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Postcolonial Studies and the Ethics of the Quarrel

John McLeod

In 1978, when concluding his landmark study of the cultural politics of modernity and imperialism, *Orientalism* (1978), Edward W. Said had this to say about the agency which he hoped his book would accrue:

The worldwide hegemony of Orientalism and all it stands for can now be challenged, if we can benefit properly from the general twentieth-century rise to political and historical awareness of so many of the earth's peoples. If this book has any future use, it will be as a modest contribution to that challenge, and as a warning: that systems of thought like Orientalism, discourses of power, ideological fictions – mind-forg'd manacles – are all too easily made, applied, and guarded.¹

While Said did not yet use the term 'postcolonial', his determined attempt to quarrel with the discursive dispensation of modernity that had secured notions of Occident and Orient contributed to the unguessed 'future use' of *Orientalism* as the grounding, and ground-clearing, inaugural text of the fledgling field of postcolonial studies. As is well-documented, the critical currency of 'postcolonial' and 'postcolonialism' arose in the wake of Said's work, resulting in these terms' frequency and familiarity in a range of publications by the mid-1990s.² Calling upon Said's contrarian critical standpoint, itself indebted in part to his Palestinian politics, and his conceptual kinship with post-Marxist poststructuralism, many postcolonial critics pursued this reckoning with power in relation to culture's ideological

fictions, often valuing the new moments and modes of representation forged by those with a relation to the oppressed of once-colonised countries.

This sense of postcolonial studies as a pugilist practice, contending with those discourses of power that arrested the past and have remained to reconstitute a new imperium for the present and future, was ably summarised in 2001 by Robert J. C. Young in *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction*: for him, the term ‘postcolonialism’ registered ‘the resistant pressure and agency of the postcolonial world’ and named ‘a theoretical and political position which embodies an active concept of intervention within [...] oppressive circumstances’.³ Yet Young’s book witnesses two quarrels, not one. Part of the importance of Young’s ‘introduction’, one of the longest and most sophisticated in the field, resides in the *reconstitution* of postcolonialism it attempts when describing its emergence and provenance. On the one hand it makes plain the deeply political thrust of postcolonial critique that takes aim not just at empires past but also, in Derek Gregory’s grim formulation, at ‘the colonial present’ in which the tread of imperialism has been remoulded so that its ideological fictions, however revised, hold fast.⁴ (Said’s *Orientalism*, let us remember, was as much about ‘Orientalism Now’ as colonialism’s yesteryears, as concerned with Henry Kissinger as Lord Cromer.) On the other hand, Young’s narration of postcolonialism’s historical emergence both reflects and contributes to a significant quarrel, ongoing and still unresolved, within postcolonial studies itself about the field’s conditions of possibility and political stripe. It is this second quarrel that shall preoccupy me in this essay. I suspect that many informed readers of my opening paragraph may already be smarting with exasperation at the potted account of postcolonialism I risked, one which commits several cardinal sins, namely: the situating of Said’s work as inaugurating postcolonialism per se, the careless mention of the Palestinian provenance of his scholarship, my ‘culturalist’ rather than materialistic focus on discourse and ‘fictions’ as constituting salient modes of political

critique, the laudatory use of the terms ‘poststructuralist’ and (even worse) ‘post-Marxist’, the anti-foundationalist view that ‘historical awareness’ and political praxis are matters of representation and ‘system[s] of thought’. If Said’s work can be thought of, rightly or wrongly, as firing the starting gun for the new terrain of postcolonial studies, then critical work in this field has been persistently quarrelling inwardly with its conceptual and political character, its shortcomings and elisions, and the precarious position of the postcolonial intellectual.

In some respects, Young’s *Postcolonialism* constituted a welcome rapprochement within postcolonial studies between, crudely put, contrary culturalist and materialist positions.⁵ While remaining open to the wisdom of poststructuralist thinking as a ‘culturalist’ means of contending with modernity’s white mythologies, Young anchors the origins of postcolonial thought in materialist traditions of Marxist anti-colonial revolutionary politics that captured the imagination across Africa, South Asia and Latin America during the struggle for national self-determination. He provocatively situates intellectuals such as Said, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida at the end of, and as indebted to, the *longue durée* of the material conditions of colonialism and anti-colonial nationalism that climax and continue in the twentieth century, in Tunisia, Algeria and Palestine. He reminds us, too, that the counterpointing of culturalist and materialist positions may be a false economy. Young’s is an expert as well as indicative example of the quintessentially bifocal element of much postcolonial scholarship, which looks as much to the inward quarrels occurring between scholars as it does to the unequal conditions of possibility that create without care the human wreckage of the earth. Quarrelling with the postcolonial has become itself something of a genre of postcolonial critique. One need not look further, by way of example, than the opening words to Neil Lazarus’s compelling challenge to postcolonial thought as he understands it, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (2011): ‘Much of my own work since the early

