Postcolonial Text, Vol 2, No 1 (2006)

Is There a Politics of Postcoloniality?

Diana Brydon
University of Western Ontario

Is there a politics of postcoloniality and if there is, what kind of politics is it? This paper was written in the context of a conference called "The Politics of Postcoloniality" hosted by McMaster University in the fall of 2003, which asked a series of questions about the relation of the academic study of the postcolonial to political activity within and beyond the academy. These questions have preoccupied the discipline from its beginnings and continue to be posed in a number of ways. What is the relation between decolonizing the state and decolonizing the mind? Are they inseparable or are they divisible projects? Or are both now rendered obsolete by the new forms of global capitalism in which the proliferation and commodification of difference has replaced the false universalisms of the older imperialisms, once the target of postcolonial critique? Can analysis of the new American Empire learn any lessons from analysis of preceding imperialisms? The field is riven by the fear that postcolonial analysis, as currently practiced, may well be complicit with newer forms of domination, even as the goals that it expresses continue to seek paths to liberation.

This paper remains haunted by such questions even as it seeks to exorcize these ghosts. The task of answering my question, "is there a politics of postcoloniality," is complicated by at least two factors. First, the meanings of postcolonialism and postcoloniality are deeply contested. Secondly, the nature of politics itself has been thrown into crisis by changes within the world system that might conveniently be dated from the fall of the Berlin Wall and the apparent rise of globalization or the system named "Empire" (as the successor to postcolonialism's antagonist, imperialism) is named by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri (in *Empire* and *Multitude*).[1]

Before my question can be answered, much ground remains to be cleared. I say this not to avoid the righting of wrongs, but because I believe that wrongs cannot be and will not be righted without this kind of preliminary work, much as I regret the suffering that continues while those of us privileged to conduct these debates may seem to dither. This paper approaches the question obliquely, by addressing some of the limiting standpoints that inhibit the productivity of a politics of postcoloniality — the "politics of blame"; strategies of

"them and us"; the assumptions behind "speaking truth to power" and the now misused phrase, "the personal is political" — in order to open space to imagine alternatives that might suffice for the changed conditions of the present: alternatives such as Dipesh Chakrabarty's notion of the "politics of despair"; Bonnie Honig's of the need to expand "the dilemmatic spaces" of endeavour; James (Sakéj) Youngblood Henderson's of "postcolonial ghost dancing"; Chakrabarty and Etienne Balibar's agreement on the current need to think beyond nineteenth century notions of the citizen. The aim throughout is to work toward a politics that balances critique with imagining otherwise.

The "we" employed in this paper refers to the community of scholars concerned about how to answer this question, initially those gathered at the McMaster conference in the fall of 2003 to discuss the politics of postcoloniality, and now the wider community that forms the postcolonial constituency. It is not employed to speak for others nor to assume or manufacture consent but rather to invite engagement about the terms on which a widely scattered group of people with distinctive approaches to these questions might begin to discuss this complex topic and to frame a workable politics.

This paper was written at a time of great loss for the postcolonial field. The death of Edward Said leaves a huge gap. Said spoke for the value of literary and cultural work within the political arena; he insisted on the importance of the political to literary and cultural study; and he worked his entire life to move American politics and postcolonial studies beyond entrapment in what he termed a self-defeating "politics of blame." But according to Said, another politics, a politics of critique and acknowledgement, will be necessary before we can move beyond a politics of blame. Said describes this challenge as follows: "I am for dialogue between cultures and coexistence between people.... But I think real principle and real justice have to be implemented before there can be true dialogue" (Bové 1). This sounds like a chicken and egg problem: which comes first? How can real principle and real justice be implemented without true dialogue? But I believe that Said is correct. We must tackle this knot.

Dipesh Chakrabarty terms the difficulty of such a project "a politics of despair" because it requires "a history that will attempt the impossible: to look toward its own death by tracing that which resists and escapes the best human effort at translation across cultural and other semiotic systems, such that the world may once again be imagined as radically heterogeneous" (243-4). He explains that this task is "impossible within the knowledge protocols of academic history, for the globality of academia is not independent of the globality that the European modern has created" (244). Nonetheless, although at present there are "no (infra)structural sites where such dreams could lodge themselves," such dreams will recur, requiring us to "write over the privileged narratives of citizenship other narratives of human connections" (244). The politics of despair, then, does not advise giving up. But it does suggest the need for a long-term view and a realistic acknowledgement of just how difficult the task will be. It is not an ineffectual wringing of hands, but a willingness

to try to think through some genuine dilemmas. As one example of that difficulty, I suggest that both the politics of blame and that of speaking truth to power are complicit within the privileged narratives of citizenship that Chakrabarty identifies as part of the problem.

For Said, the intellectual has a duty to dissent, proclaiming his autonomy from both state and profession. I see such autonomy as a dangerous illusion, encouraging individualist protest and a disabling suspicion of other modes of dissent.[2] Yet Said is convincing when he suggests that a politics of blame is more often a strategy employed by the powerful for defusing claims for restitution, reparation and justice than it is a politics adopted by oppressed peoples. Coinages such as the "black armband view of history" (cited in Pilger 193), an expression invented to disparage the rewriting of Australian history from an aboriginal point of view, are used by the powerful in Australia to dismiss unpleasant truths, such as the description of Australian colonial history as one of "theft, dispossession and warfare, of massacre and resistance" — indeed, as "genocide" (Pilger 192). To call something by its proper name is not to indulge in the politics of blame. Yet it is often seen this way.

