and Marxist paradigms employed (either intellectually or on the ground) during the 'struggle years' of the 1970s and 1980s. As can be expected, one of the first tasks they set themselves was to attack these earlier paradigms, especially in what they saw as their tendency to become narrowly teleological 'master-narratives' deeply complicit in Eurocentric ideologies of modernity and progress. To them, nationalists were 'more vulnerable to dependency on the conceptual apparatus of the west than they know' (Attwell 1995a:2); while Marxism came in for particular scrutiny and disavowal for this, and other, reasons—the attitudes of Marxism's 'post-colonial' critics varying from tones of intellectual transcendence (see Attwell 1993b:4) to selective absorption (in the case of David Bunn) to outright emotional rejection (Cornwell 1994:54).

When local 'colonial discourse'/ 'post-colonial' applications first surfaced, they seemed to herald a breath of fresh air: promising new ways in which to examine and theorise literary and cultural studies in this country. In terms of scholarship, they appeared to open up untouched areas of enquiry. For instance, Bunn's use of the notion of 'subalternity' allowed him, he believed, to open up an examination of 'the subordinate classes normally ignored by Marxist social historians' (Bunn 1992:38). Others, such as Attwell, saw its promise of a renewed interest in narrativity and textuality as a means to escape the evaluative determinism he believed had quagmired Marxist and nationalist literary critics; while de Kock praised the Comaroffs' ability to focus on the importance of seemingly trivial elements of cultural coding in identity formation

[2] Some critics, such as Bunn and Cornwell, more recently are showing signs of distancing themselves from some of the effects of 'post-colonialism'. Cornwell now remarks that 'this opaque and abstruse mode of analysis tends to reveal more about the self-absorbed cleverness of its practitioners ... than the way the real world works' (Cornwell 1996:7), while Bunn has recently come to concede that colonial discourse theory is 'a narrow hermeneutic tendency already falling out of favour'. He insists, though, on maintaining 'questions of the subject, of textuality, and of agency being advanced by post-structuralist theory'; believing that it is post-structuralism, rather than 'post-coloniality' (see Bunn 1994:24,31) that provides the basis for future theories of discursive production in South Africa.

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(see, for example, de Kock 1992b:46; 1994b:282). Critiques of the scientific certainties and appropriation of notions of 'truth' and 'rationality' and the unwavering application of binary conceptualisations by the West, accompanied by efforts to displace the 'autonomous subject of liberalism' (Attwell 1993a:33f) were made.

In their place, attention was paid to the ambivalences and hybrid identities of colonial subjects (as opposed to the inflexible binaries of collaboration/resistance they ascribed to Marxists' and nationalists' understanding of such subjectivity). Notions of the contingency of knowledge, of multiplicity, of social and expressive diversity and difference, of a cultural relativism undermining European authority and its narratives, were foregrounded. 'The problem of theorising South African space', Bunn (1992:34) commented, 'has to do with the fact that different types of subject inhabit the spatial matrix differently'. De Kock in turn condemned the

> relatively recent Western practice in which the experience of autochthonous people, and of the various layers in colonial situations, are unwittingly reappropriated ... in reductive forms of reference;

emphasising the 'bewilderingly multilingual, polyglot literary-cultural history' of the country and his determination to challenge the categories through which the colonial past had been appropriated, the better to look for 'insignificant others' (de Kock 1993a:46; 1993b:45; 1994b:285). In nearly all cases, the overt and covert violence accompanying the colonial enterprise in South Africa was highlighted.

It can quickly be seen that this new intellectual and scholastic endeavour has political consequences. Bunn (1994:28) is therefore quite accurate when he speaks of colonial discourse theory as a 'redeployment of poststructuralist methods with a particular political agenda in mind'. 'Post-coloniality', it is insisted, can and must marshall its resources to 'counter imperialistic strategies be they in the political, economic or cultural sphere' (Carusi 1989:81). At the same time, its connections with post-modernism allows it to formulate social criticism by drawing eclectically from appropriate strains of philosophical and political thought (Moffett 1993:12).

Nevertheless there are a number of factors which have cast doubt on the efficacy of local versions of this orientation, at least insofar as these have been applied by literary commentators and critics in South Africa. The general tendencies of this criticism can be isolated, despite denials by some of its users of any possibility of doing this—a convenient means to escape scrutiny of their basic premises[3].

[3] Witness Bunn's reply (to the historian Megan Vaughan) that orientalism (and presumably, the studies which flow from Said's example) is not a theory but the study of a pre-existing 'discursive matrix' (Bunn 1994:25), thus side stepping his own and others' theoretical proclivities by suggesting they are engaged in descriptive studies of what is 'already there' and incontrovertible; as well as de Kock's suggestion that the heterogeneity of 'post-colonial' approaches make any unitary label (and, one presumes, any general criticism) misleading (de Kock 1993a:45).

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A number of objections to these theories have already arisen from South Africanists: but as these issues are not the principal focus in what follows I will mention them only in passing. Current descriptions of 'post-coloniality', it is increasingly conceded, can paradoxically act to strengthen, rather than subvert, the power and visibility of the metropole: through *inter alia* its tendency to universalise and homogenise the structures and experiences of colonialism to a singular and ahistorical abstraction, inscribing all world history as the antecedent to, or the outcome of, a single issue (McClintock 1994:255; see also Chrisman 1995:206f). Among less adept critics there has also been a tendency to ignore the fact that anti-colonial organisations were jointly constitutive of the colonial reality that emerged, through their resistance to colonialism (Chrisman 1995:208). Even more damagingly, the uncertainty of knowing exactly how to periodise South Africa within a 'colonial/post-colonial' framework has been generally bypassed: there is disagreement as to exactly *when* South Africa can be said to have been decolonised (see the discussion in Visser 1997:81-83).

Moreover—and indeed this is also the case locally—there are increasing signs that the theories/descriptions of 'post-coloniality' are becoming a new academic orthodoxy of their own[4]. It is noticeable that the sense of 'newness' it both helped form and responded to often demonstrates a superficial understanding at best of what the local versions (in literary criticism) of the 'master narratives' it has sought to supplant were. It has also tended to stereotype the literary expression produced during the struggle period' as a literature obsessed with politics and oblivious of the quotidian experiences of its characters or its readers—a belief which usually relies on the authority of a handful of critics such as Ndebele, Sachs and Nkosi. Finally, the endorsement of *bricolage* by critics such as Bunn, Morphet and Moffett has allowed certain of them to accrete critical processes of argument, magpie-like, that are in the long run not so much contingent and multifaceted as eclectic and unwieldy[5].

[4] In this regard, for one who claims to foster a diversity of opinions and interpretations, Attwell is remarkably insistent in ensuring that a certain reading of his own work endures: chiding other critics for their 'misrepresentations' and lack of 'truly canny readings' (see for example Attwell 1995b:89,96).

[5] Attwell (1990a), de Kock (1993a; 1995), Cornwell (1993) and Moffett (1993) either express, or demonstrate, the kind of *melange* of theoretical inputs that seems to me eventually obfuscates their work. What is remarkable is the fact that most 'post-colonial' dismissals of their nationalist and Marxist forebears undertake no serious or detailed examination of the critical or literary expression of the 1970s and 1980s: a number of them simply refer the reader to the same source, an under-researched and sweeping Masters thesis (see Doherty 1989:171-185).

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The 'Special' Case of South Africa

However, many of these critics have apparently experienced an unease in applying their 'post-colonial' viewpoints in South Africa. In 1993 Attwell noted this, remarking that some felt that their situation was not being properly addressed by the new discourse of 'post-coloniality':

> The scepticism is part of a progressive political culture celebrating nonracial unity, in which analyses circulating around ethnic affiliations and notions of irreducible difference seem oddly reminiscent of apartheid's own binaries (Attwell 1993c:100).

Nevertheless it was Annemarie Carusi who, in two thoughtful articles, best expressed the problems local 'post-colonial' critics feel hinder them from wholeheartedly applying conceptualisations borrowed from the metropole. The issues she raises approximate those explored later by others such as de Kock and Attwell, despite minor disagreements between them.

Carusi worries about the contradictions that are generated when post-structuralist theories are applied to a 'politically charged' situation such as South Africa, where vast inequalities in discursive and socio-economic power are still intact. She notes that the emphasis on subjectivity in many post-colonial studies risks becoming trapped in humanist subjectivity: Western epistemic systems are so powerful that they snare the 'colonised body' into identifying 'its difference in terms of the imperialist's binaries', and thus into fruitless myths of origination and programmes of retrieval. The concepts post-structuralists have fed into 'post-coloniality' are useful, she avers, especially as regards their approaches to culture and identity and insistence on 'infinite pluralism or dispersions'; but she believes that an insistence on maintaining the 'self/other' binary at all costs[6] is eventually debilitating: particularly in its refusal to allow any degree of purposeful action or self-determination to the 'other', and its denial of any foundation for political transformation (Carusi 1989:87)[7].

Finally, while nationalist activists and proponents of 'post-' positions such as herself appear to have little in common, she suggests that a dialogue is necessary for the future development of both approaches. For her, 'post-colonialists' must inter-

[6] Noting the impossibility of breaking with Western systems of thought ('a closure we cannot undo'), Carusi reiterates that, in the paradigms she is using, the 'other' is 'by definition nothing in itself, but simply all that we project onto it, the repository of our desires' (Carusi 1989:89). See footnote 23.