1990s has taken the form of a contestation of particular ideas and assumptions predominant in postcolonial studies'.⁶

Postcolonial studies' insistent self-policing and internal vigilance might be considered as definitive rather than a distraction. Dennis Walder reminds us that the field 'was contested from the start of its widespread deployment as an account of certain specific discursive formations, well before being interrogated almost to extinction'.⁷ In Graham Huggan's words, the field must be understood at root as 'one of informed self-criticism – one in which the value of the term "postcolonial" itself has been continually interrogated, its methodological biases unearthed, the potential applicability of its theories put to the test'.⁸ Huggan's vocabulary captures with a certain coolness the tenacity but not the tenor of this 'self-criticism', especially as it has continued in recent years. The sense of altercation and strained relations which inflects some such contributions seems especially describable through the semantic register of 'quarrel', with its emphases on the intemperate and affronted. Vivek Chibber's recent assessment of the field, which he links very securely to the domain of 'Subaltern Studies' as it emerged from the 1980s, evidences in its teeth-gritted tone an injurious rendition of postcolonial studies, especially when he speaks of

the eagerness among academics to appear *au courant*, at the cutting edge, to display familiarity with the very latest conceptual advances. The most common means of doing so is to troll for the latest neologisms in order to pepper one's work with them, even if only for symbolic purposes. The result is a kind of conceptual inflation [...]. Postcolonial studies has enjoyed this inflated popularity more than most others – hence the spread of terms such as 'subaltern', 'hybridity', 'the fragment', and 'diaspora' across the scholarly landscape.⁹

Chibber's choice of verbs (appear, display, troll, pepper) betrays his misgivings about the legitimacy, commitment and coherence of much postcolonial scholarship, and one might be compelled to entertain his account of postcolonialism if it was less reliant for its impact upon a rhetoric of the sneer. It is hard to keep one's cool when quarrelling, perhaps. But in other examples, and as I wish to investigate, the pursuit of postcolonial in a quarrelsome mode may safeguard the commitment to its intellectual viability and secure robustly its futurity, one which turns on the vital and revitalising entangling of ethical and political concerns by postcolonial intellectuals.

The value of materialist engagements with postcolonial critique is beyond measure, especially their determined vigilance towards the interface of culture and imperialism in the context of capitalism's designs. Yet these can appear sometimes too constrained by the default suspicion towards the ways in which postcolonial thought is assembled, as in Said's work, by making politics proximate with a poststructuralism always pitted as hostile to the wisdom and political traction of Marxism. For example, Lazarus's critique of Said in *The Political Unconscious* (2011) casts doubt on the rigour of Said's engagement with Foucault and notes the enthusiastic reception of *Orientalism* by those keen to promote 'anti-foundationalism' and the 'repudiation of Marxism, usually taking the form not of a cold war anti-Marxism but of an avant-gardist "post-Marxism"', even if Said himself might not have been sympathetic to the anti-humanist thrust of postcolonial theory.¹⁰ More recently, Lazarus and his colleagues in the Warwick Research Collective (WReC) have chastised Said's critique of imperialism as insufficiently attentive to the capitalist world-system and complicit in obfuscating the material particulars which obtain in the West: 'The tendential severing of imperialism from capitalism leads Said to neglect the structuring dynamics, agencies and vectors of modern historical development'.¹¹ Driven as such, materialist postcolonialisms emerge as paradoxically formulated: propelled by a vital political commitment to ending

imperial disenfranchisement around the globe while upholding the view of postcolonial studies as a field which cannot deliver this goal due to its alleged dubious intellectual affiliations.