Such derogatory coinages can be turned on their inventors and embraced as a badge of honour. You can now access on the web a song called "Black Armband," composed by John Hospodaryk as his ironic "homage to John Howard." He writes: "...When you criticized those historians (myself included) as having a 'black armband view' because we choose to explore the oppression of the Aboriginal people, you offended the suffering of these people. This song, then, is an attempt to throw your remark right back in your face." The song wrests the black armband from the context defined by the politics of blame, reclaiming it for a politics of commemoration and contention.

But these lines will blur. Postcolonialism is not the politics of blame, and yet the stereotype sticks. To move beyond a politics of blame was the great task of Edward Said's career, yet it remained a task undone at the time of his death.

It is all too easy to confuse calls for accountability and responsibility for a politics of blame. Clearer thinking is necessary, but so is an analysis of the functions such slippage serves. Blame invokes discourses of purity that underlie divisions of us and them, implying that the guilty can be separated from the innocent, often further implying a discourse of good and evil, sin and punishment, embraced by the great religions of the Book (Christianity, Islam, Judaism). Such survivals within a supposedly secular age need to be investigated more closely, within postcolonial discourse as elsewhere.

I am deliberately cautious here. Said's strategy of "speaking truth to power" did not work very well, yet too often it remains the only model for politically engaged postcolonial involvement. If postcolonial critics are to move beyond the impasse that Said described so eloquently just before his death, then we need to understand better both the powerful

appeal and the limitations of a strategy that presumes to speak truth to power. Too often, speaking truth to power can be the rallying cry of U.S. patriotic individualism, a rights discourse firmly embedded within the current status quo, a discourse of certainty rather than questioning, which potentially nourishes a politics of blame. Please don't mistake me here. I think we need more room for dissent, not less. What troubles me in many current invocations of speaking truth to power is the narrow scope afforded dissent and its deep entrenchment in contexts of U.S. constructions of citizenship around a certain kind of individualist entitlement. It is this politics that authorizes speaking truth to power. The politics of blame is not threatened by such a speaking; on the contrary, it reaffirms its hold through such speech. As Rey Chow reminds us, "Defilement and sanctification belong to the same symbolic order" (141). That order constrains all postcolonial speaking but it takes particular forms within different national imaginaries. As postcolonial critics, we study these within the international circuits of our discipline and the local limits of our own areas of expertise, but we always view them from our own particular locations in culture.

I am very aware of my Canadianness as I read expressions of faith in the necessity of speaking truth to power. To move outside the systems that it takes for granted, we need to situate its politics historically for there are other ways of describing this impasse. In *The Wealth of Nature*, Robert Nadeau considers, for example, the remarkable hold that neoclassical economics continues to exert in defining and effectively regulating the ideological context in which these two politics function. As Nadeau explains, assumptions about part/whole relationships based on superseded forms of science continue to operate with the persistence of acts of faith within mainstream economics. These assumptions also authorize both the politics of blame and that of speaking truth to power, for each believes that separations of part from whole are not only possible but also desirable. To counter such belief with alternative arguments based on reason alone, as Nadeau illustrates, is unlikely to shake such faith. When each side in a conflict believes it holds the truth, speaking truth to power is unlikely to shake such belief. Different strategies may be needed.

In his remarkable attempt to take the readers of his book, *If This is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* beyond the politics of blame, Ted Chamberlin investigates the mobilizing power of stories but does not entirely escape the seductions of prophetic power invoked by the concept of speaking truth to power. Chamberlin suggests that prophecy "transcends the category of truthtelling without rejecting it" (51), thus offering a wellspring for communal mobilization that may be more powerful than political resistance. When such speech issues from oppressed and dispossessed peoples, it must be listened to attentively, with an effort to understand it within its own terms. But eventually, Chamberlin recognizes, even such forms of speech need to be questioned. Speaking truth to power is a mythology that can work for any group. It begs the questions: whose truth? whose power? in which contexts? Chamberlin suggests that the categories of them and us "have become hard-wired into our consciousness, in ways that are both as meaningless and as meaningful as table manners" (24). In other words, they are part of our habitus but they are not part of our

essential selves, if such selves in fact exist.

We need to pay more attention to what sustains such deeply ingrained categories of faith, while also recognizing that the choice they pose to us is a false one, "a choice," in his words, "between being isolated or overwhelmed, between being marooned on an island or drowning in the sea" (24). The "great gift" of stories and songs, he suggests, is that they "can frustrate that choice if we let them" (32). The task of a postcolonial pedagogy, he implies, will be to learn (or relearn) how to let them work that magic.

But a pedagogy is not in itself a politics. I suggest that we remain cautious about the role that literature plays "as the licenced alternative to objectivist social science" in constructing the aporias and antinomies that our knowledge systems employ to make sense of the present (Simpson 16). In his analysis of the terms that govern this license, David Simpson, in *Situatedness, or, Why We Keep Saying Where We are Coming From*, warns that "[t]he outcome of the literary turn in the legal, ethical, and social scientific spheres is therefore not to be predicted as necessarily positive because the conditions of its reception cannot be known in advance" (145). We all know from our teaching that postcolonial fictions may as easily elicit comfort as discomfort, smug or dismissive judgments as often as compassion or a rethinking of foundational assumptions. Literature has a role to play but cannot provide a substitute for politics. Politics cannot be understood by focusing on competing individuals and their competing versions of speaking truth to power. Neither can a postcolonial politics be understood by focusing on big names and their books instead of the substance of their ideas and the contexts out of which they make their meaning.