[7] She mentions Spivak's well-known conundrum of 'subaltern agency' in this regard. It should be said in passing that neither Bunn nor de Kock agrees with her interpretation of Spivak.

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articulate with nationalism, to counter its reactionary cultural tendencies. In turn, in order to be useful for the political projects of postcoloniality, poststructuralists need to wean themselves from a preoccupation with the 'Unconscious', and involve themselves in the contestation between different discourses. Carusi sees hope in the fact that there is a discourse which 'revalorises the difference of Africa' co-existing with the more problematic affirmation of 'equality *via* sameness' in black South African nationalism. The former is amenable to critics such as herself, and should be engaged with. Rather than endless theorising, her goal is a socially-effective 'reconstructive programme' based on heterogeneity and difference in the country, which might hold the potential for 'real' transformation:

> ... post-structuralist anti-humanism may find its only possible path of development with a view to transformative effect in post-colonial context, where the colonised body becomes the subject of its own history and turns the table on the imperialism of that humanism by *appropriating* its positivism from the position of its own negativity and heterogeneity (sic.; Carusi 1989:92).

Similarly, in order to assist in changing the power structures and lingering structural inequalities present in South Africa, de Kock and Attwell are wary of 'disabling' themselves by only stressing 'ruptures' and the 'discontinuous' at the expense of the 'continuations' and 'identifications' present in the projects and self-perceptions of the previously colonised. De Kock reiterates Carusi's point:

> ... if post-structuralist logic were to teach that, regardless of relative agency (sic.) or historical, political and ethical considerations, any assertion of subjectivity in identarian terms was 'logocentric', 'essentialist' and unacceptable because it merely reversed Western binary procedure, then black political mobilisation, or any group mobilisation for that matter, would have to be regarded as inadmissible (de Kock 1993a:53).

Attwell mentions, and de Kock (using Squires) elaborates on, the possibility of making a distinction between what they call 'strong' and 'weak' othering; in order to dilute the incommensurability of 'self/other' positioning in the post-structuralist paradigms they otherwise find useful. Thus, they wish to render agency, and a recognition of the pressing reality of politico-cultural struggles in the country, possible: in his own words, de Kock wishes to

> distinguish a critical practice disabled by the inflections of binarity ... from the critical apprehension of colonial practice in which binarity is perceived as a strong feature (de Kock 1993a:47; see also 60f.; Attwell 1993c:100).

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Discourse and History

As part of their wish to enable the intervention and agency of those silenced by the discourses of the West and of apartheid (in some studies conceived of completely interchangeably, rather than examined in their specificities), few if any of the South African advocates of 'post-coloniality' are prepared to accept that human subjects are irretrievably bound by the prevailing (racial) binaries and discourses operative in South Africa. While all of them accept post-structuralism's claim that our understanding of the world is received *via* discourse, they use the term in a qualified manner. This means that they are at pains, at times, to suggest that there is a material world existing outside of human apperceptions of it. Both in his studies of J.M. Coetzee and in his own pronouncements, Attwell shows an interest in the question of the relationship of post-structuralism to history and historical discourse, using the term 'history' to denote 'reality, the Real, the datum of the individual and collective experience of the past'; a term 'always used in the as-if mode' (Attwell 1990a:95,128). He contends that prior critics like Dovey have considerably oversimplified the polarisation between 'those registering the claims of political resistance and historical representation ... and ... those responsive to postmodernism and poststructuralism' (Attwell 1993a:2). Bunn (1993:4,7), in his turn, examines how discourses 'accommodate' the material world of historical agency, and how this world 'enters' discourses.

As one aspect, they stress a preoccupation with the 'limitlessness' of a textuality that will allow 'discourses and life-stories' about the past and the present to proliferate. Attwell aligns himself with Lyotard's suggestion that contemporary knowledge has shifted from 'representation to narrative, with increasingly local and differentiated projects becoming the norm' (Attwell 1990b:79); while Bunn (1993:1) admits favouring discourse analysis' ability to demonstrate how objects change as their discursive context alters, the better to follow 'the dispersion of statements with a common subject across a variety of fields'.

All are particularly concerned with the means and manner in which a colonial discursive regime in South Africa, based on coercive regulation and the 'othering' of indigenous inhabitants, has operated in the field of textuality. All are aware that South Africa was, and continues to be, a site of 'symbolic struggle' and 'historical contestation', and all place considerable emphasis on how black subjects have had to 'negotiate their very identities' and recast colonial discourse in their own terms: a process whereby 'a discursive world was recreated and new loyalties, new laws of the individual subject forged ... accepted and resisted' (de Kock 1992b:47). They thus wish to study South African history via the interactions of colonizer and colonized (see Bunn 1993:5)[8].

[8] De Kock makes much the same point, but emphasises the cultural aspect of such contestation 'in terms of multilingual, multicultural contexts of representational convergence in social relationships at large' (de Kock 1994a:34).

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South African 'post-colonialists' therefore generally feel an urge to ground their notions of discursive production within historical contexts and ideological struggles. Bunn, who wishes to establish how competing discourses have been 'constitutive of subjects and subject-effects', is the most diligent in attempting to marry notions of hegemonic struggle, contradictory social relations and the articulation of social forces to more conventional aspects of discourse analysis. Characteristically, he cites the existence of 'historical contradiction' as an issue that should prompt cultural and literary analysis to eventually ask questions as to how discursive systems deal with, elide or refashion obtaining material conditions (see Bunn 1994:27,32f; 1993:13).

Yet all too often this results in an indecision as to how, precisely, the relationship between 'the real' and 'discourse' should be understood and dealt with. De Kock, for example, at times distances himself from the view 'that language does not refer at all' (de Kock 1995:70); while at others he collapses the 'distinction between the supposedly "factual" and the "fictional" in all verbal constructions', subscribing wholeheartedly to the 'very thrust of postmodernity, as I see it ... to cast doubt on the supposed objectivities found in the *inevitably* textual source' (de Kock 1992a:7,1; emphasis mine). Attwell (1993a:17; 1990b:79)[9], in his turn, fluctuates between noting that 'history is not available for direct representation', and making the far stronger claim that paradigmatic shifts in historical enquiry entirely account for new narrativisations—but always eventually, as Visser (1997:89) notes, subsuming his recognition of socio-political and economic considerations into discussions of 'discursive conditions'.

All of these 'post-colonial' critics and their less adept followers appear to subscribe to, and are inhibited in the scope of their analyses by, the post-structuralist 'linguistic fallacy' (the phrase is the critical realist philosopher Bhaskar's) that subsumes ontology immediately to epistemology; presuming, in other words, that all ontological statements must simply be epistemological statements. This collapsing results in a conviction that social being can be analysed solely in terms of our discourses and statements about being[10]. In its most extreme form, it leads to excessive claims such as Driver's, that reality '... is a social construct; we are what we read, we are the language we speak' (Driver 1992:464).

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[9] The influence of Thomas Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* on Attwell is obvious here (see Attwell 1990a:122).

[10] Bhaskar argues that 'the linguistic fallacy'; is a particular form of the 'epistemic fallacy' (the dogma that statements about being can always be analysed in terms of statements about our knowledge of being) foregrounded by the 'linguistic turn' among a number of twentieth-century Western philosophers, such as Derrida, Rorty and others (for his counter-arguments, see *inter alia* Bhaskar 1994:46-53,47,51).

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On the contrary, one may argue that:

> The issue is not the possibility/impossibility of a 'pure' or pre-discursive access to objects, but what criteria of 'truthfulness' are suitable for which forms of representation and for what purposes, and how they are related to those forms of *extra*-discursive determinacy which impose themselves upon us practically, as limits, in all our dealings with the world (Osborne 1991:208)[11].

Notwithstanding the desire of Attwell, Carusi *et al* to allow the 'real' to irrupt into their analyses, it can be seen that they ultimately remain wedded to the linguistic fallacy, and thus cannot but shuttle uncertainly between wishing to ascribe an (African) human agency that can act within history on the one hand, and perceiving such agency to be overdetermined by the hegemonic discursive formulations of Europe and its binaries on the other. The desire to maintain at least some aspect of black subjectivity free from the overweening discourses of colonialism leads often to debatable conclusions. For example, while de Kock has a pertinent point when he suggests that for individuals such as the nineteenth-century African convert Tiyo Soga (faced with stereotyping missionary discourses which made him 'a textually objectified figure') the only way 'to begin escaping crude representations of the self was through the assertion of counter-narrative' (de Kock 1994a:45; 1995:76), there appear to be problems with his conceptualisations of what resources Soga had to deal with his own ambivalence. He eventually constructs Soga as attempting to resist 'this public, textually-constituted persona' with a 'more ambivalent, private sense of self' (de Kock 1994a:45). How far such a presumption about privatised subjectivity aligns itself with, or differs from, Western and/or colonial subjectivity is never addressed. Thus, the notion that a private, authentic selfhood is potentially a means of differentiation and self-articulation to overdetermining colonial discourses seems to refashion black identity in terms familiar to liberal humanism, which sits ill with the post-structuralist cast of the rest of de Kock's argument. However, as we shall see, it is typical for local 'post-colonial' critics to slip back into notions of authenticity when dealing with issues of black agency.

