

After Colonialism: Imperial Histories and Postcolonial Displacements, edited by Gyan Prakash. Princeton Studies in Culture/Power/History. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995. ISBN 0-691-03742-6, viii + 352 pages, notes, bibliography, index. Paper, US\$16.95.

After Colonialism is a powerful collection of essays, ably edited by Gyan Prakash, that disturbs in deeply insightful ways the discipline of history. Reflecting current interdisciplinary concerns for the critical study of colonial discourse in situations of postcoloniality, the book's contributors move beyond simple oppositions and dangerous dichotomies to examine the multifaceted and complex relationships around knowledge and power, and between colonizer and colonized. The purpose of the volume, in its editor's words, is to pry open the simple evidentiary preoccupation of previous studies on colonialism "not only to document its record of domination, but also to track the failures, silences, displacements, and transformations produced by its functioning; not only to chronicle the functioning of western dominance and resistances to it, but to mark those (subaltern) positions and knowledge that could not be properly recognized and named, only 'normalized,' by colonial discourses" (6). *After Colonialism* thus seeks to uncover local sites of knowledge and agency heretofore neglected or overlooked by the limited visions of conventional historiography. It does so, in my estimation, with magnificent success.

The list of contributors include some of the most prominent scholars

in the burgeoning field of cultural studies. While several of these essays have been published previously, they assume particular persuasiveness in the context of this larger collection. Edward Said opens the volume by pointing out the imperial affiliations and universalizing discourses of western academic disciplines such as history, anthropology, and philology. The colonized world is rendered according to the epistemological foundations of the west, a process of representation that makes "natural" Europe's claims to preeminence. Said also investigates the ways in which imperialist sentiment pervades western literature, ranging from the works of William Shakespeare to the novels of Jane Austen. Against these literary, often subtle, expressions of desire and domination, Said urges a contrapuntal reading of colonialist texts to uncover the "structures of attitude and reference" that intimately link culture and imperialism in the west.

Complementing Said's concerns for the imperial complicity of western academic disciplines, Steven Feierman critiques the universal narrative of world history that has given rise to such constructions as Africa. Feierman demonstrates how provincial are the tropes of a world history that is really only a more ambitious form of European history. Multiple, varied, and culturally particular narratives of African pasts contest the hegemonizing criteria behind the concept of civilization. African pasts cannot be subsumed and reduced against master historical narratives that measure achievement in terms of the development of agriculture, the rise of cities, or the growth of

regional trade networks. Feierman writes of the need to transcend an understanding of history that originates in Europe.

The practice of history is also the concern of Joan Dayan's essay on the 1804 slave revolution in Haiti that led to the establishment of the world's first black republic. Endeavoring to escape the extremes of idealization and debasement that characterize French historiography, Dayan invites consideration of a different kind of history, drawn from local legends and blurred but still-remembered oral traditions of the revolution. What emerges from this different kind of history—a history in which vodou practices and beliefs figure prominently—are reminders about the ambiguity of power and the ambivalences of revolution. Revolution, writes Dayan, is rarely as complete as its mythologizers and ideologues make it. A vodou history of the 1804 revolution resulting from the inclusion of unwritten histories promotes a recognition of the ways in which inventions of the mind and of memory destroy the illusion of a final, single, and uncontested master narrative.

After Colonialism is also concerned with examining the multiple dimensions of encounters between colonizer and colonized. While colonialism's advocates and critics have held decidedly different reasons for maintaining well-defined distinctions between exploiter and exploited, such a penchant for oppositional clarity often ignores the more complex, improvisational features of human dynamics in colonial settings. A failure to consider the ways in which local populations sought to mimic, appropriate, use, or

counter the colonial presence constitutes a denial of agency. Ruth B Phillips argues that formal programs of collecting and exhibiting in North American museums excluded, in the spirit of ethnographic authenticity, Native American art produced explicitly for sale to tourists. The refusal to acknowledge art forms that evidenced local negotiations with western systems of art, economics, and aesthetics ultimately works to reinforce representations of Native Americans as other, marginalized, and premodern.

While the works of Said, Feierman, Dayan, and Phillips center on the relationship between the colonialist practices of academic disciplines, a second set of essays is concerned with colonialism's encounter with the larger issue of cultural difference. Anthony Pagden examines how different European conceptions of nationalism worked to efface difference. Denis Diderot, according to Pagden, saw migration and commerce as global processes that would lead to the creation of new national communities based ultimately on shared values and common experiences. Colonialism, however, wreaked havoc on Diderot's utopian vision. Johann Herder did not share the Frenchman's optimism, assuming instead the basic incommensurability of cultures. Herder understood nationhood as little more than the outcome of centuries of accumulated cultural habits that reified both cultural distance and difference. The horrors of the colonial enterprise, awful as they were, came as no surprise to Herder, who denied the existence of anything remotely approaching a common morality. Pagden believes

the late-twentieth-century world still struggles, unsuccessfully, with these two opposed, equally unsatisfying nationalist perspectives on cultural difference.

Difference, division, and competition also existed within a given colonizing project. Leonard Blussé's account of the interaction between the Dutch colonial administration and the Protestant mission in seventeenth-century Formosa challenges those who see colonialism as essentially seamless in character. More assertive in Formosa than in its other mission fields, the Dutch Protestant mission actively encouraged the colonial administration in the extension of its jurisdiction over areas regarded as heathen. The spread of the colonial government had the intended effect, at least initially, of facilitating the expansion of mission efforts. The compatibility of these separate projects proved transitory, however. Faced with the slaughter of Dutch citizens on the nearby island of Lamey, the colonial administration, to the unwritten dismay of its missionary allies, abandoned support for the indigenization of the gospel and opted instead for a program of violence and coercion. Thus was revealed the ultimate incompatibility, in seventeenth-century Formosa at least, of empire and Christianity.