Postcolonial politics take place within a larger crisis of politics itself. We need to understand this crisis, the ways in which the postcolonial is embedded within it, and what specifically postcolonial perspectives might bring to understanding and resolving this crisis. Immanuel Wallerstein suggests that we are now at the end of the era of liberalism as the global ideology or "geoculture of the modern world system," an era initiated by the French Revolution in 1789, with its declaration of the rights of Man and its emancipatory agenda, and now brought to an end with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (1). This era was characterized, in his view, by liberalism's links with racism and Eurocentrism, and by its ability to highjack and redeploy ideologies of liberation. He believes that "the world-system is moving into an even greater North-South polarization than heretofore" (19), a situation which throws up several options for political practice: 1. what I am calling the politics of blame, he terms "the Khomeini option," the denunciation of the West and its Enlightenment values as the incarnation of evil (21); 2. what he describes as the "Saddam Hussein option," "the willingness to risk real warfare" (22); and 3. "individual resistance by physical relocation" -–the solution reluctantly adopted by many postcolonial intellectuals, refugees, undocumented workers and other migrants (23). These options pose political dilemmas. Wallerstein sees the next fifty years as a time of crucial potential, as previously dominant ideologies and economic systems collapse and new forms emerge. Out of this challenge, he

wonders “whether new transformatory movements with new strategies and agendas will in fact emerge” (24). What role will postcolonial politics play during this interregnum? Is it aligned with the old order or the new? Certainly it shares in much of the old, deriving its notions of the subject of politics and the goals of liberation from the declarations of 1789. But it may also have some alternative perspectives to offer on how to think about politics and how to practice it in these changing times. I think it does. This moment, then, may provide an opportunity. How might it be seized?

In a lucid elaboration of three concepts of politics that need to be understood together, emancipation, transformation and civility, Etienne Balibar draws particular attention to the concept of civility, which he defines as “the politics which takes as its ‘object’ the very violence of identities” (23). Citing Bertrand Ogilvie’s notion of “the ‘making of disposable man,’” he considers “indirect and delegated extermination” (23) within those contexts, elaborated by Wallerstein, in which “any claim to a right to political action has become risible...because there is practically no possibility for the victims to see themselves and present themselves in person as political subjects, capable of emancipating humanity by emancipating themselves” (24). In attempting to understand the many different contemporary forms of violence and cruelty associated with “the making of disposable man,” Balibar asks questions that are crucial to the postcolonial project: do these phenomena have any real unity? (141); can we usefully distinguish between “*ultra objective* forms of violence, or *cruelty without a face*” and “*ultra-subjective* forms of violence, or *cruelty with a Medusa face*” (143)? He sees here, in this latter form, not the “realm of ordinary forms of fascism” but rather multiplications of an “*idealization of hatred*” (25). This then, may be a clue to dangers lurking within the politics of blame--could it lead to an idealization of hatred? What Balibar sees in these unprecedented forms of violence is their “non-controvertibility”; that is, “they can neither be repressed or kept down (which is, broadly, the objective of theorizations of the political as justice, logos, social bond), nor converted politically into a means of ‘making history’” (26). These new forms of violence, according to Balibar, throw “into question the idea of the constitution of politics either as transformation or emancipation” (26). These have been the traditional mainstays of postcolonial politics. Without them, where might we be?

Balibar suggests that there still must be “a politics involved in the condition of subjects collectively confronted with the limits of their own power” and posits some hope of finding such a politics in a rearticulation of notions of civility with those of transformation and emancipation (26). Balibar suggests that terrible though the violence of the conquistadores was, it was ultimately constrained as well as authorized by the powerful hegemonic framework within which it operated. That violence was “disciplined” and “civilized” in ways that current violences are not (144), according to him. Many will find this a problematic concept, yet it articulates an alternative to the politics of blame. It also seems similar to Anthony Hall’s celebration of the negotiated politics of the Iroquois Confederacy in *The Fourth World and the American Empire*. Hall suggests that British contractual arrangements

with First Nations peoples, even when imperfectly observed or ignored, were preferable to the American Republic's refusal to recognize First Nations' sovereignty at all. Hall argues that "those distinct peoples who stood in the way of the United States's territorial ambitions were dehumanized and criminalized in the text of the Declaration of Independence" (xiv). According to him, possibly no civil limits can be set to contemporary forms of violence (from state-sponsored to individual acts) until the founding violence of this document is revisited and corrected. Such a suggestion challenges some of the bases on which postcolonial assumptions rest. To move beyond simplistic notions of liberation based on flawed preconceptions, the terms of the discussion need to be clarified, historicized and negotiated. I cannot do that here. That work will be the task of generations, working in an interdisciplinary, international, and collaborative fashion.