De Kock finally seems to believe that post-structuralist theory is important when it comes to analysing the coloniser, but that more traditional notions of agency will serve the colonised:

[11] Lazarus (1991:123) is also pertinent here: '... it is one thing to suggest that the analytical methods of structural linguistics are relevant to the analysis of human practice in general because human practice is a meaning-bearing practice .... But it is quite another ... to argue that because it can be considered under the rubric of language, human practice is itself linguistic, having no substance or materiality independent of its linguisticality'.

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> ... one is free to take from 'Post' theories as much as one needs to 'liquefy' oppressive representational procedures, and redeploy them in a decidedly *political* context of counter-narrative (de Kock 1995:69)[12].

This appears to be a standpoint also held by Attwell and (reluctantly) by Carusi, in her suggestion (quoted above) that post-structuralists wishing to become active agents will need to appropriate aspects of humanism and positivism. Theoretically speaking, this is an untenable position[13].

It must be said that an emphasis on history as the outcome of the contestation of opposing structures of discourse (belonging to coloniser and colonised) can focus on the violence and overweening logic of colonial conquest in a useful way. However, if overplayed, it may result in a tendency to interpret all the nuances of South African history simply and immediately as a reflection of contending discourses. It is striking how quickly this transmogrifies, among 'post-colonial' critics, into an assumption that the 'clash of cultures' (racially conceived) is the single most important motor of this history. Attwell and de Kock's liking for 'transformative moments', 'moments of departure' and the early Cape frontier is indicative of this implicit assumption. The frontier in particular is seen as important due to its 'signifying dimensions' and 'totemic' figures (de Kock 1993b:50; 1994a:35); a locale where black and white may be shown to face each other in their original, historical, and simultaneously symbolic, configurations: a seminal contact zone 'in the history of cultural contestation in South Africa ... where forms of knowledge and identity were contested' (de Kock 1992a:6; 1992b:39; see also 1994a:34). All historical shifts in allegiance, identity and motive simply become subservient to this squaring-up between so-called 'autochthonous' communities on the one hand, and the bearers of the scourge of the European Enlightenment on the other.

The acceptance of the frontier as a trope of historical signification can quickly be taken to an extreme—where historical analyses becomes little more than the tracing of 'coloniser' and 'colonised' in their various mutually antagonistic configurations throughout history. This tendency is manifest in de Kock's 1991 description of con-

[12] Eventually de Kock seems to find resolution in a structure/agency formulation that simply reiterates the concerns of the Althusser-Thompson debates as they were played out in South African academies in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

[13] See Visser's (1997:3-15) critique of de Kock in this regard. De Kock's (1995) attempt to resolve the 'discourse/history' conundrum means that he subscribes to practically all the misconceptions (both of 'discourse' and of the way in which 'history' is understood) that Bhaskar discusses with regard to users of the 'epistemic fallacy' (see the discussion in Collier 1994:76-106).

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temporaneous political events as an exhibition of South Africa's 'frontier consciousness to efface the truth' (de Kock 1992c:30). In the process of such generalisations, previous demonstrations that the postulation of a 'frontier tradition' as the basic model for hardening racial polarities and attitudes in South Africa was an ideological construct of liberal historiographers are completely overlooked[14].

Such an approach to history, where 'otherness' becomes a universal trope suppressing details of cultural facticity, allegorises history (Suleri 1992:13). The delight with which 'post-colonial' studies (influenced by post-structuralism or New Historicism) seize upon a single incident, anecdote or figure as emblematic of wider historical processes, modes of behaviour and cultural codes—while at times instructive—begins to exhibit a recurring slippage from the particular to the general, so that glibly generalised historical claims are put forward merely from the discussion of a single event, example, text, personage, or poem[15].

Such relative disinterest in painstaking historical research or in trying to contextualise their models is ultimately damaging. This is especially the case in Carusi and more textually-bound critics with 'post-colonial' predilections; but, in my view, only the work of Bunn does not systematically fall prey to this pattern. Attwell's discussions of context, for example, are characteristically hasty and sweeping; and, in his more recent work, display a regrettable trend to build edifices of interpretation on the subjunctive mood and conjecture[16].

Culture, Identity and 'Competing Discourses'

The 'post-colonial' framework is perceived as especially useful in the recognition of the desire of a colonised or subjugated people for an identity and for self-determination (Carusi 1989:80). Its advocates evince a desire to allow groups oppressed by colonialism (and, more recently, by the enormous socio-economic and cultural inequalities prevalent in South Africa in the aftermath of 1990), self-expression and

[14] See Legassick 1980. Despite the suggestion by de Kock that the English-speaking missionaries on the Cape frontier were as much to blame for these attitudes as the 'isolated Trekboers' cited by liberal historians, the generalising effect remains the same. In relation to the impetus of 'post-colonial' historians such as the Comaroffs to do much the same thing, see de Bruyn 1994.

[15] See the discussion of this tendency in Loomba (1991:172); and Norris' (1994:121f) critique of the post-structuralist treatment of different discourses—in particular the scientific and the poetic-metaphorical—as relative and equally valid in an epistemological sense.

[16] See, for instance, his discussion of the political and intellectual currents of the 1970s (Attwell 1993a:27-32), and his more recent study of Tiyo Soga.

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agency in their own terms. Bunn, for example, shows an admiration for scholarship that is 'scrupulous in deploying ideas of authorship and agency at work within a contested symbolic field'; and places emphasis on 'indigenous meanings' and 'African agency'; moreover believing that colonial discourse theory has significance because it 'marks the point at which radical intellectuals attempted to intervene to change the flow of theory from metropole to periphery' (Bunn 1994:28,29).

It cannot be denied that such approaches can be enormously productive—although it is equally obvious that one need not necessarily only deploy them in terms of the demands of post-structuralist theories. Yet what is immediately apparent is the degree to which local advocates of 'post-coloniality' in the literary sphere tie any examination of a subject's identity to that of their culture. Cultural differences are, without doubt, seen as the basic matrices of 'othering' and 'difference' in the country: and the divide between white and black cultures exercises most of their attention.

While most of the theorists here examined would critique essentialist understandings of culture (see for instance Cornwell 1993:49), they persist in reiterating notions of race and ethnicity as culturally pre-eminent terms in South Africa. This simply mirrors a similar preoccupation with these forms of identity in official pronouncements since 1990. Even as ANC MP Yunus Carrim, for example, argues that racial issues will diminish in importance over time in South Africa, he stresses that ethnic identities will remain resilient (and problematic) in a de-racialised social arena. Furthermore, ethnic identity is encouraged provided that it does not become political (*sic.*) and therefore irreconcilable with national identity (Carrim 1995; see also Edmunds 1996).

The effect is to maintain the binary oppositions of race and culture at the same time as they are being prepared, we are told, for deconstruction. For 'post-colonial' scholars the Eastern Cape Frontier is again a frequently cited model. When de Kock, for instance, wants to make a politically-charged point about the 'myriad determinations' and social configurations on the Eastern Cape Frontier, it returns to being that place where, in simple terms, European 'cultural agents' and 'autochthonous Africans' battled it out over the 'nature of reality, proper forms of social life, and the highest questions of morality, religion and philosophy' (de Kock 1992b:39)[17]. Attwell's generalised statement about contemporary South Africa also evinces this drift:

[17] I do not wish to deny that such oppositions might be more starkly visible on the frontier: merely that it is debilitating to transmit a frontier stereotype to all aspects of subsequent history. A general lack of discussion, ignorance and romanticisation about pre-colonial societies and oral literature by Attwell, de Kock and Carusi is noticeable; they seem disinterested in discerning any of the prior socio-cultural reconceptions Africans might have brought to this encounter; and most focus on the way in which mission-trained literate African subjects are (ambiguously) determined by an overwhelming colonial discourse.

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> South Africa continues to be seen as a crucible wherein any of the questions being addressed elsewhere burn with unusual intensity. As Homi Bhabha puts it .... 'Both at the political level and in terms of fictional writing, South Africa represents, in ... an acute and tragic and problematic way, the opportunity to actually see transformative elements at work in the construction of a new historic destiny, where the question of race and cultural difference is foregrounded' (Attwell 1993b:2).

At the same time, the assault on Marxism by such critics is an attempt to relativise the notion of class (which is seen as hegemonic in South African literary studies of Marxist orientation in the previous decade and a half) to 'one agency among others' (Visser 1997:88). The effect of this, as one scans Attwell's work in particular, is not simply that of one inflexible emphasis being downgraded so that other matrices of identity and determination might be allowed to emerge into view. On the contrary, as Visser remarks, it is possible to ascertain

> what an insistent valorising of race enables adherents of ... postcolonial theory to highlight ... and what leave occluded. As Attwell makes clear throughout his book on Coetzee, an emphasis on race accords with a focus on the relation of literature to intellectual and cultural pursuits and what he calls 'the discursive conditions obtaining in South Africa', rather than, say, the relation of literature to political currents or social relations or material conditions within society (Visser 1997:89).

One of the effects of reducing class to an agency, for instance, is that the linkages of class-identifications to questions of structure disappear. Thus, 'labour' becomes simply another identity (see for example Farred 1992), rather than the basis for the appropriation of surplus value under capitalism that Marxists have always emphasised it—I believe correctly—to be. Cultural identifications and struggles are consequently easily perceived as existing and interacting as 'free-floating events' *outside* of the economy (Dirlik 1994:346; Katz 1995/1996:42).

