

Towards Articulation: Postcolonial Theory and Demotic Resistance

VICTOR LI

IN A RECENT ARTICLE criticizing postcolonial theory's hegemonic ambition to represent or speak for the dominated and the oppressed, Simon During writes:

It is important not to forget that the postcolonial paradigm appeals largely to whites and diasporic Indian intellectuals working in the West. It does not appeal to those closest to the continuing struggle against white domination—to Koori activists in Australia or the South African PAC, say; to offer another instance, I do not think there is a Maori word for "postcolonialism." (348)

I will return to During's remarks later in this essay, but, for the moment, I want to note that his statement—"I do not think there is a Maori word for 'postcolonialism'"—not only assumes lexical incommensurability but also forwards the argument that a concept or term such as "postcolonialism" is utterly foreign and irrelevant to the Maoris in their struggle for autonomy and self-determination. The Maoris, During implies, do not have a word for "postcolonialism" because they have no need for it. To defend the Maori struggle for autonomy from the totalizing tendencies of metropolitan theory, During utilizes a strategy of cultural separatism. Thus, on one side, we are presented with Maori culture with its specific, local concerns, and, on the other, we have the academic culture of postcolonial studies, with its own separate and distinct agenda.

One can understand why During would want to oppose cultural separatism to the perceived threat of cultural assimilation and domination. Like many contemporary critics, During is suspicious of any discourse that seeks to explain or represent anything other than itself; thus, resisting what he suspects to be a

universalizing tendency in metropolitan postcolonial theory, he invokes local cultural particularities. Like most cultural relativists, During also fears that powerful metropolitan cultures will swallow up peripheral ones, thereby destroying their distinctive, resistant cultural identity. Prompted by such fears, well-meaning anthropologists, museum curators, and supporters of indigenous struggles seek to protect a threatened culture by invoking, sometimes to the point of reifying, the culture's "authentic" identity.

However, such forms of cultural protectionism ignore two dangers: the danger that cultural separation may turn into the oppressive rigidity of apartheid and the danger of identifying cultural authenticity with an ahistorical and exotic cultural essentialism. The first danger is succinctly described by the French anthropologist Jean-Loup Amselle:

Given all the philosophies of history and other sagas of human progress, American culturalist anthropologists along with Lévi-Strauss were right to stress the particularist nature and the relative character of the values promoted by different societies. But the flip side of this generous attitude is the erection of impermeable cultural barriers that imprison each group in its own singularity. . . . Far from being an instrument of tolerance toward, and liberation of, minorities as its proponents like to claim . . . [the notion of separate, distinct cultures] reveals instead all the wrongs of ethnological reason, and that is why it has been claimed by the "new right" in France. To isolate a community by defining a set of characteristic "differences" can lead to the possibility of its territorial confinement. . . . Ethnic labeling, and the assignment of differences, are self-fulfilling prophecies. (qtd. in Lionnet 107)

On the second danger, that of regarding cultural authenticity as unchanging essence, the American anthropologist James Clifford has this to say:

I am especially sceptical of an almost automatic reflex . . . to relegate exotic peoples and objects to the collective past. . . . Exotic traditions appear [to the modern West] as archaic, purer (and more rare) than the diluted inventions of a syncretic present. In this temporal setup a great many twentieth-century creations can only appear as imitations of more "developed" models. . . . Many traditions, languages, cosmologies, and values are lost, some literally murdered; but much has simultaneously been invented and revived in complex, oppositional contexts. If the victims of progress and empire are weak, they are

seldom passive. It used to be assumed, for example, that conversion to Christianity in Africa, Melanesia, Latin America . . . would lead to the extinction of indigenous cultures rather than to their transformations. Something more ambiguous and historically complex has occurred, requiring that we perceive *both* the end of certain orders of diversity and the creation or translation of others. . . . [We must begin to survey] hybrid and subversive forms of cultural representation, forms that prefigure an inventive future. (16-17)

The relegation of cultural authenticity to the past in effect freezes or halts the process of historical and cultural change and denies that a culture may be open to new ideas and new ways of doing things or that it may develop and grow through intercultural addition, adoption, or even appropriation. The attempt to salvage cultural authenticity can turn into the censorship of cultural innovation, as the following example demonstrates. After the Second World War, with the help of the Canadian government, Inuit craft-producing co-operatives were set up and directed to produce carvings that would be recognizably "traditional." A non-Inuit arts-and-crafts specialist was hired to screen out carvings deemed unsuitable. Among those deemed unsuitable was a soapstone sculpture of Elvis Presley, which escaped the sledge-hammer only because of the intervention of a perceptive official "who felt the piece reflected the reality of the Sugluk settlement with which he was familiar" (Brett 122). What this example shows is that "cultural correctness" does not appreciate cultural "border-crossings" or cultural hybridization. To the arts-and-crafts specialist, Elvis belonged firmly to the white world of the south, and the Inuit should only carve seals, bears, and hunters. It probably did not occur to him that Elvis, heard through the radio or glimpsed through magazines and newspapers, may have been as much a part of Inuit everyday life as seals and bears. Moreover, he probably would have been surprised to learn that Elvis was himself a cultural hybrid, a Southern white boy whose rock-and-roll style was derived from Black American music, itself a hybrid of African and European musical idioms.