It is vital to distinguish critics, like Young and Lazarus, who quarrel richly and productively with the postcolonial from those who dismiss it *tout court* usually through a cynical representation of the postcolonial intellectual as a culpable not critical figure. For the latter, postcolonial critique is a bogus form of intellectualism with nothing valuable to offer the contestation of those global conditions which keep capitalist modernity ascendant, and there is no value to be found in its nomenclature or key ideas. This standpoint, which arose in tandem with the establishment of postcolonial studies, was famously articulated by Arif Dirlik in 1994, who decried postcoloniality as ‘designed to avoid making sense of the current crisis and, in the process, to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a global capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries’.¹² Leaving aside the contestable grounds of Dirlik’s argument (which can be traced quite quickly to his squeamishness about any kind of poststructuralist thinking), its targeting of the postcolonial intellectual remains an instructive manoeuvre. The relationship between the postcolonial intellectual and their field of study – usually the cultures and conditions of once-colonised and minoritised peoples, those rendered ‘infrahumans’ in Paul Gilroy’s parlance¹³ – remains a persistently vexatious matter for many due to the undeniable spacings of class, culture and race which may displace the scholar from the experiential terrain of their object of study. Those committed to the legitimacy of the field (unlike Dirlik) often feel these spacings keenly. Lucinda Newns has recently offered a brave articulation of such tensions by asking if, as an early career postcolonial scholar, ‘my whiteness makes me an imposter in some academic spaces for reasons beyond my novice status?’ and admitting that ‘I couldn’t shake the feeling that personal experience would invariably trump academic knowledge when it

came to questions of race'.¹⁴ This keenness to avoid instrumentalising the oppressed as academic capital or maintaining subaltern silences in seeming to speak for the other has been behind well-intentioned affirmative action hiring policies especially in North America and has played its part in the recent UK discussion about the paucity of black professors in Britain's universities.¹⁵ Yet the proximity of these sensitivities to less careful renditions of appropriate scholarly provenance – in which, say, African Americans appear as the only legitimate custodians of America's history of Atlantic slavery – risks falling back on the same kinds of identitarian determinism crafted during colonial modernity and may remain complicit with biocentric notions of personhood that misread cultural identity primarily as a consanguineous matter.¹⁶ Paul Gilroy offers a contrary view when he argues that the critical knowledges created out of the history of colonial oppression are not a concern exclusive to the 'disenchanted descendants' of modernity's others but 'belong to anybody who is prepared to use them. This history of suffering, rebellion, and dissidence is not our intellectual property, and we are not defenders of cultural and experiential copyright'.¹⁷ In a related spirit, Graham Huggan has made the important point that 'the fundamental category-mistake of assuming that a postcolonial teacher must also *be a "postcolonial"* is precisely the kind of error that a critical pedagogy centring on a nuanced examination of the politics of cultural difference is best designed to reveal'.¹⁸

The presence of this persistent internal debate has inflected the evolution of postcolonial studies and is one of the few matters which brings together both culturalists and materialists alike. As is well-known, Said's *Orientalism* begins with an epigraph from Marx's *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte* (1852) which posits representation as a defining problem: 'They cannot represent themselves; they must be represented'.¹⁹ The essay for which Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is still best known in the field, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' (1988), proceeds from a critique of the figure of the intellectual in the work of

Foucault and Gilles Deleuze as transparently representing subaltern resistance (a critique which turns on Spivak's close engagement with *The Eighteenth Brumaire*). For Spivak, two articulations of 'representation' are dangerously compounded: representation as a means of advocacy or 'speaking for', and as philosophical or artistic mode of 're-presentation'.²⁰ To speak of, or for, the subaltern is to render them mute once more within the dominant mode of critical attention, ultimately covered up by a critical endeavour which silences rather than listens. More recently, Neil Lazarus's determinedly materialist critique of the culturalist bent of postcolonial studies in *The Postcolonial Unconscious* also displays a laudable sensitivity to the delicacies of intellectual positioning in his discussion of Frantz Fanon. In essays such as 'On National Culture' (1959), Fanon spoke of the necessity of the 'native intellectual' whose work should be inflected by the 'progress of national consciousness among the people', the revolutionary needs of whom should be identified and expressed in a new 'literature of combat'.²¹ Lazarus's sensitive reading of Fanon casts into doubt the ready synchronisation of 'intellectual' and 'people' by suggesting that Fanon's rendition of the people was often insufficiently granulated or nuanced, so that his very standpoint reflected not so much the rapport but the tensions between Fanon-as-intellectual and the masses whom he rendered subaltern in his support for their freedom: 'Fanon's formulations *are* consistently intellectualist in tone, often phrasing subaltern thought and practice in the elitist-idealist vocabulary of negation, abstract totalisation, and self-actualisation'.²² (It is interesting to witness in passing the indebtedness in these examples of Said and Spivak to Marx, and of Lazarus to Spivak –which suggests the precariousness, to my mind, of the often unhelpful angular counterpointing of culturalist and materialist postcolonialisms.)