The refusal of any degree of determinism, especially 'economic determinism', by local 'post-colonial' critics has resulted in an overpowering silence when it comes to an examination of the structural determinants of cultures and identities. There is a noticeable absence of any detailed attempts to link the cultural and experiential aspects of human existence to the economic and political background in which they are implicated. As Sarkar notes, this results in power itself becoming an oddly abstracted and disembodied concept, for all the constant harping on inequalities within South Africa[18].

[18] '... any effort to explore connections with socio-economic processes is thought to be tainted with the sins of reductionism and teleology. What began as a legitimate turning-away from the crude determinisms of "official" Marxism has degenerated in academic common-sense into a suspicion-cum-contempt for anything economic—as if reductionism cannot be "cultural" or "political", too' (Sarkar 1994:209).

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Literary studies in the 'new South Africa' thus spawn themselves in a cloud-cuckoo world innocent of transnational corporations, global movements of finance and labour, unequal and combined development, transnationalisation of production (simultaneously 'the source of unprecedented global unity and ... fragmentation', Dirlik 1994:349), the exportation of Western technologies and post-Fordist techniques of production (and intermingling of these with existing Fordist techniques in many 'third world' countries), the interpenetration of the local and the global, and so on—the very world which, it has been argued, gave birth to the 'post-colonial intellectual' in the first place (for a fuller discussion, see Dirlik 1994:348-356 and Miyoshi 1993:728-750).

This is particularly debilitating when one considers that (according to a recent study by the South African Labour Development Research Unit) the most pressing constraints on daily experience in South Africa since 1994 have been economic. It is dissatisfaction with their material circumstances—lack of jobs, housing and basic amenities—that are highest on the list of priorities of the vast majority of black South Africans at present (see Bulbring 1995). In this harsh economic climate, with falling domestic investment, reduced inflows of foreign capital, the fall of the rand and a continuing dependency on primary commodities, this trend is unlikely to reverse itself: particularly as the country is still economically hugely delimited by the 'ethnically-delineated, conglomerate-dominated corporate structure' (Mokoena 1996) of its apartheid past.

'Post-colonialists' suppose that, because the racist, falsely universalised ideologies of the European Enlightenment were transported to the rest of the world on the back of capitalist expansion, a critique of Eurocentric 'rationality' and binaries necessarily also infer a critique of capitalism. On the contrary, an ungrounded focusing on discourse in these terms may actually divert attention away from problems of inequality, provided such inequality is carried out by culturally/discursively 'authentic' local elites (Dirlik 1994:347,353).

Moreover, this emphasis on race and culture is typically aligned with assumptions that social 'truth' is culturally-bound and consensualist. To stress that all knowledge-constructions and beliefs are equally valid in their own cultural or experiential lights is dear to the hearts of local 'post-colonial' critics.

In addition, these critics have a characteristic way of linking individuals with larger cultural collectives, and these collectives with society as a whole. Individual agency is expressed by a performative, reiterated constituting of self-identity and compulsions[19]; while social groups become active agents when an amalgamation of indi-

[19] 'Performative acts' is a key term of Attwell's in this regard. For a critique of notions that 'truth' is 'a rhetorical activity ... defined in performative (not constantive) terms', see Norris 1995:122.

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viduals coalesce around their pressing identities and experiences in order to participate within wider political contestations.

The impress of the 'linguistic turn' of post-structuralism is also evident here. While the recognition that 'our beliefs are socially produced, transient and fallible' is non-contestable, this understanding is elided with the more debatable assumption that 'all beliefs are equally valid in the sense that there are no rational grounds for preferring one to another' (Bhaskar, quoted in Collier 1994:90). Such a relativist notion assimilates truth to the shifting currencies of consensus belief—products of localised knowledge whose origin should be sought in the socio-biological histories, cultural contexts or 'language games' of those who hold them (for a critique, see Norris 1995:109,111,120-122).

In South Africa, where competing discourses and world views are first and foremost identified as racial, such individual or group agency and self-expression is often presumed to be underlaid with cultural/racial knowledge. In other words, identity becomes viewed as a precursor to knowledge. For a white critic like Attwell, it follows that progressive intellectual practice on the part of the individual critic is *inter alia* to stress the racial distinctiveness of the practices and beliefs of African agents and—because it is presumptuous for people such as himself to mount any critique of black agency at all—tracing the paths of the narratives of self-expression replaces any concern with their evaluation[20]. Description replaces interpretation or explanation as the major task of theoretical endeavour by the extra-cultural critic (see the discussion in Katz 1995/1996:40).

While it is obviously valid to say that all people, individually or constituted within groups, have an experiential sense of self and identity, self-held notions of 'experience' and 'identity' do not always contain within themselves the conditions of their own intelligibility. It is precisely these notions which need to be understood and explained, both by intra-cultural and extra-cultural critics. Equally, experiences of oppression by members of any cultural grouping do not necessarily result in a shared identity without forms of ideological work; nor is oppression experienced equally, and in the same form, by such members. This is as true of black and white South Africans as any other social grouping.

In the face of such deficiencies in analytical scope, 'post-colonial' literary studies in South Africa have become trapped in an overweening culturalism. At worst, the reduction of 'material effects' to discourse by more conservative 'post-colonial' crit-

[20] An important part of Attwell's project is a shift away from issues of 'representation' and an insistence on the re-description 'of narrativity and its relationship to other discourses' (Attwell 1993a:13). In line with this, he dislikes symptomatic reading, 'which must literally involve a put-down, a putting-down in history' (Attwell 1995b:90).

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ics such as Cornwell simply removes from purview altogether any notion of material inequalities deeper than discourse. Even Bunn and Attwell, who do at least perceive that any understanding of the local cannot be maintained without a consideration of the political and economic implications of global capitalism (see especially Attwell 1993b:2), offer up little or no scrutiny or discussion of the effects of global capitalism, or capitalist expansionism in colonial times. There is little discernible sense of the processes and structures of the political or economic or how these link to, or interact with, the focus of their studies. On Attwell's part, there are merely asides: his references to South African history are brief thumbnail sketches focusing mainly on discursive fluctuations, which use discrete texts as motors for historical explanation (see, for example, Attwell 1990a:121-126; 1993a:20,26-32; 1993b:4; 1995b:92). In de Kock, there is little examination as to how missionary discourses interact with, or are changed by, shifts in colonial State structures or policies; while Bunn (1992:27,28,32f; 1993:11) mentions factors such as 'productive needs' and 'relations of production' in a cursory fashion. Indeed, the latter's mobilisation of the concept of 'material culture' can, on closer study, be seen to bear the anthropological meaning of the term—it appears, in fact, to be referenced to cultural artefacts only—while 'value', to him, is always glossed as cultural or symbolic value (see Bunn 1993:2,9; 1992:7). Thus, on closer scrutiny, the 'extradiscursive connections' he refers to are overwhelmingly contained within the cultural, ideological, and/or textual domains[21]. The fact that he is unable, or disinterested, in tracing or exemplifying the connections of his models of textuality to material conditions results, ironically enough, in the reader being able to presume a mere reflective connection between them which Bunn would certainly want to disown. Here, the project of cultural 're-description' taken on by Attwell *et al* begins to look particularly forlorn, given his and others' inattention to the causes of economic and political inequalities, or how these are to be addressed.

Multiculturalism and Transculturation as National Assets

As Sitas (1995:18) has noted, it is difficult if not impossible for general theories of race, class, gender or ethnicity to 'capture the processes of identity formation and the structures of feeling that propel (people) to act'. Such an understanding is, indeed, one of the important recognitions of 'post-colonial' thinkers as well, and validates at least

[21] To him, for instance, to study the book 'as a discursive event characterised mainly by certain forms of tropological insistence ... is to miss [its] point ... as an aspect of culture, circulating within a regime of value dependent both on metropolitan class association and core-periphery systems of knowledge transmission' (Bunn 1993:9).

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some of the challenge they have mounted against the often routine manner in which nationalist and Marxist epistemologies were applied in South African literary studies before them.

It has already been suggested that the fixation on race by 'post-colonialists' dilutes their simultaneous insistence that there is a near-infinite diversity, difference and dispersal of identities in South Africa, and multiple differences among and within its racial groups. For, while 'post-colonial' theory in South Africa can be said to emphasise culture and race without showing much interest in their material determinations, this does not mean that an emphasis on race as an original and authentic means of self-identification is accepted. Far from it: in the wider context of post-1990 national reconstruction, South Africa is perceived as a multicultural society.

Here, 'post-colonial' critics labour to articulate a project which will allow commensurate and fulfilling freedoms for all its people, especially previously dominated groups and individuals. The goal of democracy, in these terms, is a proliferation of sites of difference and different speaking positions. Consequently, Attwell (1995a:23) critiques ideas of a uniform and stereotyping Africinity, and highlights questions of 'cultural translation, the analysis of relocations, transformations, and appropriations'; and Miki Flockemann (1993:206) suggests that the

> articulation of gender, race and class in the South African context points to a discourse in which non-hierarchical accommodation of difference could serve as a point of departure for a restructured society.

Indeed, such emphasis can be taken to extreme levels: where difference, ambivalence and hybridity themselves are seen as more authentic forms of identification. Thus Cornwell's (1993:50) belief that Bhabha's notion of hybridity can:

> ... provide the native with a voice that speaks authentically for the (culturally hybridised, parodic) self, asserting simultaneously both similarity and difference[22].