This phenomenon of cultural intermixing and exchange has been termed "transculturation" by Latin American critics and writers and has been taken up by literary theorists such as Mary

Louise Pratt and Françoise Lionnet. In her study of travel writing and colonial encounters, Pratt argues that adopting a transcultural approach allows for a contact perspective that foregrounds "the interactive, improvisational dimensions of colonial encounters so easily ignored or suppressed by diffusionist accounts of conquest and domination" (7). A contact perspective, Pratt continues, "treats the relations among colonizers and colonized . . . not in terms of separateness or apartheid, but in terms of copresence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices, often within radically asymmetrical relations of power" (7). Of course, we should never lose sight of asymmetrical relations of power in any encounter between cultures, but a transcultural approach enables us to acknowledge as well that the subaltern culture is neither passive nor lacking in the power to resist, influence, or even redirect and shape the dominant culture.

To Françoise Lionnet, the concept of transculturation provides us with "a new vocabulary for describing patterns of influence that are never unidirectional" (103). She defines transculturation as "a process of cultural intercourse and exchange, a circulation of practices that creates a constant interweaving of symbolic forms and empirical activities among the different cultures that interact with one another" (103-04). The transcultural approach as described by Pratt and Lionnet allows us, for example, not only to accept the conventional view that African slaves were assimilated to "white" American culture but also to comprehend the truth of Kwame Anthony Appiah's claim that "there is . . . no American culture without African roots" (qtd. in Lionnet 102).

Language provides us with the best example of transculturation at work. As the transculturalist *par excellence*, Mikhail Bakhtin, puts it: "The word in language is half someone else's" (293). Even a quick examination of the English language bears out Bakhtin's point, revealing the extent of the language's transculturation. Words that we use in everyday life, such as "shampoo," "pajamas," and "ketchup," or an important newsworthy word such as "tariff," turn out to be transculturated words, words that have travelled from elsewhere and metamorphosed into English.¹

The point I wish to make, for the moment somewhat elliptically, is this: adopting the stance of cultural relativism or separatism leads to a problematic politics of identity, while choosing a transcultural approach leads to an empowering politics of articulation (a concept that will be explained in more detail later in this essay). The debates that currently swirl around postcolonial theory, in my view, are debates over which approach to adopt or emphasize. It is to one of these debates that I now turn.

II

A central characteristic of postcolonial theory is its exertion of a certain historical vigilance, a wariness of all monocultural discourses and their colonizing imperative. Postcolonial theory's suspicion of Western narratives of enlightenment and progress is matched equally by its resolve to not be taken in by imagined or invented national allegories of native authenticity. Postcolonial theory's critical vigilance, moreover, is directed against itself, such that its institutional and geopolitical locations, locutions, and interests are all brought into question.

One of the questions postcolonial theory addresses to itself is that of its relation to its constituency, a question that quickly turns into the accusation that theory alienates itself from the very constituency on whose behalf it intervenes. In a somewhat simplified and schematic manner, the problem can be described as the perceived gulf between a highly literate metropolitan theory, with its institutionally privileged enunciative positions and modalities, and the generally disadvantaged demotic speech of marginalized populations. Thus critics such as Benita Parry, Timothy Brennan, and Simon During have all questioned theory in the name of what can be called "demotic resistance." Parry, for example, has accused postcolonial theorists such as Homi Bhabha and Gayatri Spivak of "an exorbitation of discourse" that is deaf to the "alternative text" of the native subaltern (43). In a similar vein, Brennan comments on theory's self-imposed distance from popular national resistance: "the increasing obtuseness, increasingly mandarin quality of metropolitan theory was an indirect way of dealing with the threatening engagements of the decolonized intellectuals' quest for recognition" (103). The

most damaging accusation, however, comes from During, whose critical remarks on the irrelevance of postcolonial theory to indigenous struggles have already been cited here.

It can be argued, however, against Parry, Brennan, and During, that their critical vigilance is in fact part of the problem they have defined so usefully. Their suspicion of postcolonial theory and their call for demotic resistance, after all, are couched in the same theoretical idiom and delivered from the same privileged locations as those of the postcolonial theorists they critique. There is, it seems to me, no way of avoiding such a performative contradiction as long as postcolonial theorists and their critics remain locked within the theoretical languages and institutional structures against which their vigilance is trained but from which their critical authority, their certification to speak, is none the less derived. As Vivek Dhareshwar points out, “[e]ven a discourse that claims to deconstruct the West’s constructions of the Other has to still circulate in the discursive space of the West; it remains positioned in that discursive space and its problematics get defined by the structure of address available in that space” (150). Similarly, Gayatri Spivak admits to the aporia of her own critical position, of having to say “‘no’ to a structure, which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately” (225).

I wish to argue that both postcolonial theory and its critiques land themselves in such a predicament because they reproduce in their arguments a stubbornly persistent binary opposition between the theoretical and the demotic, between theory’s suspicion of the simplifications of collective identity and action and popular demotic resistance to the institutional and interpretative privileges accorded to theory. An opposition of this kind locks theory and theory’s critiques into an unproductive cycle of vigilance, counter-vigilance, renewed vigilance, and so on.