As Timothy Bewes has described things in his compelling analysis of postcolonial shame, 'postcolonial theory is founded on the unanswerability of questions such as the following: Is there any position from which to write that is not itself implicated in the history

of colonial inequality?’²³ Given my discussion of the field’s internal quarrels thus far, Bewes’s question might actually be readily answered with a firm, head-shaking ‘no’. Mindful, then, of the seeming unresolved nature of these concerns about the postcolonial intellectual as one whose scholarly coverage may be a form of ‘cover up’, I would like to reconsider the often quarrelsome engagement *within* postcolonial studies as instead assuming an important and empowering efficacy, one which might take us beyond the impasse that some feel as imposters, or as helplessly complicit in a cynical form of ‘cover up’, or as aiding the capitalisation of the wretched of the earth. As ever, the craft of literature can broker some profound conceptual possibilities in this regard.

In his essay first published in 1977, ‘The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel With History’, Edward Baugh explores the ways by which a range of Caribbean writers took issue with predominant models of history, sourced in the time of Empire, as a means of cementing their commitment to shaping a new futurity for the region less dependent upon the epistemological and historiographical limits of colonialism. Beginning with Derek Walcott’s seemingly heretical declaration of history as an irrelevance in the Caribbean region, Baugh shows how writers such as Walcott and George Lamming quarrel with the enveloping of the Caribbean in a Eurocentric historiography that has disinvested the region and its people of historical agency and any meaningful place in the metanarrative of modernity. This quarrel empowers a quest for ‘a concept of history which will make them make sense of the world, or their lives’ and, in Walcott’s case, put to an end the ‘search for history as a saga of heroes and a sequence of grand events as a way of meeting the threat of historylessness and of achieving a dynamic for truly West Indian creativity’.²⁴ It is Baugh’s use of ‘quarrel’ that interests me: the quarrel seen as an enabling encounter, a productive rather than entirely barbed ‘meeting’ between agent and ‘threat’, one which recasts a belligerent moment as a turning point for creativity. In Baugh’s rendering of Caribbean writing, the quarrel is a hopeful not hateful

challenge, a means of turning not terminating the target of one's ire. Quarrels may be the consequence of finding fault, but at the same time, as these writers' work shows, to quarrel is to commit – to a principle, an idea, a relation. If we regard in something like Baugh's terms the contentions within postcolonial studies voiced particularly by those, like Lazarus and Young, who wish to sustain and refine 'resistant pressure and agency', then the stern self-critique which runs throughout the field's development comes to seem rather more enabling. I read the self-conscious inward quarrelling of postcolonial critique as a creative mode of intellectual commitment, ethically savvy not conceptually *au courant*, which works purposefully with those perceived tensions between 'academic knowledge' and 'cultural and experiential copyright' that have weighed heavily on many scholars' consciences.

Let me explore one very brief example to illustrate my claim. In a number of important interventions which include her book *Postcolonial Writers and the Global Literary Marketplace* (2007) – the focus of my attention below – Sarah Brouillette has examined in fine detail the marketization of postcolonial literature and the ways in which postcolonial writers (both scholars and creative practitioners) draw down into their writing a worried consciousness of themselves, their work and their key concerns as marked-up commodities of cultural difference. Rightly suspicious of the presumption that postcolonial cultural creativity is an essentially dissident activity which heralds transformation, she urges instead a materialist cognizance of 'the commodity function of postcolonial texts. Postcoloniality is also a culture industry, and one with empirical parameters that have not been subject to consistent scrutiny.'²⁵ Her quarrel with postcolonialism commences from recognising this lacuna and prompts her to rehearse some well-known criticisms of the field. Brouillette is not alone in pointing out with some suspicion the favoured high style of postcolonial literature: written in English, anti-realist, often using 'a language of exile, hybridity, and "mongrel" subjectivity'.²⁶ Such texts have been appropriated, she suggests, 'in part because the niche

marketing that some associate with the promotion of exoticism is also the publishing industry's response to proliferating possibilities for accessing segmented markets of readers in a global scale'.²⁷ What preoccupies me here about Brouillette's compelling book is not so much the nature of her critical engagement with the material particulars of the postcolonial culture industry, but more so her instructive fascination, hardly announced, with the *affective* dispensation of this domain. If Brouillette's attention to the empirical parameters of postcolonial writing's marketisation looks outwards towards the fortunes of postcolonial thought as it engages the world, then her inward-looking preoccupation with matters of sentiment, especially guilt, marks her own fascinating and generative quarrel with postcolonial studies as wrestling ethically with exactly the problems that Newns has recently outlined.