The more radical of these critics stress the subversive potential of difference, even within a post-1990 scenario. Carusi notes that 'otherness' and 'difference' can act as rallying points for resistance to any political *status quo* (Carusi 1993:232); while Grant Farred focuses on cultural politics as a continuing terrain of struggle after 1990. From his position to the left of the ANC, he insists on the diversity of even South Africa's black majority; stressing that

[22] Therefore 'hybridity' solidifies, paradoxically, both as a theoretical term and state of social being, into the signifier of a more authentic position (for a critique, see Ahmad 1995); while identity-through-difference is itself essentialized (Dirlik 1994:346).

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> difference—cultural, political and ideological—may be all that stands between the masses of exploited black South Africans and the ... unholy triumvirate ... of a newly embourgeoised and entrepeneurial black middle class, the white upper and middle classes, and multinational capitalism;

adding that the disparate and disjunctive cultural identities of the country can be utilised by women, community activists and the like 'to give voice to political and ideological differences' (Farred 1992:224)[23].

However, such an insistence on a continuing 'struggle against positionalities' (the term is Stuart Hall's) is the exception rather than the rule. There is a more benign version of multiculturalism voiced by 'post-colonial' thinkers, who are increasingly drawn towards affirming the political goals of national reconstruction and the building of a new national dispensation. Cornwell believes that an inclusive and egalitarian future will require national unity to be thought of in what he calls 'other' terms (Cornwell 1993:51)[24]. Attwell (1993a:24) addresses issues of legitimacy, authority and positioning through his discussions of agency in order to insist on an agency which interacts with, and critiques, questions of nationhood—of 'finding ... a place for one's own particular story within the framework of the broader, national narrative'. Even critics who see themselves as occupying a more radical and critical position perceive the nation as the broad delimiter of their scope. Farred therefore advocates the articulation of differences within the framework of national identity and reconstruction (Farred 1992:218), and Jean-Philippe Wade delineates the business of literary studies in a future South Africa as:

> ... a microcosm of the democratic nation seen ... as an 'articulation of differences'. The 'totality' or 'unity' is articulated—constructed, provisional, mutable, indeterminate, resistant to closure—to separate it from any suggestion of an essential unity grounded in some transcendental signified, and it is a 'totality' made up of irreducible 'differences'—that multiplicity of voices which make up our national terrain (Wade 1996:239).

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[23] It is this version, I would argue, that tends to emerge from 'post-colonial' intellectuals using deconstructive or rigorously post-structuralist paradigms, such as Carusi: what distinguishes her from other critics under discussion here is her insistence that the 'margin' denotes a negative discourse of limits, rather than a place where 'other' cultures can emerge to enjoy their due degree of respect, recognition and (in Taylor's words) the 'chance to be themselves unimpeded'. For an interesting (if eventually inconclusive) discussion of the similarities and differences between 'orthodox' multiculturalism and 'post-colonial' approaches, see Seshadri-Crooks 1995.

[24] Transculturation will allow black and white in South Africa to struggle towards a 'new national identity ... in the ... recognition of a buried historical mutuality, through an archeology of contagion which displaces the discourse of colonialism' (Cornwell 1993:51).

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Attwell is most vocal about this. It is within the context of contemporary South Africa's 'nation-in-waiting', this 'grand anomaly' seeking solutions from 'enlightenment ad hocery' that his enthusiasm for 'transculturation' and 'transformative moments' becomes explicable (Attwell 1993b:4). In a public address in 1994, he used the exemplary ambivalence of placement and self-identification of (once again) Soga to suggest that this gave people such as Soga the potential to marshall the values of Western humanism that the West - due to its colonizing urge - had dishonoured in practice. Such a transforming and reconstruction of Enlightenment ideals contained a seed which, Attwell believes, might still bear fruit in a post-1990 South Africa: with a new South African Constitution that simultaneously allows a universalist discourse of rights and respects the meaning of difference[25].

For Attwell, clearly, transculturation and the ambivalent and fractured nature of identity are elevated to preferred political status, and this amounts to more than the scholarly observation that we all muddle along as bearers of multiple and shifting identities. Despite the prevalence of group identifications of race and class in South African history, what he in actual fact discerns in South Africa is a history of transculturated, agglomerated and hybrid identities; giving rise to a local version of African nationalism which, through its post-1990 'mission boy constitution' (the phrase is Rian Malan's) allows the space for hope. Like Attwell, de Kock gives voice to a general belief that Enlightenment notions such as 'liberty', 'justice' and 'equality' can be recuperated and articulated by the colonial subject afresh in post-colonial contexts (de Kock 1993a:60). Thus, somewhat oddly, their version of post-structuralism is harnessed to an advocacy of a 'Rainbow Nation' constitutionalism that has been underwritten by the historical accretions of an educated black middle class[26].

Formulations such as these are more similar than they may at first appear to official Government perceptions of the intercultural and political tasks they face on a national level. In less abstract terms, Attwell's terrain is nothing less than the demo-

[25] These points were made in an inaugural lecture to a Professorship at the University of Natal (Pietermaritzburg) by Attwell on 12 October 1994. Although this address has since been published by the English Department of that University, entitled 'The Exemplary Case of the Rev. Tiyo Soga, African Nationalist', Attwell has refused the author permission to quote from it, citing as his reasons inter alia that it 'was written in the months following elections. It does not take much sagacity to see that the political reality has changed' (personal communication, 25 October 1996).

[26] One can add that it is precisely at this point that both these critics part company with their otherwise flaunted use of deconstructive and post-structuralist philosophers. For a pertinent warning as to how an acceptance of formal equality before the law in different versions of constitutionalism can serve to divert attention away from continuing socio-economic exploitation, structural violence and *de facto* exclusions from constitutional purview, see Johnson 1996.

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cratic, celebratory realm of the 'Rainbow Nation'—that geographical-cum-spiritual locale where we all struggle for equal freedoms and nobody loses—that the South African media and politicians insist we at present occupy[27]. 'The challenge before our new democracy' remarks Carrim,

> is to provide the space for people to express their multiple identities in a way that fosters the evolution of a South African national identity (Carrim 1995).

The country becomes a place where the 'other' is allowed to speak; where a multitude of voices can be heard interacting in a new spirit of democracy.

While it is obvious that a democratic South Africa requires a broadly representative and diverse democracy, it is pertinent to note that there is a burgeoning of interpretations of democracy by the media and the new elite which emphasises the commercial potentialities in this trope of interacting and empathetic cultures. It is significant, for instance, how quickly the traditional African quality of *ubuntu* (humaneness/generosity/respect) has been harnessed as a more benign, culturally sensitive technique of business management. For, as a senior black manager of an insurance company suggests, *ubuntu* in the workplace allows her to interact with every member of her staff and 'acknowledge their being':

> ... bridging the racial and cultural gaps ... doesn't mean getting into a melting pot and becoming one ... cultural empathy is about acknowledging differences, even if we don't necessarily understand them .... This does not exclude holding them accountable for their productivity and performance at work ... (and knowing) what is happening with them as people, because if I don't get in touch with that I won't know what demotivates them (Maud 1995)[28].

[27] It is interesting to note that it is in his cautious acceptance of the 'Rainbow Nation' that Attwell most markedly differs from John Coetzee. For a sharply critical response to 'Rainbow Nation' constructions, see Coetzee 1995.

[28] *Ubuntu*, the values of which is 'something we can all share so that we can all be truly at home ... we can all be *ubuntu* people—people who make generosity of spirit and action a cornerstone of their lives' (Prozesky 1996) is hereby transmuted into a means of 'intercultural communication' to 'make the rainbow nation work' by appropriate management techniques—as in a recent advertisement from the University of the Witwatersrand Business School ('Match your individual management style and the culture of your organisation to the changing society and business environment'). For, as a representative of the Black Management Forum has recently said during a television debate, 'By merely saying hello to your gardener you are practising the principle of *ubuntu*' (TV1 Agenda Programme, 20/8/95). (See also Lovemore Mbigi's book *Ubuntu: the Spirit of African Transformation Management* (Knowledge Resources, Johannesburg, 1995).

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Ongoing co-operation between major role-players in the country is continually motivated for as being in the national interest, even as a number of issues now loom which show the irreconcilable interests of some interest groups. As big business and labour increasingly come into conflict due to their wide divergence of opinion on matters such as fiscal policy, job creation strategies, and the privatisation of public assets, clashes between the two are mourned by the media as a 'time warp ... back to the eighties' (Seery 1996; see also Dumisa 1996).

A Mutual Support of Difference: the Role of Alliances

In line with the redefinition of 'politics' by post-modernists in the metropole, local critics scrutinise the political sphere in South Africa in order to highlight the resistance of the individual subject or dominated groups to modes of domination—especially discursive—perpetuated by the dominant forces in society. Since 'discourse' in post-structuralist studies is perceived as the medium of all social identities and struggles, claiming an identity on the basis of a specific experience of oppression is seen as the ground for a totally new type of politics; where an affirmation and validation of notions of 'difference' is calculated as equally, if not more, important than locating these interests and identities within the socio-economic configurations of society (Osborne 1991:216). 'Democracy' becomes an all-embracing term signifying all emancipatory practices.