Postcolonial theory and its demotic critiques are compelled to adopt a strategy of vigilance because of a tendency, often overlooked, in both camps to privilege a politics based on the concept of negative freedom. Negative freedom, a classic liberal ideal, can be defined as the belief in absolute self-determination free from all external constraints, interferences, or influences.² In demanding absolute autonomy, negative freedom activates a

hermeneutics of suspicion that rigorously tracks down and uncovers any form of external influence or pressure that may compromise the autonomy of an individual or group. Such a hermeneutics of suspicion finds common cause with a politics in which identity remains autonomous and authentic by affirming its difference from others and by vigilantly guarding against external determinants. In relying heavily on a notion of autonomy founded on difference, postcolonial theorists and their demotic opponents find themselves adopting a discourse in which identity is based on separation, demarcation, exclusion, and non-contamination, a discourse of autonomy in which the other is not yet a "possible basis for agreement" (Glissant 97). Thus, in questioning the political and institutional motives of metropolitan postcolonial theory, critics such as Parry, Brennan, and Dering clearly seek to maintain, through the practice of separatist vigilance, what they regard as the autonomy and integrity of demotic resistance. From the other side, the insistence on the authenticity of the resistant demotic or native voice appears curiously like an indulgence in what Henry Louis Gates, Jr. has called "the sentimental romance of alterity" (466). Yet even as postcolonial theorists accuse their demotic detractors of advocating the pure and autonomous identity of the other, their own accusation must assume a certain enunciative autonomy, an identity, however minimal, distancing it from the native or demotic scene it questions. Thus, for instance, even as Edward Said criticizes "nativism" for seeking an illusory autonomy and priority of identity, the cosmopolitan and ironic view that enables his critique appears to insist on a detached and somewhat superior perspective far above the embattled and strident fray of competing standpoints (see Said 275-76). In other words, Said's championing of cultural heteronomy and hybridity requires him, paradoxically, to maintain the autonomy and purity of a freelance, exilic consciousness. As Said has remarked in an interview, "even in the case of the Palestinian movement itself I've made it a point never to accept an official role of any sort; I've always retained my independence" (qtd. in McGowan 175). It appears that, for Said, the preservation of otherness in the same, of difference in identity, requires that the otherness or difference

of the critic be kept free and separate in itself. But, as John McGowan points out in his critique of Said's valorization of oppositional otherness, "to imagine the other as distant and separate is profoundly undialectical . . . [since it] rests on an assumption of self-sufficiency, of an identity forged in the absence of social ties" (175). Thus, taking an ironic turn, Said's suspicion of purist identity politics depends on his acceptance of the pure and autonomous oppositional identity of the critic.

What should be clear, then, is that certain tendencies in post-colonial theory and demotic critiques of postcolonial theory both readily assume a concept of negative freedom, of autonomy from all external influences and relations, and thus find themselves locked into rigid oppositions that are then forced to exercise vigilance against external threats to their autonomy. It may be more productive in the long run, however, to relax the opposition and shift the emphasis from the defensive autonomy of negative freedom (freedom *from*) to a more open, a more relational and positive version of freedom (freedom *to*), a freedom enabled rather than constrained by social relationships. To go beyond the ultimately paralyzing mode of theoretical self-vigilance will require the thought of relationality or transculturation and the practice of articulation, the productive though always provisional and uncertain colligation of different elements. Stuart Hall, who has done much to promote the theory of articulation, defines it thus:

In England, [articulation] has a nice double meaning because "articulate" means to utter, to speak forth, to be articulate. . . . But we also speak of an "articulated" lorry: a lorry where the front and back can, but need not necessarily, be connected to one another. The two parts are connected to each other, but through a specific linkage that can be broken. An articulation is thus the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time. You have to ask, under what circumstance *can* a connection be forged or made? So the so-called "unity" of a discourse is really the articulation of different, distinct elements which can be rearticulated in different ways because they have no necessary "belongingness." (53)

Hall's description of articulation allows us to rethink and reinvent the possibility of linkage where opposition and difference

may seem only too firmly entrenched. Rather than falling into the frozen certainties of political identities or the stalemated opposition of different ideologies, the practice of articulation re-opens the dimension of agency, change, risk, and uncertainty. In short, it enables us to make our own history even under conditions not of our choosing. Thus, instead of privileging theory at the expense of the demotic or vice versa, or defending the purity of demotic resistance against the cosmopolitanism of theory or vice versa, or allowing the perceived antagonism between theory and the demotic to settle into an unavoidable aporia, we should attempt to grasp them relationally, placing and articulating them in the same space of struggle, judgment, and enunciation. Homi Bhabha argues that such an emphasis on the *activity of articulation* produces a shift from “the negative dialectics of the ‘symptomatic reading’ [or what I have called theoretical self-vigilance], to an attention to the place and time of the enunciative agency” (“Postcolonial Authority” 57). The emphasis on agency and articulation allows us to go beyond vigilance, and the guilt and suspicion that generate vigilance, and to redirect our energies instead to the more difficult and uncertain task of cultural creation and collective social action.

This is why I think social activists and politically engaged writers have been ahead of academics in their awareness of the need to question the strict separations necessary to the desire for absolute cultural or critical autonomy and to engage instead in the political activity of articulation. I will thus turn to the work of Rigoberta Menchu, Edouard Glissant, and Chinua Achebe and briefly sketch how I think they can help us end the rift between institutionally privileged discourses and the claims of the demotic.

III

The Nobel Peace Prize winner of 1992, the Guatemalan Indian activist Rigoberta Menchu, ends her *testimonio* with these words:

My commitment to our struggle knows no boundaries nor limits. This is why I've travelled to many places where I've had the opportunity to talk about my people. Of course, I'd need a lot of time to tell you all about my people, because it's not easy to understand just like that.