Brouillette's first chapter, 'The Postcolonial Industry', begins not by outlining the empirical structures and economic relations which aid the instrumentalization of postcolonial creativity, but by focusing – perhaps surprisingly, given the book's declared provenance – upon matters of conscience and guilt. She proceeds by offering a respectful critique of the distinction she discerns in Huggan's *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (2001) between 'an unnamed cosmopolitan consumer who seeks mythic access to exotic experience' through the agency of tourism, and the less-deceived visitor, 'educated, elite, distinguished consumers who actually have access to the reality that the other consumer can only ever wish to possess'.²⁸ In a literary context, the former is aligned with the uninformed reader, presumably of the First World, whose consumption of postcolonial texts effectively strips out any dissident politics through the quest for satiating images of alluring exotica. The latter position is closer to the postcolonial critic's: better equipped to recognise and learn from an authenticated reality represented in texts that is often grim, and keen to challenge the economy of First World privilege.²⁹ Brouillette reads this distinction as a revealing self-

defining one for the postcolonial scholar, for whom the 'market reader' becomes 'the guilty party in the market transactions which plague the postcolonial field'. 'Indeed', she continues,

I think it is not too much to say that the image of the market reader, like the image of the ignorant and obnoxious tourist, is one inevitable product of postcolonial guilt, a guilt which is one correlate of the ethical challenges presented by analyses of postcolonial cultural markets. [...] [S]uch guilt is not a form of opposition to the system it assesses. It is instead one of its constitutive and legitimating features.³⁰

Rendered thus, guilt is the affective residue of the postcolonial scholar's impossible attempt to stand apart from the marketplace in which both the texts they encounter and the critique they offer are each constituted. To borrow News' term, postcolonial guilt betrays the postcolonialist as 'imposter' not interlocutor, visitor not native, and prompts one's self-perception as privileged consumer of difference to be displaced onto those held as less intellectually capable or careful. Brouillette seems keen to present this guilty conscience as something which stymies postcolonial critique per se, and this sits with her more general trepidation about using 'postcolonial' in a more positive light. Academic readers, she claims, 'may derive comfort rather than misgivings' from the knowledge that the market reader engages glibly with postcolonial texts, and so 'we might think of postcoloniality as having a generative touristic conscience that is evident in many authors' defensive constructions of figures of reading that are by turns self-exempting or self-implicating'.³¹ But we might tease out a more productive, less self-lacerating consequence of Brouillette's thinking by noting how she also makes proximate guilty conscience and critical self-consciousness and, scarcely intended I suspect, shifts the focus on political purposefulness towards an entanglement with

ethical promise. Whereas Brouillette regards postcolonial guilt as more or less undisruptively systemic, we might regard its agency as rather less obsequious, whatever its origin.

Brouillette's mention of 'the ethical challenges presented by analyses of postcolonial cultural markets' is a fascinating and not entirely expected manoeuvre. If there is something circular and tautological in the quarrels which materialist postcolonialisms tend to pursue – that postcolonial critique will never be sufficient to broker meaningful political (read Marxist) outcomes because it is postcolonial critique – then the identification of 'ethical challenges' amidst a materialist quarrel with postcolonialism's legitimacy brings a different kind of process into play. As Bewes reminds us when making an important distinction between guilt and shame as by no means commensurate terms, guilt can be understood as 'the narrative viability of the individual as an ethical category, including the possibility of its expression and/or redemption'.³² How might the (self-)narrativisation of the postcolonial critic's guilt-ridden standpoint keep open a vital critical traction on their part amidst their circumscription by economies of disempowerment?