The conference that generated this paper asked a series of questions. What does postcolonial work in the academy, and perhaps specifically in literary studies, hope to achieve? What methods are appropriate to the task? Why does this work matter to us? What is at stake in studying and teaching the postcolonial? What kinds of communities can gather under such a name? What is its relation to the concept of "the nation"? What are our hopes--and our fears? If pitting truth against lies or your truth against my truth is not enough, then what will suffice? It is crucial to remind ourselves of such questions because it is easy to get bogged down in the day to day, or distracted by matters that at the end of the day matter much less. Postcolonial politics, as I understand it, is not about a state or a condition, as the suffixes "ity" and "ism" suggest. Like all politics, "postcolonial" refers to a process, a way of doing politics differently. Cold War politics still inflect many responses to such a phrase, even among young people who never knew that era first hand. One student in my class this year was enjoying Suniti Namjoshi's *Goja* until he read the following passage: "But I'm beginning to understand the point of Goja's tale: as long as Charity is confined to the private sphere, and Power to the public and political one — nothing works!" (136). What I saw as a powerful moment of insight into the contradictions of a culture that prided itself on its goodness even as it allowed unconscionable poverty to co-exist with unimaginable wealth, he saw as a call to Communism, a system he had learned had been proven not to work. How do we free Charity and Power from the "mental straitjackets" of the imagination (Brydon and Tiffin 33) maintained by this false binary? A postcolonial politics, I argue, begins with such questions.

At its most fundamental level, postcolonial thinking challenges the failures of imagination that led to colonialism and its aftermath, a failure that continues with globalization but is now assuming horrific new forms. It involves learning to understand the legacies of the past in all their complexity so as to provide ourselves with a sound grounding, both cautionary and inspirational, for imagining better ways of living together in the future. That is where the politics come in. The way to such learning is determined by the needs and urgencies of the present. Such learning involves the kinds of unlearning that Gayatri Spivak addresses when she speaks of "un-learning our privilege as our loss" ("Criticism" 9). So often the

second part of that equation gets forgotten. It involves recognizing that structures of knowledge often contain their own sanctioned forms of ignorance (another Spivakian concept) and their own asymmetrical forms of knowing, that blindness and insight may be the Siamese twins of knowledge.

But to recognize that truth is complex is not to dispense with it entirely. Here Satya Mohanty's engagements with critical realism need to be followed closely. My view, which admittedly goes against the grain of much of the new "common sense" about postcoloniality, is that postcolonial histories and stories challenge the prevalent postmodernist faith in individuality, deterritorialization and relativism and their entrenchment of special interest group and identity politics as the only politics of which people are capable. In my view, a postcolonial politics means turning away from cheap cynicisms and easy answers to enter instead into what Bonnie Honig calls, creating an adjective from the noun "dilemma," the "dilemmatic spaces" of difficult engagements. Such dilemmatic spaces require a certain humbleness of approach, a willingness to be proven wrong, an openness to fresh ways of posing problems, a willingness to submit to the demands of "infinite rehearsal" (Harris *Infinite*) rather than to seek any kind of "final solution." The echoes here are deliberate. My hopes are to evade "eclipses of otherness" (Harris *Womb* 55, 92-3); my fears are renewed forms of fascism.

There are many dilemmatic spaces that a politics of postcolonialism must engage. One of those spaces is the matter of our own situatedness. As differently positioned heirs to the legacies of colonialism, we study a phenomenon that provides us in every sense with the means and the manner of our current living. Many scholars working within the postcolonial field have been accused of putting academic politics and careerism before the larger objectives of work in the field, even of substituting career advancement for working toward decolonization and the kinds of political change it seems to demand. The cynicism of such criticism mistakes a part of the picture for the whole and misidentifies the issues. Indeed, that kind of critique remains trapped in a politics of blame that fails to identify the larger circuits of power within which academic exchanges are embedded, and too often presumes to prejudge the issues before all participants are heard. There are a few issues that I want to raise here. First is the question of how to identify the nature and terms of our situatedness as postcolonial critics. This will include addressing the phenomenal popularity of situating the self within many current discourses and the contradictory but mutually constitutive forms that practice takes, as analyzed so provocatively by David Simpson in *Situatedness*. Second is identification of the proper scope of postcolonial inquiry. Thirdly, what goals it can appropriately set itself. Fourth, insofar as the postcolonial involves a distinctive form of political analysis, this will involve articulating its relation to other forms of political analysis, such as liberalism and Marxism. Here, Duncan Ivison's *Postcolonial Liberalism* and Crystal Bartolovich's and Neil Lazarus's *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies* are good places to begin. Five, if the postcolonial has indeed been diverted from its proper goals, how can it be set back on an appropriate path once more? Finally, how can we

know whether or not we have identified such a path, or whether new configurations of the field merely reinscribe complicity with hegemonic orders?

Arif Dirlik suggests that the field has taken a wrong turn in retreating from "the understanding of colonialism as system," moving instead into "a situational approach that valorizes contingency and difference over systemic totality" (433). Such a situational approach makes it harder to identify the system that has simultaneously given rise to postcolonial studies as a growth area within the academy while denying it any purchase within the world outside academe. Dirlik suggests that "Preoccupation with colonialism and its legacies makes for an exaggerated view of the hold of the past over contemporary realities, and an obliviousness to the reconfiguration of past legacies by contemporary restructurations of power" (429).