The infinite dispersions of identity and affiliation of 'post-colonial' practice therefore renders it (in its own view) not only a way to ensconce democracy, but also a means whereby self-expressive and—articulating groups can be mobilised into shifting sites of resistance to oppressive practices and systems, without coagulating into 'master-narratives' themselves. As Katz notes (1995/1996:48), what is brought into play is

> a kind of pluralist politics based upon the self-referentiality of any specific political practice and the contingency of articulations which connect one kind of practice to another.

In terms of both individuals and social groups, meaningful political interventions are seen as possible through the fluid formation and re-formation of contingent alliances. Cultural difference becomes a specific means to found fleeting coalitions. The basis for this idea of politics is that of an affinity which respects the differences among the constituent groups of the alliance (Farred 1992:231); thus, they can never be fully or finally constituted and are open to re-articulation and renegotiation. Specific issues will act as an impetus for individuals and groups to coalesce spontaneously 'out of a sense of urgency' (Moffett 1993:13).

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While few local advocates of 'post-coloniality' have thoroughly examined how these interactions will escape the level of (in Coronil's term) disjointed mininarratives, or how they will manage change within the wider body politic, a few have assayed opinions. These range from Helen Moffett's belief that each particular political issue/ conflict should be treated *ad hoc* and *sui generis*, to Attwell's sharper sense that there are discursive-historical issues which help form the particular way in which such conflicts articulate themselves; and his awareness that an emphasis on multicultural alliances does not *a priori* offer a radical content or purpose to such struggles[29].

The problems with such a conceptualisation of politics are multiple. At worst, such a notion of politics blurs the:

> ... historically produced structurality of the social system, casting the more or less intractable objectivity of its different instances as a fluid arrangement of exchangeable signifiers ... politics becomes a matter of discursive articulation (Lazarus 1991:127).

Even the most ardent disciple of incommensurability cannot, however, deny that there are some socio-political inequalities and cultural demands more pressing than others right now—the claims of Volkstaters do not seem equal to the enormous problems faced by 'Bushmen', for example. So, in practice, South African proponents of 'post-coloniality' do seem to accept implicitly that there are a 'hierarchy of oppressions' to be addressed, at least in some areas. But in this regard, again, the race-ethnicity axis predominates at the expense of other forms of consciousness and interest.

In practice, furthermore, this approach contains a number of problems in the way it conceptualizes the attainment of a democratic society. Firstly, with the broad exception of some critics working in the field of gender studies, there has been little examination (past hasty *caveats*) of the ways in which subordinated communities contain their own divergent viewpoints, divisions of interest or hierarchies of privilege. Secondly, while the stressing of 'small acts of subversion' appears useful in understanding nodes of human agency outside of a binary of passive acceptance or militant revolution, the notion of social change that accompanies this viewpoint tends to be merely ameliorative (see, for instance, Bhabha in conversation with Attwell in Attwell 1993b:112-3). Thirdly, little attention is paid to the ways in which the structural interests and imperatives that impel one dominated group into action may impinge upon or

[29] See also the dismissal, by the Chicago Cultural Studies Group (of which Bunn was a member), of what they call the 'Benetton effect' of 'corporate multiculturalism' (Chicago Cultural Studies Group 1992:532).

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force this group into a situation of conflict with others[30].

Here again, the concerns of 'post-colonial' scholars do not seem to pose a significant challenge to more mainstream Government attitudes; because it seems unreasonable, in a scenario of pressing national reconstruction, for local 'post-colonial' scholars not to bridle their notions of difference and subversion to a regimen of compromise and communication. Differences are articulated and accommodated within a national framework which promises, through its political and educational organs, 'to encourage a critical attitude and ... respect (of) other people's opinions' (Johnson 1994:81); but stops short of describing how such contingent and fleeting alliances can meaningfully confront South Africa's position within the circuit of global capitalism and its commercial and consumerist imperatives.

Post-modern thought seeks to prevent the 'imposition' of one interest group's truths on others; but advocates 'conversation' (the term is Rorty's) between them. Locally, in more conservative 'post-colonial' formulations, a notion of benign, diverse multiculturalism within the nation is affirmed which is always and only renegotiated in terms of respect and mutuality. Conflicts are simply seen as breakdowns in 'communication' between social groupings. In more radical departures, cultural differences are seen as potential sites for intervention and redeployment within a chain of alliances opposing the dominant hegemony. Both these positions, however, allow for a pluralism which can be accommodated within the politics of reform[31]. Inequalities are regarded as open to redistributive mechanisms and negotiated settlements are addressed, but not (for instance) South Africa's commitment to 'the logic of the market', or its position as a sub-imperial power within Southern Africa. Acknowledgements of irresoluble social conflicts, disruptions and contradictions blur into invisibility (Parry 1994:6,12)[32].

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[30] 'In a world of identity politics, mobilisation by the Other is always a provocation' (Pixen 1995:113).

[31] Rouse points out that such a version of multiculturalism is compelled to exist in a relationship of complementary opposition with 'single culture/identity nationalism': 'Always offering at least the illusion of significant choice, they have seemed to fully exhaust the field of imaginable alternatives and, in doing so, they have endowed their commonalities (their emphases on bourgeois class positions, nationalism, and educational and political reform) with a powerfully constraining force' (quoted in Seshadri-Crooks 1995:52).

[32] Consequently, while demands for epistemological self-criticism and revision (alongside a recognition of the potential validity of other positions and viewpoints) is part of the scholarly process and is crucial to that process, it is simply presumed that such an impulse, based on reciprocity and constant self-scrutiny, can be extended to the sphere of politics. This is both an arrogant and limited perspective and only likely to prevail, it can be argued, in an intellectual elite.

Negotiation is seen as the means whereby conflict between interest groups can be managed and alleviated. Faced with the violent confrontations of the past, 'post-colonialists' promise a continuing negotiation within, and between, identities and interests:

> In this context, it is hard to conceive of a notion more revolutionary and liberatory than that of negotiation ... not primarily in the sense of a political initiative (although the political is of course never absent), but as rubric for another discursive possibility embedded in the cultural realities of South Africa which is in dire need of recognition and embrace (Cornwell 1993:46).

Stressing contestability rather than contestation, transaction rather than conflict, acquiescence is secured for a slow and managed transformation of society; where everything can be questioned and negotiated except the underlying foundations of South Africa's political institutions and economic orientation.

As Prasad (1992:44) notes in a different context, such a position can at the same time appear to endorse positions that are antagonistic to the dominant order and protect the dominant order by claiming it is simply one position amongst others. Although I am sure that many of the literary critics cited here would deny their involvement in such a politics, their emphasis on culture, self-expression and 'historical contingencies' to the exclusion of 'foundational' issues—such as the connection of cultural identities and forms of expression to material interests and wider ideological struggles in society—render them enormously vulnerable to complicity in such a political scenario: precisely because of what they refuse to examine. The boundaries they have drawn around their perceptions render it impossible for even the most radical of them to critique politico-cultural processes in terms of the roles and relationships these assume within a national political order overdetermined by global capitalism. Instead, they can only be affirmed as expressions of existing subjectivities, or as potential sites for intervention and redeployment within a chain of alliances desirous of slow and careful reformation of the *status quo*, however this is to be imagined.

The Role and Positioning of Intellectuals

Living as an expatriate in Canada, Jolly (1995:23) avers that, for literary academics dealing with South African culture, 'positioning oneself in opposition to the hegemonic forces ... can be a truly postcolonial act'; and explores how such intellectuals can assist in the redistribution of resources and power inside the country at the same time as they transform institutional forms of racial privilege. This is a subject which, it can be seen, taxes most South African 'post-colonial' thinkers. Most of those I have dis-

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cussed are white; and, given that they are faced with reiterated criticism, either that they construct the 'other' in their own image, or that as a group they are only aware of their own political identity through the construction of an 'other', they show a recurring self-consciousness about what they as white critics should be 'legitimately able to do' (de Kock 1993b:45).

They are particularly concerned with clearing a space for the 'other' to speak, free from white social ventriloquism and overweening 'master-narratives'. In clearing the ground where a multitude of voices and life-stories can be heard, 'post-colonial' critics can 'articulate difference' and rehearse 'communal liberation'; paving the way for a 'nonimperialist, genuinely multicultural future' (Jolly 1995:25,26). In this regard, de Kock cites Spivak as saying, '... you don't give the subaltern voice. You work *for* the bloody subaltern, you work against subalternity' (de Kock 1992c:46).

Yet it is striking that white 'post-colonial' critics are unwilling, to a person, to give up their ability to study, and comment about, black literature and culture. Here again, de Kock's dismissal of 'strong othering' and any absolute occlusion of 'other' to 'self' as regards knowledge and experience pertains (see de Kock 1993a:49). Instead, they believe that a 'refusal to violate the politics of identity' (Jolly 1995:24), to engage in 'intercultural description' (de Kock 1993a:61) or analyse 'aboriginal texts' is unwise. This might result in an eventual ignorance within the academy as to what the demands and concerns of the 'other' are. It is considered important to have representatives of the 'other' in the academy—so that the 'existence and recognition of many kinds of native experience' and 'aboriginal authority' are represented (Jolly 1995:26). Just as in the wider society, in a multicultural academy the 'noncolonising mutual exploration of difference' (*idem.*) can act to affirm and assist the vision of a future South Africa as a true society of equals.