And I think I've given some idea of that in my account. Nevertheless, I'm still keeping my Indian identity a secret. I'm still keeping secret what I think no-one should know. Not even anthropologists or intellectuals, no matter how many books they have, can find out all our secrets. (247)

Though Menchu's insistence on safeguarding the autonomy and inviolability of her Indian identity comes through very clearly, it is important to note as well that she recognizes the need to publicize her people's plight and to gain the solidarity of others. Though rooted in a constituency, she also realizes that a wider audience is needed in the struggle waged for the survival of her people. Moreover, as George Yúdice has pointed out, Menchu's affirmation of her Indian identity leads neither to essentialism nor to a "romanticized ancestral reconciliation" because it is part of a "cultural and political practice necessary for survival" (226). This cultural and political practice requires Menchu to engage simultaneously in the defence of autonomous identity and the search for new articulations, for new forms of political struggle. We see this when Menchu, in order to preserve her Indian identity and the ways of her ancestors, decides to join a national peasant organization thereby embracing, as she puts it, "other things, other ways" (149). Menchu's double strategy of defending autonomy through the practice of social or political articulation is also evident in her attitude to education in general and the learning of Spanish in particular. Thus Menchu agrees with her father's warning—"My children, don't aspire to go to school, because schools take our customs away from us" (169)—and adds, "even though a person may learn to read and write, he should not accept the false education they give our people. Our people must not think as the authorities think. They must not let others think for them" (170). Yet Menchu's resistance to education is a resistance to the hegemonic educational system imposed by the non-Indian central government in Guatemala. She does not abandon the idea of learning; nor does she deny the importance of learning Spanish. On the contrary, Menchu says that although her life has taught her many things, "human beings are also made to learn many more" (162). Further, with a pragmatism born out of political activism, she adds: "Since Spanish was a language which united us [that is, the different Indian groups],

why learn all the twenty-two languages in Guatemala? It wasn't possible, and anyway this wasn't the moment to do it . . . I learned Spanish out of necessity" (162).

Menchu's participation in a national peasant movement also taught her to see beyond cultural and ethnic oppositions, which, as often as not, are created by a shared history of political and material oppression. Thus, though Menchu proudly proclaims her native identity, she is not a naive nativist, for she also understands that her own identity includes different elements, different sub-constituencies, if you will, and that she has to participate fully in the struggle as "an Indian first, and then as a woman, a peasant, a Christian" (120). She also realizes that as a Guatemalan Indian she must try to articulate her struggle to that of the Spanish-speaking *ladinos*. Thus, in a moment of self-reflection and self-critique, she remarks:

As I was saying, I'm an Indian *ist*, not just an Indian. I'm an Indianist to my fingertips and I defend everything to do with my ancestors. But I didn't understand this in the proper way, because we can only understand when we start talking to each other. And this is the only way we can correct our ideas. Little by little, I discovered many ways in which we had to be understanding towards our *ladino* friends and in which they had to show us understanding too. Because I also knew *compañeros ladinos* with whom we shared the worst conditions, but who still felt *ladino*, and as *ladinos* they didn't see that our poverty united us. But little by little, both they and I began discussing many very important things and saw that the root of our problems lay in the ownership of the land. All our country's riches are in the hands of the few. (166)

The most important lesson we can learn from Menchu's testimony is that the struggle to preserve the autonomy of cultural identity may require a further thinking beyond autonomy towards social and political articulation; or, as Menchu puts it, "we have to erase the barriers which exist between ethnic groups, between Indians and *ladinos*, between men and women, between intellectuals and non-intellectuals, and between all the linguistic areas" (233).

IV

Like Menchu, the Martinican writer and critic Edouard Glissant advocates resistance to the "all-encompassing world of cultural

sameness, effectively imposed by the West.” He too asserts the importance of preserving the identity of one’s culture from that “universal humanism that incorporates all (national) peculiarities” (97). Thus, like Menchu, Glissant initially calls for a protective vigilance, for “[a]n identity on its guard, in which the relationship with the Other shapes the self without fixing it under an oppressive force. That is what we see everywhere in the world: each people wants to declare its own identity” (169). Again, however, like Menchu, Glissant affirms the autonomy of cultural identity precisely in order to open it out to a world of cultural diversity and cultural interchange, to what Glissant terms the recognition of “la Relation” (xii). Thus, even as Glissant asserts the need for “an awareness of our place in the world,” he also adds that we must reflect “on the necessary and disalienated relationship with the Other” (169). Autonomy once attained, in Glissant’s view, should not lead to isolation or separation but to a poetics of productive relationships and creative articulations. As he puts it, “[t]o declare one’s identity is to write the world into existence” (169).

Glissant’s views on creolization are instructive in this regard. Glissant approaches Martinican Creole without any romantic illusions about its status as both a language of resistance and a language of powerlessness. Creole as a language of resistance is also Creole as powerless language. What does Glissant mean by this? First of all, Creole, in its present form in Martinique, is an anti- or counter-language. It is a language that produces through “fits and starts . . . an attempt to deny the Other’s total and corrosive hold” (159). The Other, of course, is the colonizer’s language, French. Like his fellow countryman, Frantz Fanon, Glissant is aware that France’s granting of citizenship, of *département* status, to Martinique is a concession and an imposition that has trapped Martinicans in greater dependency and that the only response to such a “benevolent” imposition is to resist it. As Glissant puts it,

[t]he only source of light ultimately was that of the transcendental presence of the Other, of his Visibility—colonizer or administrator—of his transparency fatally proposed as a model, because of which we have acquired a taste for obscurity, and for me the need to

seek out obscurity, that which is not obvious, to assert for each community the right to a shared obscurity. (161)