Attention to that "reconfiguration of past legacies by contemporary restructurations of power" requires continued vigilance, attentiveness to new forms of complicity, and a willingness to move on, to recognize that analyses appropriate to one time and place may prove inappropriate in another. In Dirlik's view, postcolonial criticism "speaks to the legacies of the past, but it is arguably informed in its basic premises and orientations by assumptions that derive their plausibility from its context in globalization" (429). These are points we need to take very seriously. To test them, the contemporary postcolonial critic will need to consider current contexts of globalization: their derivations and deviations from colonial legacies and the possibility of their relative autonomy from these. But attention to globalization alone will not necessarily solve the bigger questions here; it merely displaces the problem of situatededness from one arena to another.

Dirlik's arguments, like those of H.D. Harootunian, derive from an analysis of a U.S. context in which area studies rather than Commonwealth literature is seen as the foundation for contemporary postcolonial studies, a context and a history that do not describe the Canadian situation. Harootunian's account of the present state of the discipline is barely recognizable from the locations in which I have worked in Australia and Canada. He writes that postcolonial discourse "has seized control of English departments and along with its ally identity politics redefined the character of cultural studies" (150). From my perspective, he is wrong on at least two of these three counts. English departments have not been transformed by postcolonial studies and identity politics are not necessarily its allies, although they may prove traveling companions for a while, as in anti-racist struggles. If identity politics have redefined cultural studies, then that is a matter I leave open for today. I suspect he is right about this. It may also be true, as Kobena Mercer suggests "...that one of the ironies of the nineties was that the keywords of postcolonial thinking perhaps became globalized as merely commonplace rather than critically interrogative" (234). I have already suggested that the concept of speaking truth to power, always problematic in my view, has become one of those normalized clichés, drained of its political force, even as the examples of intellectuals such as Edward Said, Salman Rushdie and Arundhati Roy remind us of its

rallying power and the ethical force it is capable of summoning.

Harootunian's prescription for postcolonial revival is to redirect its attention to "capitalist modernity and its transformations," to the relationship between the "experience of everydayness and the relentless regime of the commodity form" (173). Without such reconfiguration, Harootunian asks: "What, then, can we hope from postcoloniality? An innocuous 'cultural respect,' postcoloniality's response to human rights?" (172), he concludes dismissively. Posed in these terms, the New Age or liberal caricature that passes for postcoloniality in his essay is indeed a trendy triviality, yet I would like to keep this question alive as something requiring much further investigation, today and in the future. What renders cultural respect innocuous? Is it always so? What is the relation between respect and rights? Is there a problem with the terms here or with the assumptions they carry? If respect and rights cannot lead to a more equitable world, then what kinds of concepts can replace them? Chamberlin's book, for example, disengages a discourse of respect from one of rights, without denying the need to address questions of entitlement, ownership and spiritual value.

In a similar vein to Harootunian, Dirlik argues that "the problematic of postcolonialism" is exhausted because "colonialism as systemic activity has receded before a reconfiguration of global relations, so that, even where colonialism persists, it appears differently than it did before as it is refracted through these new relationships" (445). I agree that the current situation reconfigures power relations and requires a renewed and possibly redirected mode of analysis, but the survival of older forms of colonial discourse and the assumptions these carry cause me to dispute Dirlik's contention that the problematic of the field has been exhausted. Dirlik identifies the problematic of postcolonialism solely with its role as critique, yet as Harootunian acknowledges and Chamberlin elaborates, its role as "memoration" (173) is equally important. How and what communities remember and what they erase from memory are always at stake. Indeed, since June 2003, when Stanley Kurtz of the Hoover Institute testified before the Subcommittee on Select Education, Committee on Education and the Workforce, U.S. House of Representatives, claiming that "The ruling intellectual paradigm in academic area studies (especially Middle Eastern Studies) is called 'post-colonial theory,'" the field has been identified as a major threat to U.S. patriotism, requiring further regulation, closer monitoring and the possible withdrawal of funds. According to Kurtz, "The core premise of post-colonial theory is that it is immoral for a scholar to put his knowledge of foreign languages and cultures at the service of American power." Such a politics of boycott is then interpreted by Kurtz as expressing "an extreme animus to the United States itself." Once again, a refusal to serve is read through the lens of the politics of blame and the spaces for dissent, and the dilemmatic spaces of engagement, are severely narrowed.

For me, the task of postcolonial theory is to widen the space for negotiating understanding beyond knee-jerk ideological posturing on both sides of an issue. How does one respond to a Kurtz? I see no value in accepting the terms of engagement he sets, either to embrace or

reject his caricature. What needs to be attacked are the premises on which he bases his arguments.

More questions confront the postcolonial theorist who wishes to move beyond such narrowly circumscribed rhetorics of betrayal and blame. As my quotation from Said at the beginning of this paper indicates, that is not to suggest that Palestinians have not been wronged or that these wrongs must not be recognized, but it is to argue that once such acknowledgement is made, both a will and means must be found to negotiate a better way forward. It is true, as one of this paper's readers implied, that I am suspicious of the master-narratives of politics, but that does not require embracing a relativist view that one side's truth is as good as another's. The ethical choice of adjudicating truths may not be best served, in the end, by taking one side above another. Ethically, we may well decide that one side is right and the other wrong, but politics, as the art of the possible, moves in a different sphere. Rather than a politics of winners and losers and winner take all, I prefer to adopt a politics of negotiation and compromise. Postcolonial histories must prompt us to ask how we can know what kinds of political change will work best for all of us, or at least for more of us, when as Erna Brodber puts it, "the half has never been told" (35).