Brouillette suggests that Huggan's antipathy towards market readers is itself a product of a tourist economy, an example of (following Dean MacCannell's work) 'touristic consciousness' more generally, in which the concerned traveller sets themselves again unthinking tourists in a self-defining act. Because *all* tourists seek to deny 'one's position as a tourist', Huggan's work is caught up in exactly the tourist economy which produces the very 'postcolonial exotic' that Huggan seeks to challenge.³³ There is no anterior place for critical reckoning beyond marketization. Hence, Brouillette reads Huggan's constrained position as 'a *symptom* of postcoloniality even while it is an assessment of it'.³⁴ The circularity of this position, as Brouillette sees it, chimes readily with the often tautological conclusions of materialist postcolonialisms. But what critical traction does the ethical world of morality, conscience and guilt make possible? We might read the ethical character of

Huggan's attempt to quarrel the market production of exotica more inquisitively and generously, by remembering the rendition of quarrel gleaned from Baugh's reading especially of Walcott. In Baugh's essay, the quarrel functions to propel consciousness outwith the predominant mode, the historiography of colonial modernity, in an attempt to reach *beyond*, to use Walcott's words, a 'truth [based] on shame or on revenge'.³⁵ Walcott's quarrel is captured famously in his argument about the literature of the 'New World' in the Caribbean as too enamoured of a sense of history sourced in colonial modernity so that it functions as a kind of 'literature without morality' that is usually written 'through the memory of hero or of victim'.³⁶ The servile muse cannot think past the subject positions which this history has shaped: 'servitude to the muse of history has produced a literature [...] of revenge written by the descendants of slaves or a literature of remorse written by the descendants of masters'.³⁷ While the modest work of postcolonial critique may seem a little remote from Walcott's Olympian designs here – although let us remember that Brouillette's critique of Huggan is a prelude to her sustained reading of Walcott's 'The Fortunate Traveller' (1982) – we might recast Walcott's ideas when we reconsider Brouillette's pejorative remark that 'Huggan cannot avoid attributing moral authority to the idea of some deeper truth hidden behind what is fronted in tourism experience'.³⁸ Huggan's search for this surer ground, behind the glossy coverings of touristic exotica, on which to challenge the market's machinery marks his struggle against servility to marketization and indeed the logics of the market as such. It prompts a generative act of ethical self-critique *propelled in negative terms*: a compulsion *not* to be that, an aspiration *not* to adhere. If Huggan's work really is symptomatic in its guilty conscience as Brouillette entertains, then this quarrel with conscience does not stymie critique but sparks the momentum to reach for a more ethical location where we can support and sustain the political purposefulness of cultural and critical work. It is through the act of reaching, rather than by arriving on that ground itself (should it indeed exist), where guilt

might be turned transformatively, in a Walcottian vein, to support political repair not self-defeating despair. An important ethical reflex is made available through this questing by quarrelling, one which marks a committed attempt, definitively postcolonial, to break beyond an otherwise incapacitating and tautological reckoning with complicity that would otherwise lead uselessly to ‘recrimination and despair’.³⁹

The ethical possibilities of postcolonialism’s quarrels reside in exactly such an attempt, first of all, to detach one’s critical standpoint from that of the heroic knowledge broker, indifferent to the victim’s cultural and experiential particulars and akin to Kwame Anthony Appiah’s ‘*comprador* intelligentsia’ interested only in mediating the peripheries’ cultural commodities⁴⁰ – *and* also from the despairing metropolitan, arrested by guilt and arraigned for their culturalism, with nothing to offer but one’s own complicity in the commodification of postcolonial markets. In seeking not to market the margins through his own critique as an entangled matter of conscience as well as politics, even if this task struggles towards full success as Brouillette wonders, Huggan’s ethical reflex compels him to reckon critically with the economies which circumvent his political commitment to challenge oppressive circumstances. The last thing he is involved in here (remembering Dirlik’s words) is a ‘cover up’.

Of course, this is not to declare simplistically that ethical reflexes trump political concerns in postcolonialism. As Lazarus makes clear in his remarks about Homi Bhabha’s rereading of Fanon, the scholar who ‘privileges ethics over politics’ will find little truck with materialist postcolonialism, I suspect.⁴¹ Rather, I ask instead that we pause to recognise and ponder the highly complex – indeed, necessary – entangled relations between the ethical and the political in postcolonial critique, and the imbricated functions they perform in anchoring and empowering the engagement with the material particulars of our colonial present.