As an obscurity directed at the dominant Other, Creole is a language of resistance. As Glissant goes on to argue, however, to base the identity of Creole solely on resistance, on a form of negative freedom, is to declare in a sense its powerlessness; it is to base identity on *reaction* to the Other rather than *action* for oneself. Thus Creole as linguistic or poetic resistance “will be insignificant unless it is an integral part of a resolute collective act—a political act” (163). That resolute collective act implies not only Martinique’s political self-determination but also Martinique’s cultural emancipation from France. Such a cultural liberation would require, as a first step, the transformation of Creole from an anti- or counter-language based on resistance to French to a Creole that can affirm and celebrate its own identity without having to defer to, and thus without having to resist, the authority of French. In other words, Glissant wants to replace the negative reactionary freedom, on which Creole’s present linguistic identity is based, with a more positive concept of freedom that affirms Creole’s identity as diversity and not as a language that has failed to attain purity. As Glissant explains,

[t]he idea of creolization demonstrates that henceforth it is no longer valid to glorify “unique” origins that the race safeguards and prolongs. . . . To assert peoples are creolized, that creolization has value, is to deconstruct in this way the category of “creolized” that is considered as halfway between two “pure” extremes. . . . Creolization as an idea means the negation of creolization as a category [that is, the category of Creole as impure French, a category imposed by the French and tacitly accepted by Martinicans in their use of it to resist official French], by giving priority to the notion of natural creolization, which the human imagination has always wished to deny or disguise (in Western tradition). (140-41)

Glissant’s rethinking of creolization allows him, therefore, to see cultural or linguistic identity as multiply determined, as always-already transculturated. One’s cultural or linguistic autonomy is thus, for Glissant, never fixed and isolated but always an ongoing articulation of differences. One of these differences that has been articulated in Creole, not as an instance of a pure or superior identity but as merely another equal element in a new

collectively formed language, is French. In Glissant's words: "If, therefore, when we deal with our own history, we adopt (we Caribbean people) the various European languages and adapt them, no one will teach us how to do this. We will perhaps be the ones to teach others a new poetic and, leaving behind the poetics of not-knowing [or the counter poetics of a counter-language], will initiate others into a new chapter in the history of mankind" (169).

Following Glissant's lead, members of a younger generation of writers, Jean Bernabé, Patrick Chamoiseau, and Raphael Confiant, in their manifesto "In Praise of Creoleness," argue that Creoleness is always-already transcultural or translingual:

Creoleness is not monolingual. Nor is its multilingualism divided into isolated compartments. Its field is language. Its appetite: all the languages of the world. The interaction of many languages (the points where they meet and relate) is a polysonic vertigo. . . . Living at once the poetics of all languages is not just enriching each of them, but also, and above all, breaking the customary order of these languages, reversing their established meanings. (901)

Glissant, Bernabé, et al., therefore, repudiate the binary opposition that would put Creole in its demotic place and install French on the plane of high culture and argue instead for a Creole that articulates linguistic relationships in all kinds of unsuspected ways, as Glissant explains:

It is the unknown area of these relationships that weaves, while dismantling the conception of the standard language, the "natural texture" of our new baroque, our own. Liberation will emerge from this cultural composite. The "function" of Creole languages, which must resist the temptation of exclusivity, manifests itself in this process, far removed from the . . . fire of the melting-pot. (250)

V

Glissant's meditations on the diversity that constitutes cultural, national, or linguistic identity are very similar to Chinua Achebe's concerns in his novel *Anthills of the Savannah*. Indeed, Achebe's rethinking of postcolonial national identity in this novel could well be summed up by Glissant's remark that "[d]iversity needs the presence of peoples, no longer as objects to be swallowed up, but with the intention of creating a new relation-

ship" (98). *Anthills of the Savannah* describes the dissolution of an authoritarian nationalist discourse no longer in touch with the realities of the common people and shows how that dissolution leads to the political awakening of the novel's three main characters, Chris Oriko, Ikem Osodi, and Beatrice Nwanyibuife, who begin to unlearn their own isolated elitist premises and privileges. All three characters, highly placed in the social hierarchy, undergo a transformation as they shed their "been-to" stance of superiority as graduates of London University. All three become "wide-eyed newcomer[s]" (201) to the ways of their own country, a fictional West African State named Kangan. Far from being the administrators and intellectuals who have the knowledge to guide their society, they learn, to their surprise and humility, that they are alienated from their own people and that they have to be taught the demotic wisdom they have so long ignored. Thus Chris, for example, in his flight from the country's dictator, his former classmate, Sam, has to be instructed in the art of street survival by the taxi-driver Braimoh. Recognizing the value of the instruction he has received, Chris says humbly to Braimoh: "Thank you . . . I must remember that. . . . To succeed as small man no be small thing" (194).

The novel argues that for too long the dominant nationalist discourse of Kangan has centred around an elite male clique that has claimed to represent the nation; but as Beatrice angrily reminds Chris: "Well, you fellows all three of you [Chris, Ikem and the dictator, Sam], are incredibly conceited. The story of this country, as far as you are concerned, is the story of the three of you" (66). In turn, Beatrice learns that the national discourse should include not only educated women like her but also the likes of Ikem's half-literate mistress, Elewa, and Beatrice's own Christian maid, Agatha (184-85). The failure of Kangan nationalist discourse is therefore the failure of its exclusions, the failure, as Ikem observes, "of our rulers to re-establish vital inner links with the poor and dispossessed of this country" (141). We must note, however, that the novel's increasing inclusion of the voices of the poor and dispossessed and of the pidgin they use does not lead to a rejection of the intellectual's role in society. The intellectual, to be sure, is no longer *the* centre of authority.

