



UvA-DARE (Digital Academic Repository)

Unrealized promises: the subject of postcolonial discourse and the new international division of labor

Aroch Fugellie, P.

Publication date
2010

[Link to publication](#)

Citation for published version (APA):

Aroch Fugellie, P. (2010). *Unrealized promises: the subject of postcolonial discourse and the new international division of labor*.

General rights

It is not permitted to download or to forward/distribute the text or part of it without the consent of the author(s) and/or copyright holder(s), other than for strictly personal, individual use, unless the work is under an open content license (like Creative Commons).

Disclaimer/Complaints regulations

If you believe that digital publication of certain material infringes any of your rights or (privacy) interests, please let the Library know, stating your reasons. In case of a legitimate complaint, the Library will make the material inaccessible and/or remove it from the website. Please Ask the Library: <https://uba.uva.nl/en/contact>, or a letter to: Library of the University of Amsterdam, Secretariat, Singel 425, 1012 WP Amsterdam, The Netherlands. You will be contacted as soon as possible.

Summary

Unrealized Promises:

The Subject of Postcolonial Discourse and the New International Division of Labor

As the main title intimates, this work is influenced by T.W. Adorno's theory of ideology and by performative approaches to the study of discourse. The articulation between Marxism and poststructuralism, the traditions to which each of those pertain, is central here. It leads me to examine postcolonial academic writing as the social establishment of a promise. "Unrealized Promises" refers to the way in which some contemporary discourses elude the fulfillment of their stated political engagement. That rhetorical strategy is characteristic of today's hegemony. It consists of confounding the sphere of potentiality with that of realization, and of turning political questions into ontological dilemmas. I investigate the ways in which a number of texts in postcolonial criticism intervene in, assume, appropriate or recast that strategy.

As I indicate with my subtitle, for that purpose this study brings together two categories that are rarely, if ever, considered in conjunction: the subject of discourse and the new international division of labor (NIDL). Exploring the former with the aid of philosophy, psychoanalytic and linguistic theories, and the latter with the aid of theories of political economy, I claim that the inclusion of the NIDL as an analytical category makes discussions of subjectivity not only more historically assertive, but also epistemologically more productive. Approaching academic production as a place of selection, circulation and accumulation of cultural capital, I analyze the subject positions created, referred or simply operative in the texts. With that focus, I can assess the ways in which texts in postcolonial theory allow or foreclose the possibility for concrete social subjects, specifically situated in relation to the NIDL, to be either legitimated, commoditized or reified as subjects of enunciation.

I employ the methodology of cultural analysis as put forward by Mieke Bal in order to approach the texts not only as theory, but also as expressions of the historical sites in which they are wrought and circulate. By means of this approach I seek to reverse, even if partially, the hierarchical practice of systematically applying "Western" theory to "non-Western" cultural objects. Besides trying to reverse that practice in the limited confines of my study, I trace it in the texts I analyze. I pay attention to what that continued practice implies for a field in which one of the major avowed objectives is to contest the cultural and epistemic hegemony issuing from colonization and its

aftermath. The methodology of cultural analysis also allows me to focus on the relationship between the ideological and the epistemic dimensions of the texts.

The first two chapters deal with the “unrealized” aspect of the promise. A central issue in Chapter One, for example, is self-referentiality. Self-referential postcolonial discourses rely on metaphysical claims. Since the approach to language as an abstract category rather than as a situated practice plays a crucial role in this, I bring theories of Adorno and Michel Foucault together to consider the ways in which language is realized as discourse, and the role of contextuality in that realization. Self-referential discourses are characterized by the reiteratively postponed deliverance of the promise of including difference. In order to analyze how this happens, I explore “difference” in the abstract with reference to Jacques Lacan and as embedded in postcolonial theory with reference to Rey Chow. In self-referential postcolonial criticism, difference is congealed as a fixed concept rather than working as an implicit relational category. Therefore, I explore ways in which Adorno’s dialectical approach to the question of difference may prove intellectually and politically productive for postcolonial criticism.

In Chapter Two I draw from Peter Sloterdijk and Slavoj Žižek’s arguments that cynicism, rather than ignorance, is the most pertinent concept to understand how contemporary ideology operates. I also put forward that, parallel to that approach, there is a persistent need to practice a symptomatic reading of culture. I build these arguments by reformulating Lacan’s notion of the symptom with the aid of Karl Marx and Gayatri Spivak, and as a consequence of my analysis of an internet broadcast lecture. The lecture, by postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, deals with globalization and democracy. It was video-transmitted live from the U.S. to Berlin, right after the events of September 11th, 2001 in New York. I explore the ways in which the author relates to his historical and technological conditions of enunciation. I am particularly concerned with the unrealized promise of connectivity. To understand what shapes that promise, I confront the performative with the discursive dimensions of the lecture and analyze how the virtual environment of the transmission plays into it.

Chapter Three is a turning point in this study. Here I move to a more constructive critique of the field. For that purpose, I build on the notion of strategy as developed by Michel de Certeau and Jean-Luc Nancy, among others. I contrast the strategy of the postcolonial scholar Gayatri Spivak with that of a scholar working outside the field, Néstor García Canclini. My focus is on how they employ the epistemic divide (Spivak) and the new international division of labor (García Canclini) as foundational analytical categories. A first objective is to detect how their respective

epistemologies correspond with different situated interests and ideological commitments. In addition, I explore ways in which these methodologies may be put to work together to push for the deliverance of the withheld aspects of their respective promises. By simultaneously pursuing my objective from within and from outside the field, I foreground the foundational inclusions and exclusions on which the ideology of postcolonial theory relies.

In Chapter Four I investigate the ways in which the conventions of academic writing, particularly citational practices, participate in the production and accumulation of cultural capital across the NIDL. I focus on a book by Anthony Appiah to explore how the academic referencing system may be exploited to democratize this process. With the aid of Pierre Bourdieu, I analyze citation as an objectified form of cultural capital. Drawing from Bal's notion of preposterous history and from the view of Marx's theory of value held by Žižek and Kōjin Karatani, I propose that even within academic production, value is actualized in circulation. Therefore, I argue, the postcolonial critic may intervene in the geo-economic configuration of cultural capital. S/he is in a position to determine whether to actualize – and in this way retroactively produce – the symbolic capital of subjects, including those on the preposterously marginalized side of the NIDL. In these ways, the fourth chapter introduces a crucial factor when analyzing promises and their (lack of) realization: the question of time.

In Chapter Five I return to Adorno to propose that, if an ideology is defined as such by what it promises and yet denies, then the shortcomings of postcolonial theory are to be contested by striving for the fulfillment of its own discursive promise. In other words, this contestation is to be brought about by opening up a space within postcolonial theory for the postcolonial other as an actual subject. I examine this possibility by analyzing a speech by Salvador Allende and a translation by Julius Kambarage Nyerere. With reference to psychoanalytic and Marxist theories of fetishism and melancholy developed in this chapter and in previous ones, notably those of Žižek, W. J. T. Mitchell, and Ranjana Khanna, I take those “non-Western” discourses as fetishes of the excluded other. I investigate the limits and possibilities offered by this fetishistic practice. Since the promise of the fetish here is the reification of the subject, I explore the extent to which and the forms in which Allende and Nyerere speak back to the promise that in their names is enunciated. This last chapter at once critiques the constitutive incongruence, yet pushes for the realization of the withheld promise of postcolonial theory.