Brouillette's *Postcolonial Writers and the Literary Marketplace* itself exemplifies these productive entanglements. Its suspicion towards the economic viability of postcolonial writing as a distinct market makes it difficult to regard such writing in a celebratory mode or make assumptions about its game-changing propensity. In claiming that 'the niche marketing that some associate with the promotion of exoticism is also the publishing industry's response to proliferating possibilities for accessing segmented markets of readers on a global scale', or '[e]xpanding markets for literatures in English have depended on the incorporation of a plurality of identities for global export', Brouillette makes inseparable the exotic, the economic, the artistic and the academic, in ways which support a vital materialist critique of the postcolonial's relation with global capitalism (even if empirical data can be thin on the ground in her book).⁴² At the same time, her preoccupation with matters of ethical and moral regard drives her close encounters with creative texts. She reads Salman Rushdie's and J. M. Coetzee's works in terms of the 'terminology of guilt', and consequently binds together matters of conscience, self-consciousness and, crucially, critique.⁴³ The writers she explores in the book are each presented as exactly involved in the quarrelsome literary depiction of their position within the economy of the global literary marketplace, especially their instrumentalisation as authentic representatives of the cultures they are deemed to represent. Hence, her reading of Rushdie's novel *Fury* (2001) as 'depicting a beleaguered writer who wants to stop living in a scenario he did not create for himself, because it causes problems that challenge his right to authorize his own texts and, more importantly, his own life'.⁴⁴ No wonder, then, that Brouillette's conclusion finds in self-consciousness an admirable critical conscience that cannot be fully constrained as 'niche'. Hoping that 'the field of postcolonial production is actually one whose members function through self-conscious positioning', Brouillette leaves the door open for a critical assessment of this field by asking if 'authorial agency' might be found when we wonder 'why does the postcolonial intellectual – a category

that includes literature professors and arts journalists as well as poets and novelists – self-consciously fantasize and construct the processes through which his or her own texts are consumed?’⁴⁵ This is a creative form of self-consciousness far removed from the disabling, anxiety-inducing worries about capitalising postcolonial cultures and experiences to which Newns honourably admitted, one which does not automatically render the scholar’s inevitable investment in the legacies of colonial inequality as cancelling any grounds for constructive thought. Rather, and as I have mooted, Brouillette’s inspiring book makes this self-consciousness also a distinctly ethical matter because she is persistently preoccupied by the matter of conscience in her undaunted attempt to secure viable political leverage – even if Brouillette does not announce, or perhaps even fully realise, things as such.

Picking a quarrel with(in) the postcolonial, then, seems to me a vital means of sustaining the political and ethical commitment to challenging the disastrous dispensation of the colonial present, while maintaining a crucial sense of the field as calling upon the varied attention and response of *everyone* bound by its horizon, across a range of positions, and not only those people authenticated or badged as legitimate postcolonials. As Young presents things in a different, pithier context, the dissident knowledges of the postcolonial ‘seek to change the terms and values under which *we all live*. You can learn it anywhere if you want to. The only qualification you need to start is to make sure that you are looking at the world not from above, but from below.’⁴⁶ The combination of a commitment simultaneously to learn *and* to unlearn, to commit to see at the same time as interrogating the modes through which the world is seen and rendered legible, sparks the beginnings of a fertile (self-)critical quarrel, not its short-circuiting. Rather than interrogating the term ‘postcolonial’ ‘almost to extinction’, in Walder’s phrase, such quarrels may shift those arresting anxieties concerning one’s critical position into a different gear, where the self-perception of one’s complicity with colonialism’s lasting conditions can offer a starting point for ethical traction that creatively

supports the quest, in Young's words, 'to transform the conditions of the present'.⁴⁷ This is not at all to sidestep the unresolved challenges of positionality and the experiential, of 'imposter' syndrome and guilty conscience, or to establish an apologist standpoint for the postcolonial intellectual absolved of a guilty conscience. The ethical and political necessity of continuing to quarrel with the postcolonial may be of far greater value than seeking such resolution. Rather, it is to begin to admit and explore these challenges openly, and in terms other than of defeat.

¹ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (London: Peregrine, 1985 [1978]), 328.

² For a lucid account of the term's ascendancy in these years see Bart Moore-Gilbert, *Postcolonial Theory: Contexts, Practices, Politics* (London: Verso, 1997), 5-33.

³ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford, Blackwell, 2001), 57.

⁴ See Derek Gregory, *The Colonial Present: Afghanistan, Palestine, Iraq* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004).

⁵ The description of postcolonial theory as 'culturalist' is usually a pejorative rather than a neutral one, often given by those who contrast culturalist postcolonialism unfavourably with more empirical forms of research found in sociology or political economy. For an example, see Neil Lazarus, 'Introducing Postcolonial Studies' in *The Cambridge Companion to Postcolonial Literary Studies*, ed. Neil Lazarus (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 1-16.

⁶ Neil Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 1.

⁷ Dennis Walder, *Postcolonial Nostalgias: Writing, Representation, and Memory* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2011), 15.

⁸ Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic: Marketing the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 2001), 229-30.