Yet, at the same time, the intellectual becomes part of a new articulation of national identity and authority. I want to look at two set pieces in the novel in which this new articulation takes place.

The first is Ikem Osodi's lecture to a university audience in which he recounts the Abazon Elder's fable "The Tortoise and the Leopard" as an example of political struggle. Though Ikem's use of the Elder's fable reveals his respect for the traditional lore of his people, his respect does not condemn the fable to a quaint folklorist status; in Ikem's retelling there is no ideology of salvage, no attempt at preserving the exotic elements of the tale. The traditional tale is adapted by Ikem for a modern university audience, and in the process an articulation is achieved linking the Abazonian struggle to the problems besetting Kangan society as a whole. Moreover, the work of articulation is not solely that of the intellectual. The Abazonian Elder, in telling Ikem the story in the first place, shows his awareness that the tale would travel well and that, through Ikem, he can link his Abazonian constituency to a more diverse Kangan audience. The Elder's understanding that Abazonian identity depends on articulation rather than separation or isolation from the rest of Kangan is expressed clearly when he rebukes one of his fellow Abazonians for criticizing Ikem's absence from Abazonian social ceremonies:

"Go on with your meetings and marriages and naming ceremonies because it is good to do so. But leave this young man alone to do what he is doing for Abazon and for the whole of Kangan; the cock that crows in the morning belongs to one household but his voice is the property of the neighbourhood. You should be proud that this bright cockerel that wakes the whole village comes from your compound."

(122)

Ikem's lecture at the university thus provides an example of a successful articulation of the traditional and the modern, the regional and the national, the demotic and the academic. It is possible, Achebe appears to be saying, for the intellectual to remain an intellectual and yet learn from the people and be of service to the people. The intellectual is most herself or himself when she or he becomes a model of social articulation; as Ikem Osodi puts it,

"There seems no way I can become like the poor except by faking. What I know, I know for good or ill. So for good or ill I shall remain myself, but with this deliberate readiness now to help and be helped. Like those complex, multivalent atoms in Biochemistry books. I have arms that reach out in all directions—a helping hand, a hand signalling for help." (142)

The other example of social articulation occurs at the end of the novel, in which Beatrice holds a naming ceremony for the baby daughter of Elewa and the murdered Ikem. The gathering can be read as Achebe's re-imagining of the Nigerian nation, a re-imagining in which differences are included and articulated in new and creative ways and not simply elided as they would have been in an elitist, masculinist nationalism. The gathering illustrates Glissant's statement that "the nation is not based on exclusion; it is a form of disalienated relationship with the other, who in this way becomes our fellow man" (250). At the naming ceremony we find different ethnic groups, Moslem and Christian, men and women, old and young. Moreover, the gathering, which is described as an "ecumenical fraternization" (224), though traditional in its observation of ritual, is also innovative in that Beatrice gives the baby girl a boy's name: Amaechina, "May-the-path-never-close" (222). The name is conferred at a traditional ceremony; but, in turn, through Beatrice's uncoupling of name and gender, tradition is transformed, given new life and re-oriented towards the future—"May-the-path-never-close." This simultaneous observation and transformation of tradition is what Elewa's roughish old uncle admires when he says,

"Do you know why I am laughing like this? I am laughing because in you young people our world has met its match. Yes! You have put the world where it should sit. . . . My wife here was breaking her head looking for kolanuts, for alligator pepper, for honey and for bitter leaf. . . . And while she is cracking her head you people gather in this whiteman house and give the girl a boy's name. . . . That is how to handle this world." (227)

Again, what we have in the uncle's guarded approval of Beatrice's action is a recognition of the need for articulation between the generations, between the genders, between the past and the present, between the old medicine-man uncle and Beatrice, the London University graduate with a "walloping honours degree in

English" (62). In a recent interview, Achebe describes his own practice of articulation in the following way: "We do have several traditions. We have the indigenous tradition, the oral tradition, the vernaculars, the ancient tradition of literature before, but we also have today. You can't disappear back into the past, so we need to create a synthesis of these two. That is the issue" ("Interview" 79-80).

VI

With the examples of Menchu, Glissant, and Achebe in mind, in conclusion I would like to return to Simon During's remark that postcolonial theory "does not appeal to those closest to the continuing struggle against white domination" (348) and that there is no word in Maori for "postcolonialism." During's remark is useful in cautioning us against postcolonial theory's ambition to be the avant-garde of political struggle. But, from the point of view that I have adopted in this essay, During's comment is problematic not only because it assumes, rather patronizingly, to know the real interests of the Maoris but, more importantly, because it forecloses the possibility of articulating local Maori struggles to a wider national or transnational arena of struggle, thereby disallowing the possibility of forging larger solidarities, stronger political blocs. It seems to me that if postcolonial theory should learn, as During rightly suggests, to curb its ambition and recognize that the discursive ambiguities and complexities it so elegantly formulates must be tempered by the cruder and harsher but no less ambiguous and complex demands of local political struggles, then it is equally the case that local political activists may find the arguments and strategies of postcolonial theorists to be of some use in their struggle. Thus, *contra* During, it can be argued that although "postcolonialism" may not exist in the lexicon of Koori and Maori activists, its addition may be welcomed by those activists if only because it widens the scope of their struggle and adds to their arsenal of strategies.