Colonial regimes also struggled to order that which was not easily or neatly ordered, and with confounding, sometimes tragic, results. In one of the volume's more remarkable contributions, Gauri Viswanathan details how the acceptance of Christianity in colonial India meant a civil death for converts who were no longer recognizable

under Hindu scriptural law as functioning members of their former communities. Complex and in many instances contradictory, British colonial policy reflected liberal humanism's secularization of religious experience. Belief was now privatized and rendered subordinate to the claims of reason, logic, and the law; it was a discourse that did not travel well in colonized environments. For purposes of administration, colonial courts refused to recognize either the social consequences of religious change experienced by converts, or the efforts by established religious communities in India to enforce the banishment of these outcasts. The consequences of this conundrum fell hardest on the converts who found themselves in liminal spaces unwanted by their former communities and unprotected by colonial law.

In like vein, Zachary Lockman writes how Zionist discourse in Palestine, though employing the language of socialism, class struggle, and working class solidarity, ultimately came to represent Arab workers as shadows on an essentially unoccupied land, lacking the characteristics of a nation and hence the right of self-determination, but susceptible nonetheless to the anti-colonialist activities of "outside agitators." Like other subordinated peoples, Palestinians were rendered invisible or marginal in the discourses and historical narratives of the powerful. Yet they were always there, and their presence had a constitutive if now denied influence on the development of Zionism between 1897 and 1927.

Though its centrality to modern and postmodern worlds is acknowledged,

the concept of colonialism is itself subjected to critical, discursive, and historically contingent analyses in this volume. J Jorge Klor de Alva writes with particular attention to the problematics engendered by an indiscriminate application of the term *colonialism*, finding it of little relevance when applied to peoples in the core areas of Central and South America, for whom regional, relatively autonomous sociopolitical and cultural units created by growing mestizo/criollo worlds provided more immediately relevant orderings of experience. Given the formation of an elite ruling class that resulted from the distinctive racial and ethnic mixings that occurred among the legitimate and illegitimate progeny of colonialists, Africans, and indigenous peoples, de Alva argues that decolonization cannot be said to have taken place in these areas as it did elsewhere in the world. The Princeton University anthropologist, then, would have his readers recognize the historical particulars that inform contemporary notions of identity, including the emergence of nativist ideologies that discriminate against true natives. Like Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, de Alva shares a concern for identities of strategic essentialism that elide historical differences and varieties of oppression in favor of common agendas against an assumed, globally uniform style of colonialism.

The third and final set of contributions in *After Colonialism* charts the fault lines of knowledge across colonized landscapes. Irene Silverblatt explores the perceived advantages that led different groups of ethnically distinct Andeans in seventeenth-century

Peru to see themselves as Indians, a decidedly pejorative social category bequeathed by the Spanish colonial administration. Marred by colonial constraints and prejudices, the gloss *Indian* nonetheless articulated Andeans' experiences as colonized people. A conscious employment of the term *Indian*, and with it the historical memories it evoked, led to the emergence of indianism, an ideology that transcended ethnic borders, formed alliances across boundaries of gender and privilege, and challenged colonial truths. This indianism embodied a resurgent nativism that spoke of self and possibility but in an intricate dynamic with the compromising practices of Spanish hegemony. "Indianism's simultaneous embrace and rejection of the colonial order," writes Silverblatt, "charted courses of possibility for the years to come" (293).

The last two essays by Emily Apter and Homi Bhabha advance the cause for alternative forms of knowledge and agency made possible by the dysfunctioning of colonial discourse. Focusing on the work of Elissa Rhais, a popular Algerian novelist of the 1920s, Apter details how the persistent reproduction of Oriental fictions and stereotypes of North African women affected and were in turn affected by French feminism. What resulted from this interplay were varied representations of Muslim life that competed with one another in their claims to be real, and in their advocacy of a common feminism that addressed the situations of North African and French women. These colliding colonial realisms undermined any confidence in a transcendent, irreproachable representa-

tion of colonial reality, thus creating space for other visions of identity and agency. The destabilization of colonial stereotypes resulting from these conflicting versions is further advanced by the serious questions regarding the actual identity and gender of the author known as Elissha Rhais. Apter closes with an argument for a new historiography of literary history that acknowledges the parodic, provisional, and historically posed or contexted.

In an essay that revisits many of the more prominent themes addressed earlier in the volume, Homi Bhabha finds a space for subaltern agency in the ambivalent functioning of history and anthropology as outlined in Foucault's *The Order of Things*, and in the more concrete events surrounding the 1857 mutiny of local colonial troops in India. What emerges from the uncertain interstitial spaces of history and anthropology when applied to the 1857 mutiny, especially the role that rumors played in that mutiny, is an outbreak of agency that is partial, contingent, and ambivalent, and that encourages new histories beyond the strictures of colonial fears, fantasies,

and desires.

Like Bhabha, Prakash hopes that *After Colonialism* will invite further work that exploits the fissures, uncertainties, and contradictions in colonial discourse and that in so doing, it will make possible an awareness of the humanity and agency of the subaltern, the exploited, the colonized, and the forgotten. Judging from the quality of the individual essays, including the editor's own introduction, I find this hope well founded. *After Colonialism* is an amazing, wide-ranging collection of essays that no summary review can do justice to. Many of these essays, because of the methodologies they espouse and the issues they engage, deserve their own separate and critical commentary. I leave this task to others. Suffice it to say here that the writings of these very erudite, imaginative, bold, and committed scholars suggest the new kinds of knowledge waiting to be freed by the undisciplining of history and other forms of colonial discourse.

DAVID HANLON

University of Hawai'i at Mānoa