White academics give notice of an awareness of the limitations of their own background, and admit to a lack of organic relationship to 'underclass movements' (*sic.*; Attwell 1990b:83). They embrace the marginality of their own positioning in contemporary South Africa, but are careful to proselytise for a criticism which 'does not simply authorise or silence critics on the basis of the "adequacy" of their experience' (Jolly 1995:24).

In discussing Coetzee's fictional *oeuvre*, Attwell celebrates it as a 'clear-eyed representative of its own historical positioning and limits of power', which allows the author—speaking without authorisation and from a position which cannot be tied to a particular constituency—to be more honest and explicit about his own social placement than 'committed white writers' (read: critics as well) are able to be about theirs (see Attwell 1993a: 25f,119,122). Consequently, the:

> ... wary, increasingly marginal narrative subject who deftly negotiates the interstices of power, maintaining its ethical integrity but avoiding not only appeals for inclusion but also any overstatement of its own legitimacy and authority (Attwell 1993a:25f).

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Attwell praises in Coetzee ceases to be just a favoured fictional device. It also exemplifies the 'post-colonial' academic-at-work-in-the-world[33].

Drawing attention to Spivak's suggestion that the activities of philosophical and historical study are always, as disciplines, heterogeneous and discontinuous with subaltern social practice, they assume that this stance will as a consequence be relevant to grassroots activity (see Carusi 1989:93f). Indeed, there is a suggestion that their ability to contextualise and relativise their own systems of knowledge allows them to make these even more useful, as they can act in ways that will not overwhelm the integrity of the 'other'[34]. At the same time, their 'subversive' stance allows them, they believe, to critique the disciplinary practices of the academic institutions in which they work. Thus, according to Jolly (1995:24), the 'post-colonial' critic is in the enviable position of having the potential 'to negotiate between peoples in the context of the "knife-edge of change"'.

Looked at closely, however, such versions of 'marginality' eventually aim themselves at re-empowerment rather than self-erasure, once the white academic has learned sufficient humility. This has the very real potential for mutating into 'a gesture of discrete self-affirmation which allows the subject of the gesture a moral high ground' (de Jong 1994:229). In this vein, de Kock's recommendation that white critics should use 'restraint' (*sic.*) when wishing to step outside of 'discourse' and the 'constraints' of the 'European mind' (de Kock 1993a:63), exhibits not so much a concession of space for black critics to operate, as reticence to engage fully or straightforwardly in any exchange of viewpoints. This is deeply condescending.

Their perception of viable political activity for themselves highlights the imperative of ethical choice for the individual scholar. In line with his wish for a criticism which allows for political agency, de Kock argues that even critics who use post-structuralist or deconstructive techniques must open the way for 'an ethical subject who can recognise the tyrannies of identity, but ... work from a basis of identity which is politically defined' (de Kock 1993a:60).

Attwell's interest in ethics is more conservative than this. He believes that those intellectuals who did not claim the political high ground or blur their intellectual pur-

[33] More recently, Attwell has shown an impatience with academics who remain on the 'political high ground' of their 'other status ... of marginality'. Instead, he now stresses the need to 'confront one's own ambiguous positioning' and acknowledge 'that one's formation as an intellectual is itself testimony to the effects of cultural imperialism—and begin working out the most strategically useful ways of pursuing an intellectual life ... as that unhappily designated being, an Africanist' (Attwell 1995a:23).

[34] Bunn's examinations of the positioning and complicity of observers *vis-a-vis* their 'objects' of study is relevant here; and relates to his interest in the work of anthropologists such as Geertz and Clifford.

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suits with political imperatives in times of 'ethical confusion' like the 1970s and 1980s (*sic.*), now have a greater freedom to disentangle ('differentiate' is the word he chooses) their scholarly from their political obligations (Attwell 1990b:83). Rejecting the Althusserian notion that there is no ethics outside of ideology, he emphasises that such relative distancing of the critic from intrusive political commitments while in scholarly pursuits is a superior position because it is 'not self-interested' (Attwell 1995b:95).

This reprivileges the seemingly marginal pursuits of those involved in English Departments, against the political 'master-narratives' which have served to devalue their importance. Attwell's, and de Kock's faith in ethical choice as a determinant of social behaviour appears to wish to restore judgement and morality to the public sphere. With this one can have no quarrel. However, it appears to limit its understanding of ethical behaviour to criteria of 'honest' individual behaviour and judgement[35]. The individual emerges as a powerful counterforce to group limitations and subsuming ideologies.

While a compelling argument can be made for such individual space at least as far as academic enquiry is concerned, it is less compelling to perceive political proclivities as explicable by individual ethical choice alone. This loses sight of the ideological and social constraints which delimit the behaviour and concerns of individuals within wider socio-political (rather than simply discursive) structures. 'Restraint' and lack of self-interest cannot be used as concepts to incisively examine intellectuals'—or anyone else's—social behaviour or interests; and this mitigates against Attwell's belief that 'post-colonial' writers or critics have a clearer insight into their own historical positioning and limitations than those who have gone before.

The Racial Determinants of Scholarly Knowledge

By suggesting their own relative unimportance and marginality, it is possible for 'post-colonial' intellectuals in South Africa to be rather coy about their own emergence as a social group with authoritative voices, especially in the academy. Their bedazzlement with discourse and its social manifestations, and their concern with 'subject-positions' rather than the capitalist structuring and restructuring of the world, means that it is all too easy for them to bypass or underplay their own placement and viewpoints as these

[35] Attwell's attempt to differentiate Coetzee's notion of ethics (to be apprehended in 'performative acts of language') from Kant's (conceived as the conscience of the individual) does not, it seems to me, significantly alter this point (Attwell 1995b:95); neither, in my opinion, does Attwell's attempt to discuss subject positioning as 'dependent on systems of signification rather than on autonomous subjectivity of an idealist kind' (de Jong 1994:228) alter the broad confirmation of individualism in his work.

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relate to economic determinants and class relationships[36].

White academics wish to allow the 'other' a place to speak within the academy. The question can then be asked: who, precisely, is in a position to indulge in self-expression in such a context? The 'other', him- or herself, obviously. There is a supposition that the representatives of the 'other' in the academy—in South Africa usually individuals identified along a race-gender axis (rather than, say, with reference to class, urban/rural or regional imbalances)—are *a priori* in touch with, and can represent, an aggregate of 'others'.

Scrutinising the utterances of 'post-colonial' scholars in South Africa, it is fascinating to note how easily some of them slide into the assumption that authority is determined by cultural definition. In evidence is a tendency to react against the prevailing racial disequilibrium of access to power and self-expression with presumptions of a reflexive relationship between black intellectuals and their racial constituency.

In South Africa, where competing discourses and world views are first and foremost perceived as cultural (with an insistence of racial and ethnic identifications), individual or group agency is often presumed to be underlaid with cultural knowledge. Thus, while most of the black scholars who intermittently or fully articulate the language of post-structuralism and 'post-coloniality' sharply critique the over-preponderance of white viewpoints in the contemporary South African academy, they (interestingly enough) rarely follow this through with any thorough-going deconstruction of black nodes of authenticity and authority[37]. In some cases, there is still a desire to recognise a black popular collective agency which can be evaluated as 'authentic'. Mbulelo Mzamane, for example, condemns a fellow black critic's commentary as deficient because it 'gestures towards a people's voice, but the mode of discourse denied the people their authentic voice, in their own terms' (Mzamane 1991:66). In turn, Lewis Nkosi can deny that individual black writers or academics can be guilty of any social ventriloquism *vis-a-vis* their community, by disallowing the relevance of matters of authority and self-authorisation in such cases. Rather, he insists that the issue should be seen simply as 'one of access and self-representation' (Nkosi 1994:57).

Desiree Lewis (1992:21), who insists that she is not arguing for a single authentic interpretation or correct position in feminist literary studies, still does not fol-

[36] See in particular Miyoshi's (1993:746-749) suggestion that 'post-colonial' intellectuals are part of a new class whose ideological preoccupations, worldview and international 'migrancy' are integrally related to the restructuring of the world under transnational capitalism.

[37] The only exceptions to this I have found in my reading are Grant Farred and Sikhumbuzo Mngadi. See Farred 1992 and Mngadi 1996.

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low up her critique of the 'inherently self-aggrandising momentum' of the institutional power of white feminists with any discussion of the social fissures limiting the understanding of middle-class black feminists such as herself. Indeed, her vague attempts to problematise the class aspects of authority disappears in a tendency to elide 'black', 'working class' and 'third world' as categories (see Lewis 1993:536,538,541).

The predominant issue among black critics appears to be asserting what can be called 'epistemological franchise'. Considering 'the legacy of factual representation in South Africa', several black *literati* at the University of the Western Cape underline the point that:

> Black objects of interpretation—whether coloured, middle-class or 'UWC's disaffected black academics with axes to grind' become probed objects ... by white journalists or academics at faculty meetings who ponder endlessly the strangeness of the other, and, by implication, consolidate their authority ... Whether this knowledge production is liberal, Marxist or feminist, it carries the stamp of approval of a white knowledge-producer. This body of knowledge ... demands to be opened up to the same sort of scrutiny that black objects of interpretation are relentlessly subjected to ... Identity politics is ... high on the agenda everywhere right now. But identity politics concerns not only blacks or Africans, or coloured people, but also the history of interpretative authority that many white academics have for many years lived by (Lewis *et al* 1996).