Why, then, does During insist on keeping metropolitan postcolonial theory separate from Maori political activism? It is, I suspect, partly because he fears that any contact between the two will result in an unequal exchange leading to the co-optation of

the latter by the former. Arif Dirlik expresses a similar concern in his critique of postcolonial theory when he argues that the postcolonial valorization of hybridity conceals an asymmetry of power relations that favours metropolitan-based postcolonial intellectuals. Yet although Dirlik is right in insisting that “not all positions are equal in power” (343), both he and During underestimate the ability of the “weaker” party to confront, appropriate, change, and adapt the dominant discourse to suit its own needs. Thus, while Dirlik and During can only observe the silencing of the subaltern demotic voice by metropolitan theory, the assimilation of the other into the same, a more sensitive analysis can detect subtle ways in which the subaltern other can take up the dominant discourse and, through a process of critical mimicry, work its changes on that discourse. As Homi Bhabha points out, when a statement from one institution is transcribed in the discourse of another, a process of destabilization and innovation occurs, since “any change in the statement’s conditions of use and reinvestment, any alteration in its field of experience or verification, or indeed any difference in the problems to be solved, can lead to the emergence of a new statement: the difference of the same” (*The Location of Culture* 22). According to Bhabha’s analysis, concern over the metropolitan co-optation and assimilation of the subaltern is challenged by the subaltern’s subversive mimicry—fear over the making same of the different mocked by the making different of the same. In his study of how the Kwaios of the Solomon Islands resisted British colonialism, Roger Keesing usefully reminds us that “[e]ven when they appear to be appropriating the structures and categories and logics of colonial discourse, subaltern peoples progressively but ultimately radically transform them, in the very process of transgression and in their deployment in a counter hegemonic political struggle” (238).³

However politically well-intentioned, the desire to protect the subaltern demotic voice from metropolitan theory, ironically, can end up preventing the establishment of coevalness between the two. In seeking to defend the subaltern other’s autonomy, metropolitan critics like During find themselves implicated in the very situation of dominance they wish to dismantle. By their

logic, the subaltern's autonomy is predicated on the subaltern's unchanging structural position as the other of the West. However, this "othering," which ensures the subaltern's autonomy, also betrays the vulnerability of subaltern identity, its problematic unchanging role as reactive opposition to active Western domination, for, as Bhabha has warned, "the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power [and in which] the Other text is forever the exegetical horizon of difference, never the active agent of articulation" (*The Location of Culture* 31). Asked to function as the deconstructive limit of Western knowledge, the subaltern other, more often than not, is constructed into being by dissenting factions of the West. As such, the other is frozen in an antithetical, adversarial role, its identity forever dependent on its difference from the West. Essentialized and preserved in theoretical aspic, the other is made to function as the conscience of the West, turned into an allochronic entity whose history is controlled by the deconstructive needs of the Western academy rather than its own. Coeval historical agency, innovation, and change are denied to the other in order that it can remain forever as the limit-text of the West. Thus, whenever a non-Western subaltern other is told not to take up Western knowledges or discourses because to do so would be to betray his or her indigenous culture, what some anthropologists have called "the salvage paradigm" is activated and the model indigenous culture is denied historical agency in order that it can be salvaged and displayed in all its purity and autonomy *by* and *for* the West.

Is there a Maori word for "postcolonialism"? The answer, I hope it is clear, should not be "no and there is no need for such a word," but "not yet." Depending on Maori needs, "postcolonialism" may well become a loan word inserted into the Maori lexicon, a metropolitan word that will become locally inflected, ceding its identity as it becomes articulated to Maori exigencies. A continent away from the Maori struggle, the Mayan peasants of Chiapas launched their rebellion on the same New Year's day that the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) took effect. NAFTA entered the lexicon of the Zapatista rebels because they understood that the struggle for their indigenous

rights and for their very livelihood had to be engaged not only on their own local ground but also on a nation-wide and transnational basis. Shedding the image of what Alcida Ramos has called “the hyperreal Indian,” the Indian created in the image of predominantly white-staffed indigenist movements—“[the Indian who is] dependent, suffering, a victim of the system, innocent of bourgeois evils, honourable in his actions and intentions, and preferably exotic” (163)—the Mayan rebels of Chiapas launched what Roger Burbach has called a “postmodern rebellion” (113). They skilfully utilized the media for their own ends; and Burbach reports that when he visited the region with an international delegation in March, 1994, a few months after the uprising, he was struck by the sophisticated nature of their demands:

In a meeting with many of the community members, it was striking that the women’s organization took the lead in discussing the community’s needs and plans as well as the obstacles it faced. They wanted decent schools, medical services, assistance so they could attend nearby technical colleges, and the right to elect their own representatives at the municipal and state level. They also wanted lands from the nearby cattle estate to augment production . . . but were fully cognizant of the fact that these lands could only be farmed with appropriate technologies to avoid impoverishing the delicate soil of the region. (123-24)

The Chiapas uprising proves that in order for subaltern or dominated peoples to be other than objects of study or recipients of action by well-meaning postcolonial theorists, rock stars, or metropolitan political activists, they must be seen as they see themselves—not as isolated, vulnerable peoples (though they can be that too) whose authentic way of life needs to be protected, preserved, or salvaged by external powers but as theoretical and cultural coevals and co-actors who are interested in metropolitan knowledges, techniques, and goods and who can freely articulate these with their own local, historical needs and practices. As Rigoberta Menchu puts it, arguing for resistance as articulated action rather than piecemeal reaction, “we need to be on the constant lookout for new techniques . . . everything must have a reason or we might do things we want to, but without knowing why we’re doing them” (130).