⁹ Vivek Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (London: Verso, 2013), 3-4.

¹⁰ Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 186.

¹¹ WReC (Warwick Research Collective), *Combined and Uneven Development: Towards a New Theory of World-Literature* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2015), 32.

¹² Arif Dirlik, 'The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism', *Critical Inquiry*, 20 (1994), 328-365 (353).

¹³ Paul Gilroy, *After Empire: Melancholia or Convivial Culture?* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2004), 49.

¹⁴ Lucinda Newns, 'Speaking for others: tensions in post-colonial studies', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, July 17, 2014.

[<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/comment/opinion/speaking-for-others-tensions-in-post-colonial-studies/2014501.article> , consulted 4 February 2016, 2.16pm]

¹⁵ As regards the latter, see Jack Grove, 'Black scholars still experience racism on campus', *Times Higher Education Supplement*, March 20, 2014.

[<https://www.timeshighereducation.com/news/black-scholars-still-experience-racism-on-campus/2012154.article> , consulted 4 February 2016, 1.05pm]

¹⁶ I have critiqued elsewhere biocentric models of personhood which presume an imminent relationship between the subject's cultural identity and notions of blood and the blood-line, expressed in common phrases such as 'birth culture' . See John McLeod, *Life Lines: Writing Transcultural Adoption* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015).

¹⁷ Gilroy, *After Empire*, 61.

¹⁸ Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*, 246.

¹⁹ Said, *Orientalism*, xiii.

²⁰ See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, 'Can the Subaltern Speak?' in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Basingstoke: Macmillan Education, 1988), 271-313.

²¹ Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1990 [1967]), 193.

²² Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 177.

²³ Timothy Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2011), 3.

²⁴ Edward Baugh, 'The West Indian Writer and His Quarrel With History', *Small Axe*, 16: 2 (2012), 60-74 (68, 69). This essay is a revised version of the one first published in 1977. For Walcott's critique of history to which Baugh refers, see Derek Walcott, 'The Caribbean: Culture or Mimicry', *Journal of Interamerican Studies*, 16:1 (1974), 3-13.

²⁵ Sarah Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers in the Global Literary Marketplace* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011 [2007]), 20.

²⁶ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 61. Here Brouillette closely follows Timothy Brennan's lead in decrying cosmopolitan writers' penchant for 'aesthetic novelty'; see Brennan, *At Home in the World: Cosmopolitanism Now* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1997), 37. For a more recent example of this critique of postcolonial literary style, itself something of a cliché, see Lazarus, *The Postcolonial Unconscious*, 26-7.

²⁷ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 70.

²⁸ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 19.

²⁹ Brouillette is perfectly aware of the impossibility of encountering 'authentic' cultural otherness not least due to the fact that authenticity is always marked as such and hence is a product of mediation. For a spirited and compelling exploration of the ironies of authenticity,

see Vincent Cheng, *Inauthentic: The Anxiety over Culture and Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

³⁰ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 21.

³¹ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 26, 27.

³² Bewes, *The Event of Postcolonial Shame*, 28.

³³ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 18. Brouillette follows here the ideas contained in Dean MacCannell, *The Tourist: A New Theory of the Leisure Class* (New York, Schocken Books, 1976).

³⁴ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 22.

³⁵ Derek Walcott, 'The Muse of History' (1974) in *What the Twilight Says: Essays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), 36-64 (44)

³⁶ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', 37.

³⁷ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', 37.

³⁸ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 18.

³⁹ Walcott, 'The Muse of History', 37.

⁴⁰ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (London: Methuen, 1992), 240.

⁴¹ Lazarus, *The Political Unconscious*, 181.

⁴² Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 70. 58.

⁴³ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 112.

⁴⁴ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 108.

⁴⁵ Brouillette, *Postcolonial Writers*, 177, 175-6.

⁴⁶ Robert J. C. Young, *Postcolonialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 20 [my italics]. I made a similarly provocative point in an essay of 2007: '[P]ostcolonial studies has the potential to assemble new communities and networks of

people who are joined by the common political and ethical commitment to challenging and questioning the practices and consequences of domination and subordination. Anyone can do it. We all come to things from our own positions, of course, and we are each of us enabled and blinkered by the location of our standpoint; but we all have something to learn from, and contribute to, postcolonial studies.’ See John McLeod, ‘Introduction’ in *The Routledge Companion to Postcolonial Studies*, ed. John McLeod (London: Routledge, 2007), 1-18 (6).

⁴⁷ Young, *Postcolonialism*, 66.