At the same time, Chinua Achebe reminds us of how much further we must go before we can begin to identify shared goals. He says:

> To those who believe that Europe and North America have already invented a universal civilization and all the rest of us have to do is hurry up and enroll, what I am proposing will appear unnecessary if not downright foolish. But for others who may believe with me that universal civilization is nowhere yet in sight, the task will be how to enter the preliminary conversations. (104)

How to enter the preliminary conversations? That may indeed sound unduly timid to those more confident of the right way forward, yet I believe that postcolonial studies is still at this stage. We are still learning on what basis such a conversation may be begun because those of us inhabiting settler colonies, in any case, are still learning to listen to alternative analyses of who we are and what our accomplishments mean. We are still experimenting with devising our points of entry into alternative ways of envisioning the world. Dirlik and Harootunian believe that the conversation must begin with a critique of capitalism; Chamberlin suggests a renewed respect for ceremonies of community building through the rituals of words. We need the analyses that come from both traditions. I do not believe we have to choose between these options. Rather, we need to learn to think them through together and try to think beyond them. James (Sakéj) Youngblood Henderson, in his essay, "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing: Diagnosing European Colonialism," provides one example, from an indigenous perspective, of how that might be done, wrenching the ghost dance away from Eurocentric interpretations back into the context of "a sustained vision of how to resist colonization" (57).

There are, then, both ideological and institutional contexts constraining the politics of postcoloniality and the terms on which such a conversation may be started, as Henderson recognizes. He identifies colonial strategies of "Eurocentrism, epistemological diffusionism, universality, and enforcement of differences," seeing each of them as living within the contexts of knowledge production today (58). Dirlik and Harootunian identify capitalism as the major constraining context, a context that in its consumerism and its desire for the new makes their academic audience impatient with last year's trend and anxious to move on to the next new thing. They deplore such faddishness yet cannot resist its terms of engagement entirely. For Dirlik and Harootunian, postcolonialism has had its fifteen minutes of fame. In contrast, Chamberlin seeks to connect with a common sense of shared humanity that is concerned by conflict and yearns for "common ground" (as indicated in his subtitle, "Finding Common Ground") among all the warring factions that divide the world. The larger systemic context he identifies is not capitalism but rather the enduring power of stories to divide and unite us and to explain the world. I think that capitalism and stories need to be theorized together. Since each of these theorists is to some extent constrained by the audiences he addresses, their work needs to be read together. In their haste to declare the postcolonial defunct, Dirlik and Harootunian fail to give it the time it needs to work through its mandate. In his desire to reach beyond the academy, Chamberlin makes a virtue of simplicity but cannot always do justice to the demands he wants to make. While I find Henderson's analysis most persuasive, it assumes an audience familiar with a high degree of academic abstraction.

Terri A. Hasseler and Paula M. Krebs remind us that "[t]he definition of postcolonialism in the United States exists in a market context" (91). That context is part of what we need to understand if a politics is to be developed to address and change it. In tracing trends within MLA job descriptions over the past ten years, they conclude that both market forces and "a potential shift in the politics of the larger field of English studies" seem to be at play (91), although they remain unsure of what impact the dynamism and breadth of the field is having. They suggest that although "postcolonialism has become part of the common language of literature departments, there are nevertheless many dialects within this language," meaning that specialists working within one geopolitical location may not necessarily share reference points with specialists in another (99). This is certainly true. In writing this essay from my southwestern Ontario, Canadian location, I am very aware of how different my perspective is from that of my colleagues in the United States and of how hard it is to speak across those national barriers. What are the implications of such a state of fragmentation for the national and global politics of the field? Hasseler and Krebs' title, "Losing Our Way after the Imperial Turn," implies a certain lack of faith in the efficacy of the field, despite the pious hope expressed in their conclusion that postcolonialism may eventually have a transformative effect on many aspects of "English studies," including "disciplinary boundaries, approaches to texts, and even the politics of institutions" (100).

For Hasseler and Krebs, then, the politics of postcoloniality are academic politics, with implications for change largely confined to the university. For many, that politics is insufficient, and the results that it can be expected to achieve will be modest and happen too slowly. I am more ambivalent. Postcolonial study is not just about English studies but about knowledge formations and their consequences, within and beyond university study. At the same time, what politics needs from university researchers is sound research that can be trusted and the authority of an arms-length distance from the marketplace and from the state, so that rational strategies for political action may be based on objective information and analysis. At a time when media credibility is at an all-time low, and scientific research is itself being questioned for its partisan and partial nature, scholarship in the humanities needs to reclaim an ethical ground that through postmodernism it voluntarily relinquished. Thus it is urgent that university researchers combat corporate funding of research and the privatization of universities, including the transformation of knowledge into product and students into consumers. It is also necessary for postcolonial work to challenge the stereotypes and assumptions that make inequities seem both natural and deserved, thus preparing the ground for a politics through which Achebe's desired conversations may begin to happen. While literary study has a role to play in this task, the insights of other disciplines are also needed to contribute to this recontextualization.