NOTES

- ¹ "Shampoo" comes from the Hindi verb *champna* ("to press") and its familiar imperative, *champo*. "Pajamas" is derived from the Hindi word for a type of loose trousers, *pajama*, itself borrowed from the Persian compound word made up of *pai* ("foot") and *jamah* ("garment clothing"). "Ketchup" travelled into English from a Chinese regional dialect term for shellfish sauce—*Kāe* ("shellfish" or "seafood") and *tsiap* ("brine" or "sauce"). Finally, "tariff" comes from a Turkish variant of the Arabic word *tarif* ("notification, explanation"). For extended discussions of the etymology of these and other transculturated words in English, see Louis G. Heller, et al., *The Private Lives of English Words*.
- ² For an excellent critique of the uses of negative freedom in postmodern and postcolonial criticism, see John McGowan's *Postmodernism and its Critics*, especially Chapter Three.
- ³ In a similar vein, Anuradha Dingwaney Needham has argued that C. L. R. James critically appropriated the colonial sport of cricket and turned it into a symbol of West Indian self-determination:
By seizing upon a symbol of English (i.e., the colonizer's) national character—cricket—to represent West Indian (i.e., the colonized's) self-definition, James, in effect, abducts "Englishness" (as defined by cricket) and makes it not the exclusive property of the colonizers but rather the means by which the colonized peoples of the Caribbean set themselves free. (288)

WORKS CITED

- Achebe, Chinua. *Anthills of the Savannah*. London: Picador, 1988.
- . "Interview with Feroza Jussawalla." *Interviews with Writers of the Post-Colonial World*. Ed. Feroza Jussawalla and Reed Way Dasenbrock. Jackson: U of Mississippi P, 1992. 63-82.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. *The Dialogic Imagination*. Ed. M. Holquist. Trans. C. Emerson and M. Holquist. Austin: U of Texas P, 1981.
- Bernabé, Jean, et al. "In Praise of Creoleness." Trans. Mohamed B. Taleb Khyar. *Callaloo* 13.4 (1990): 886-909.
- Bhabha, Homi K. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994.
- . "Postcolonial Authority and Postmodern Guilt." *Cultural Studies*. Ed. Lawrence Grossberg et al. New York: Routledge, 1992. 56-68.
- Brennan, Timothy. "Black Theorists and Left Antagonists." *The Minnesota Review* 37 (1991): 89-113.
- Brett, Guy. "Unofficial Versions." *The Myth of Primitivism*. Ed. Susan Hiller. New York: Routledge, 1991. 113-36.
- Burbach, Roger. "Roots of the Postmodern Rebellion in Chiapas." *New Left Review* 205 (1994): 113-24.
- Clifford, James. *The Predicament of Culture: Twentieth Century Ethnography, Literature, and Art*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1988.
- Dhreshwar, Vivek. "Toward a Narrative Epistemology of the Postcolonial Predicament." *Inscriptions* 5 (1989): 135-57.
- Dirlik, Arif. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." *Critical Inquiry* 20.2 (1994): 328-56.
- During, Simon. "Postcolonialism and Globalization." *Meanjin* 51.2 (1992): 339-53.
- Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. "Critical Fanonism." *Critical Inquiry* 17.3 (1991). 457-70.

- Glissant, Edouard. *Caribbean Discourse: Selected Essays*. Trans. J. Michael Dash. Charlottesville: UP of Virginia, 1989.
- Hall, Stuart. "On Postmodernism and Articulation: An Interview with Stuart Hall." Ed. Lawrence Grossberg. *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 10.2 (1986): 45-60.
- Heller, Louis G., et al. *The Private Lives of English Words*. Tarrytown, N.Y.: Wynwood Press, 1991.
- Keesing, Roger M. *Custom and Confrontation: The Kwaio Struggle for Cultural Autonomy*. Chicago: U of Chicago P, 1992.
- Lionnet, Françoise. "'Logiques métisses': Cultural Appropriation and Postcolonial Representations." *College Literature* 19.3/20.1 (1992/93): 100-20.
- McGowan, John. *Postmodernism and its Critics*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991.
- Menchu, Rigoberta. *I, Rigoberta Menchu, An Indian Woman in Guatemala*. Ed. Elizabeth Burgos-Debray. Trans. Ann Wright. London: Verso, 1984.
- Needham, Anuradha Dingwaney. "Inhabiting the Metropole: C. L. R. James and the Postcolonial Intellectual of the African Diaspora." *Diaspora* 2.3 (1993): 281-303.
- Parry, Benita. "Problems in Current Theories of Colonial Discourse." *Oxford Literary Review* 9 (1987): 27-58.
- Pratt, Mary Louise. *Imperial Eyes: Travel Writing and Transculturation*. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Ramos, Alcida Rita. "The Hyperreal Indian." *Critique of Anthropology* 14.2 (1994): 153-71.
- Said, Edward. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf, 1993.
- Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value." *Literary Theory Today*. Ed. Peter Collier and Helga Geyer-Ryan. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1990. 219-44.
- Yúdice, George. "Marginality and the Ethics of Survival." *Universal Abandon?: The Politics of Postmodernism*. Ed. Andrew Ross. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1988. 214-36.