A great deal of what is here said is salutary and relevant. However, it is noticeable that these critics' confrontation with racial imbalances in knowledge-production does not end in any interrogation of their own authority. Thus, their version of 'post-colonial' criticism seems to hold racial binaries intact, in a move which does not promise a critique of the social power and position of its authors, but rather only a displacement of power and authority towards a previously disadvantaged but (within its own constituency) relatively privileged group. In such a scenario, a little scepticism of the high-sounding ideals of those involved is not out of place[38]. Perhaps, as Dirlik (1994:339) has remarked, postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of new-found power.

In my opinion black 'post-colonial' intellectuals cannot accept tenure as spokespeople for their community without the constant interrogation of their own po-

[38] As Seshadri-Crooks (1995:66) points out, it is only the benign, 'orthodox' deployment of multiculturalism which can accept this. Any radical 'post-colonial' argument for the destabilising of existing relationships of pedagogical power in South Africa must 'rehearse continually the conditions for the production of its own discourse or be doomed to fall into a form of anthropology'.

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sition demanded by their own post-structuralist predilections. What is most striking about the approaches of both white and black critics of this ilk, though, is a tendency to use post-structuralist techniques and approaches when scrutinising the 'oppressor', but to slide back into positivism and liberal humanism when faced with the products of the 'oppressed'.

Furthermore, the reliance of these critics on the texts of the colonial masters or relatively privileged and literate representatives of the 'other' is striking; one can perceive (to place Loomba's words in another context) that their interrogation of colonialism is too often shaped primarily by its own discourse (Loomba 1991:180). Little attention is given to pre-colonial South Africa or to past and present oral literature. They demonstrate little conversance with debates about modes of appropriation and social hierarchies in pre-colonial African societies, or in oral forms of expression. These are, surely, crucial to any attempts to understand the foundations and constraints of the 'other' identities they are elsewhere concerned with[39].

Conclusion

It is finally true, as a number of overseas critics of 'post-colonial' theories have attested, that there is a tendency for its thinkers to see their own academy-based, class-delimited subjectivity as a model for all humankind[40]. This is most apparent in Attwell. When all is said and done, he wishes to keep literary scholars focussed on what he believes they are 'competent to do' (see Attwell 1990b:80,83). Such an insistence on the relative distance of literary scholarship from political concerns not connected to the academy cannot, in my view, be a means to initiate awareness and participation among students or academics of the nuances of the social world outside of their immediate scope of privilege. In the long run, his emphasis on political participation within the institutions of learning can degenerate into a scenario of disputation and contestation over meaning and reference amongst scholars which can be managed within the academy's intellectual and social boundaries and are, in actual fact, 'more like corporate undertakings than agencies of political struggle' (Prasad 1992:36). In this regard, Attwell's (1996:213) love of 'sophisticated conversations' based on 'collective negotiation' among scholars hints at a possible elitism that throws into question his apparent approval of divergent points of view.

[39] This does not mean (as Bunn attempts to argue in dismissal of this point) that scholars of oral culture/literature necessarily presume that orality as a mode functions outside of the limits of narrativity (see Bunn 1994:31).

[40] For further discussion, see Parry (1994:20); Ahmad (1995:7f); Miyoshi (1993:750f); Dirlik (1994:330,339). For South Africa, see Chrisman (1995:207).

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Despite their dislike for traditional liberalism, Visser suggests that critics such as de Kock and Attwell are involved in an appropriation of 'post-colonial' notions, not so much to suit local conditions as certain political agendas. Their strivings to 'look beyond the fixed polarities of some metropolitan versions of postcolonial studies' (see Attwell 1993b:4f) has become:

> ... a 'centrist' or 'moderate' appropriation which domesticates the theory, stripping it of its more interesting and provocative assertions in order to reinstate it as the latest expression of liberal pluralism (Visser 1997:92).

'Post-colonialists' would, in my opinion, dispute this by pointing to their decentring of the universalised humanist categories and constructs of the autonomous subject of traditional liberalism, and their antipathy towards any form of 'master-narrative'.

In order to understand the manner in which critics such as Attwell can be placed in such a category, a re-examination and redefinition of the province of 'liberalism' in South Africa is in order. In a recent article on the transmutations of the liberal novel, Tony Morphet shows a way this might be possible. Suggesting that J.M. Coetzee's fiction is liberal in 'a new, qualified sense of the word', Morphet notes the persistence throughout Coetzee's work of protagonists who have 'no incorporative and assimilating design' but see the world around themselves as 'dangerous and incomprehensible, their authority dissipated and their sense of meaning crumbling' (Morphet 1996:57). Unlike traditional liberals, who believed they could exercise their authority for the good of others, this 'new liberal' Morphet extrapolates from Coetzee's fiction has no wish to incorporate or assimilate others to his or her beliefs. They can be recognised by an epistemology that works against the closures of authority (be they religious, historical or literary) and which challenges other aesthetic positions and viewpoints by always 'setting up another version, another play which plays itself out in the midst of all the other plays that are taking place' rather than indulging in rational or moral argument and rebuttal (Morphet 1996:57f). Taken to the political arena, such a position demands a rigorous marginalising of authority, including one's own.

In a situation where their ideological and political authority has all but dissipated, this valorisation of criticism from the margins seems increasingly endemic to liberal thought in the 'new South Africa'—be it from literary post-structuralists, the Democratic Party or more conservative liberal ideologues such as Hermann Giliomee[41].

What is as significant is the partial, but nonetheless odd, convergence between local 'post-colonial' literary critics' use of post-structuralism and 'Rainbow Nation'

[41] In this regard, see Giliomee's (1996) re-invocation of NP van Wyk Louw's concept of *lojale verset* ('rebellious lojalty') first coined to suggest a placement for moderate Afrikaans intellectuals *vis-a-vis* the Nationalist Party during the 1930s.

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nationalism: especially as regards the significance attached to racial and ethnic axes of cultural identity, and the way in which the individual is believed to interact and connect to larger groups. If examinations of identity require scrutiny of 'precisely the fissure between the self, social identity and broader structural constraints' (Sitas 1995:83), these critics mostly downplay the last-named. An excessive culturalism and aestheticism results. This has an unfortunate tendency to feed into racial and ethnic stereotypes which are the legacy of apartheid, and which the present Government does not seem able to displace[42]. Combined with their refusal to assess any of the identifications or actions of the 'other', this results in an inability to conceive of any long-term alternatives to the emerging political *status quo* or the prevailing vision of a multiracial capitalism. In this regard, Dirlik's (1994:347) remark that ideological fragmentation may represent not the dissolution of power, but its further concentration, could not be more pertinent.

Local 'post-colonial' scholars' desire for 'other' groups to possess an agency that can challenge the dominant orders of colonialism and neo-colonialism ends by reinstating essentially humanist notions of the manner in which the agency of the 'other' operates. In their endeavours to escape the 'critical disablement, passivity, and self-defeating contradiction' (de Kock 1993a:44) of some variants of 'post-colonial' studies informed by linguistic post-structuralism, critics such as Attwell, de Kock and Carusi appear to end in an ineluctable contradiction themselves.

As far as their critique of 'master-narratives' is concerned, 'post-colonial' literary scholars in this country are involved in merely replacing one set of limits of perception and argument with another. Their stance has come to legitimise a certain type of pluralist reordering of the way in which the country is imagined, rather than enabling a conceptually and politically open arena. While seeming to authorise the margins and enable their move into the centre, areas of structural conflict—such as class—are downplayed, or regarded as solvable through negotiation. In other words, while emphasising contestability, enduring modes of contestation are blurred over.

While 'post-colonial' studies have opened up valuable emphases and insights for South African scholars, the major paradigm shifts consequent on their emergence have been less radical than originally thought. These studies are not value-free and the decisions about what to foreground and what to ignore can, and should be, scrutinised and analysed. It is noticeable that 'post-colonial' theory has, to some extent, simply

[42] In a recent speech Nelson Mandela claimed that the country should be a place where the Coon carnival, Zulu reed dance and *braaivleis* can be equally valued. These cultural events are, surely, neither explanatory nor inclusive of the behaviour and perceptions of all 'Coloureds', Zulus or Afrikaners.

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rehearsed old themes and problems of the 'third world'[43], rephrasing these in the language of post-structuralism (Dirlik 1994:352), at the same time as some categories of analysis and paradigms (Marxism is the obvious example here) have been dismissed. Again, it is not unfair to say that 'post-colonial' scholars' attempts to piece together 'new combinations of elements which have been left unarticulated by dominant institutions and knowledges' (Katz 1995/1996:46) can be seen, eventually, to be circumscribed. In this regard—as in so many others—the triumphant announcement of the amalgamation of postmodern politics, 'post-colonial' studies and linguistic post-structuralism that Attwell proclaimed in a 1993 *Current Writing* as a more cogent and progressive scholarly outlook on the world is already beginning to look somewhat overhasty.

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[43] An interest in the ambivalence of black subjects towards the 'benefits' of colonialism is evident in the work of South African oral historians of the 1980s such as Shula Marks, for example; while de Kock's critique of English Departments adds little to the edition of *Critical Arts* which tackled this subject a decade earlier.

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