Politics will not be valued or understood until those aspects that distinguish it from other human endeavors are recognized along with the ways in which it is enmeshed within other activities. "The personal is political" was an effective slogan for different times, when it challenged notions of the autonomy of the individual to insist on the Marxian insight that any choices we might make are always made within contexts not of our own choosing. Feminists in the 1960s found it helpful in fighting sexism. But today it has been turned on its head, often being employed to reinforce the very focus on autonomous individual choice that it was designed to combat. Today, employment of the phrase tends to obscure rather than illuminate the crucial connections that must be made between different aspects of our lives. It reduces politics to individual preference. As an editorial in Z Magazine puts it:

> The "personal is political" — meaning that personal outcomes are largely a product of systemic relations and of structures beyond each individual that need to be addressed — came to mean, instead, that all political phenomena arise from the accumulated personal choices of individuals, so that what needed to be addressed to win better circumstances was primarily people's personal choices.

The concepts of agency and of choice need to be rescued from such draining contexts today.

In valuing politics as politics, we need not devalue other kinds of human creativity. Ultimately, my own interest lies in the ways that literary texts both engage and exceed the political. Many critical texts, from a variety of ideological perspectives, have recently appeared addressing the question of postcolonial aesthetics. But the task of thinking through

aesthetics and politics together remains one of the challenges before us.

Although the ultimate orientation of a postcolonial politics is toward negotiating political change in the organizations of governance, power and wealth in the world, the more immediate task is creating the kinds of knowledge base and the kinds of subjects who can work together creatively toward achieving such goals. We always need to remind ourselves of the long and short term goals of our work. By drawing attention to the notion of "ends" I am directing attention to the functions of postcolonial work but also highlighting its imbrication within utopian projects as varied and contradictory as Marxism and Christianity. The language of postcolonial theory is heavily imbued with potent metaphors from economics and religion. How do we negotiate across these conflicting agendas? "The Ends of Postcolonialism," my original conference title, carries eschatological echoes from monotheistic religious, liberal and utopian discourses, each of which implies that history is progress toward "an end," a final point of consummation. These are echoes I wish to disclaim but which must be investigated before they can be discarded because the whole enterprise is imbued with them, heavily imbued with them. The notion of bearing witness, for example, grounds much work within the field in a way that seems to delink the concept from its roots in religious experience, but can such associations be so easily delinked? Or should they be? In what ways does the postcolonial politics of bearing witness move this concept out of religious discourse into the realm of the political? What are the implications of such transference for the practice of a politics of postcoloniality?

This paper has obliquely addressed a series of inter-related questions: 1. What is the point of postcolonial scholarship? 2. To what extent is the field imbued with a missionary zeal to redeem the world? 3. To what extent can such idealism be harnessed for democratic negotiations concerning governance? 4. To what extent does it remain dangerously embedded in forms of idealism that can slip toward fascism? 5. Is there a temporal limit to the scope of the field? Is postcolonialism a project that will be completed when the legacies of colonialism have been worked through and surpassed, or is it the kind of process that Wilson Harris terms an "infinite rehearsal"? 6. What form should a postcolonial politics take in Canada? 7. How does one think an indigenous literacy alongside a transnational literacy?

This last question articulates the project that Ted Chamberlin begins in *If This is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories?* If we can start to become proficient within these forms of literacies, then what would change as a result? As Ivison asks: "Given the history of relations between Aboriginal peoples and the state, on what possible grounds could a liberal state ever become a postcolonial one?" (72). With these questions, we are back to where I began, with Edward Said's observations on the preconditions for political dialogue. Ivison suggests that the "[i]nvocation of reasonableness" as "a deeply contested terrain in colonial contexts" (72) will need to be rethought, as it is being rethought within postcolonial studies today. That thinking proceeds on many fronts. It will take a collective effort across disciplines and different communities of interest to shift these definitions. Its chief enemy right now may be

the demand for instant solutions and easy answers. But we cannot discount the fear that such changes bring to many, either. If we are to replace modernism's command to "make it new" with the urging to "make it just," it will be hard to avoid defensive responses that confuse that demand with the politics of blame.

Hardt and Negri were too hasty (in *Empire*) in dismissing postcolonial theory as a backward-looking study with no relevance to the challenges of globalization. The civilizing mission remains alive and well and must be distinguished from Balibar's attempt to reclaim the "civil" for a different kind of genuinely emancipatory project. The goal of creating equitable and peaceful societies, beyond the dead hand of the colonial past, is worth embracing. Politics is humanity's means for achieving such a goal, but politics itself requires an infrastructure and value system to function. At the very minimum, politics requires people who can act collectively for the public good. That is why Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak pays so much attention to the urgent need for developing forms of transnational literacy and unlearning those sanctioned forms of ignorance that still too often pass for common sense. That is why Len Findlay and James (Sakéj) Youngblood Henderson issue their calls to indigenize. As students and teachers, we have a role to play in defining the focus of postcolonial analysis in response to changing conditions under globalization. To be effective, a politics of postcoloniality will need to keep listening to its critics, from all sides of the political spectrum, while working to create the conditions under which genuine dialogue might begin.

Notes

[1] My thanks to the conference organizers (David Jefferess, Sabine Milz, Julie McGonegal) for putting this crucial topic on the agenda and for gathering such a dynamic community together to discuss it. I have benefited enormously from audience feedback both during the conference and afterwards and wish to express my thanks to this group and to my students in English 424F for pushing my thinking so much further on these questions. I am also deeply grateful to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding this research under the title, "The Ends of Postcolonialism."

[2] Barry Sarchett makes a somewhat different argument, I think, in "Preprofessionalism and Disciplinarity," when he critiques Said's suggestion that professionalism is "the greatest threat to the integrity and autonomy of the intellectual," an argument based in his view on "faulty, nostalgic historical models and suspicious ideological assumptions" (43). See *ADE Bulletin* 133 (2003): 42-46. See also Jeffrey J. Williams' argument against Said's distrust of professionalism (216-18) in "The Life of the Mind and the Academic Situation." In Jeffrey J. Williams, ed. *The Institution of Literature*. Albany: State U of New York P, 2002. 203-25.

Works Cited

Bird, Achebe, Chinua. *Home and Exile*. Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000.

Balibar, Etienne. *Politics and the Other Scene*. Trans Christine Jones, James Swenson, Chris Turner. London: Verso, 2002.

Bartolovich, Crystal and Neil Lazarus, eds. *Marxism, Modernity and Postcolonial Studies.* Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.

Bové, Paul A. *Edward Said and the Work of the Critic: Speaking Truth to Power*. Durham: Duke UP, 2000.

Brodber, Erna. *Myal*. London: New Beacon, 1988.

Brydon, Diana and Helen Tiffin. *Decolonising Fictions*. Sydney: Dangaroo, 1993.

Chakrabarty, Dipesh. "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for 'Indian' Pasts?" *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, 1997. 223-47.

Chow, Rey. "Where Have All the Natives Gone?" *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Ed. Padmini Mongia. London: Arnold, 1997. 122-46.

Chamberlin, J. Edward. *If This is Your Land, Where Are Your Stories? Finding Common Ground*. Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003.

Dirlik, Arif. "Rethinking Colonialism: Globalization, Postcolonialism, and the Nation." *Interventions*. 4.3 (2002): 428-448.

Findlay, Len. "Always Indigenize! The Radical Humanities in the Postcolonial Canadian University" *Ariel*. 31:1 & 2, Jan.-April 2000. 307-26.

Hall, Anthony J. *The American Empire and the Fourth World*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's UP, 2003.

Hardt, Michael and Antonio Negri. *Empire*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2000.

—. *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire*. New York: Penguin, 2004.

Harootunian, H.D. "Postcoloniality's Unconscious/Area Studies' Desire." *Learning Places: The Afterlives of Area Studies*. Ed. Masao Miyoshi and H.D. Harootunian. Durham & London: Duke UP, 2003. 150-74.

Harris, Wilson. *The Infinite Rehearsal*. London: Faber, 1987.

—. *The Womb of Space*. London: Greenwood, 1983.

Hasseler, Terri A., and Paula M. Krebs. "Losing Our Way After the Imperial Turn: Charting Academic Uses of the Postcolonial." *After the Imperial Turn: Thinking With and Through the Nation*. Ed. Antoinette Burton. Durham: Duke UP, 2003. 90-101.

Henderson, James (Sakéj) Youngblood Henderson. "Postcolonial Ghost Dancing" Diagnosing European Colonialism." *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*. Ed. Marie Battiste. Vancouver: UBC P, 2000. 57-76.

Honig, Bonnie. "Difference, Dilemmas, and the Politics of Home." *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*. Ed. Seyla Benhabib. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton UP, 1996. 257-77.

Hospodaryk, John. "Black Armband." *Union Songs*. Accessed on October 21, 2003 <http://www.crixa.com/muse/unionsong/u152.html>

Ivison, Duncan. *Postcolonial Liberalism*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2002.

Kurtz, Stanley. "Statement." Accessed on October 21, 2003. <http://edworkforce.house.gov/hearings/108th/sed/titlevi61903/kurt.htm>

Mercer, Kobena. "A Sociography of Diaspora." *Without Guarantees: In Honour of Stuart Hall*, ed. Paul Gilroy, Laurence Grossberg and Angela McRobbie. London: Verso, 2000. 233-44.

Mohanty, Satya P. "The Epistemic Status of Cultural Identity: On Beloved and the Postcolonial Condition." *Reclaiming Identity: Realist Theory and the Predicament of Postmodernism*. Ed. Paula M.L. Moya and Michael R. Hames-Barcia. Berkeley: U of California P, 2000. 29-66.

Nadeau, Robert L. *The Wealth of Nature: How Mainstream Economics Has Failed the Environment*. New York: Columbia UP, 2003.

Namjoshi, Suniti. *Goja*. North Melbourne: Spinifex, 2000.

Pilger, John. *The New Rulers of the World*. London: Verso, 2002.

Simpson, David. *Situatedness, or, Why We Keep Saying Where We're Coming From*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty. "Criticism, Feminism, and the Institution" In *The Post-Colonial Critic*. 1-16.

—. *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1999.

—. *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*. Ed. Sarah Harasym. New York: Routledge, 1990.

Wallerstein, Immanuel. *After Liberalism*. New York: New Press, 1995.

Z Staff, "Editorial: The Personal is Political?" Accessed on October 22, 2003 <http://zena.secureforum.com/Znet/ZMag/articles/julyeditorial97.html>