Rethinking the Colonial Encounter with Bakhtin (and *contra* Foucault)

Cultural historians of colonised societies have shone an important and revealing light on hitherto neglected aspects of repression and domination by employing the ideas of Edward Said in conjunction with those of Michel Foucault. In the 1980s, however, postcolonial studies became a budget holding discipline, and its central categories have since become what philosopher of science Thomas Kuhn called 'normal science' in the humanities. Combining selected ideas developed in Said's 1978 *Orientalism* with Foucault's under-theorised and inflated, if subtle, ambiguous and shifting ideas about discourse,[1] led to a hardened conception called 'orientalist' or 'colonial discourse' that is now more often assumed than interrogated. Such interrogations are, however, one of the main missions of this journal (Shi-xu 2016). French structuralism with its focus on binary oppositions and Althusser's conflation of such structures with inescapable forms of ideology here meets Nietzsche's 'will to power', which is allegedly everywhere and inescapable. The closed circle of a putative orientalist discourse that dates back to the Enlightenment and beyond, structured around a series of binary oppositions: the rational, democratic and progressive West versus a mystical or religious, despotic and stagnant East, is a clear example of where this notion leads. History becomes a relentless monologue, with all individual utterances among those operating within the western episteme ultimately succumbing to these institutionalized discursive forms. Complex cultural phenomena become 'problems' to be 'solved', by revealing the effects of this 'discourse' on a supposedly organic, if hierarchical, pre-colonial culture (Kaiwar 2014: 109-10). Foucault's critique of Enlightenment reason as a discourse of 'power-knowledge' here merges with a pre-modern romanticism that is, ironically enough, often derived from colonial philology.

The historically specific, but exploitative and contradictory aspects of pre-colonial societies and the ideological struggles that characterized their cultural spheres are inevitably obscured by such conceptions. For instance, materialist, Buddhist and shramanic critiques of, and opposition to, pre-colonial brahman ideological domination in what is now India, and its continuing relevance in the colonial period, is de-emphasised in post-colonial writings to an extent comparable with the European philologist construction of a shared Indo-European heritage. Laudable though the postcolonial attempt to 'provincialize Europe' (Chakrabarty 2000) may be, the complex and internally differentiated field of encounters between philologists, colonial administrators, brahmans and shudras is replaced by an encounter between closed circles of discourse. This is surely ironic that while counterhegemonic thought and practices, and subaltern visions of a classless and casteless future were common *both* in the 'West' *and* 'East', they seem to count for little in a field of self-proclaimed 'subaltern studies' (by contrast see Omvedt 2008).

The current article discusses the Soviet origins of this idea of a closed 'orientalist discourse', which has rarely been acknowledged, even though its general conception has become widely accepted in postcolonial studies. We also consider alternative approaches that emerged in the USSR in the 1920s, especially among members of the so-called Bakhtin Circle, and it is argued that, suitably developed and modified, they may help to move the study of the colonial encounter beyond its current limitations.

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[1] On the history of this combination see Burke and Prochaska 2007; on the inflated and undertheorised aspects of Foucault's notion of discourse see Norris (2015: 204).

In the final section we briefly consider the emergence of colonial philology in British India to illustrate the inadequacy of considering this simply as an encounter between an organically unified pre-colonial society and a unitary discourse of Western orientalism. Unbundling power and knowledge and considering their shifting interrelations, and paying particular attention to the dialogic relations between distinct groups of European and indigenous intellectuals in conditions of colonial domination, adds new dimensions to the study of the colonial encounter. It also provides means for a more effectively critical engagement with the continuing heritage of colonial preconceptions in scholarship today.

Words and *logos*

While postcolonial theorists have tended to assume a harmony between Said's Orientalism and the Foucauldian notion of discourse, there is, in reality, considerable dissonance. While in his 1978 book *Orientalism* Said does indeed employ Foucault's notion of discourse in his discussion of the West's production of knowledge about the East, Said was emphatically a humanist thinker and 'Orientalism' an eclectic construction (see especially Brennan 2006). While assimilating Foucauldian terminology, Said articulated serious reservations about Foucault's approach, which were largely forgotten, or simply ignored, by subsequent postcolonialists. Most importantly he condemned Foucault's 'flawed attitude to power [which] derives from his insufficiently developed attention to the problem of historical change' (Said 1983, p. 222). He also objected to the poststructuralist assumption that 'the individual text or author counts for very little', and insisted that 'individual writers' do leave a 'determining imprint' on an 'otherwise anonymous body of texts constituting a discursive formation like Orientalism'. Said (1995 [1978], p. 23) argued the 'dynamic exchange between individual authors and the large political concerns shaped by the… great empires' needs to be foregrounded. Dissolving agency into the shifting structures of signification was something that Said had clear reservations about, and he did not subscribe to the post-structuralist theory of language that elevates the structure of linguistic differences above all else. As he put it in 1983, there is 'a sensible difference between… *Logos* and words: we must not let Foucault get away with confusing them with each other, nor with letting us forget that history does not get made without work, intention, resistance, effort, or conflict, and that none of these things is silently absorbable into micronetworks of power' (1983, p. 245).

Said's distinction between *logos* and words reminds us that structuralism and poststructuralism were not simply outgrowths of Saussure's linguistics. Rather than treating the synchronic system of differences, *langue*, as an ontological phenomenon, Saussure regarded it as an epistemological convenience. In neo-Kantian vein he insists that 'it is the viewpoint adopted which creates the object [of knowledge]' (Saussure 1987 [1916], p.8) and that while linguistics should study language as a synchronic system of differences, *langue*, other aspects of language require an alternative methodology for study. True enough, in the *Cours*, Saussure proceeds to outline only the static and closed model of *langue*, but this does not preclude the possibility of a coherent alternative model based on a different methodological option. Said's 'words' seems to refer to the elements of *langue*, while *Logos* pertains to language as ideologically impleted and intentionally articulated in social acts commonly called utterances. *Logos* corresponds to the object of the proposed new discipline that Mikhail Bakhtin sought to develop in the 1950s and 1960s as an

alternative to the rise of Soviet structuralism. In the 1960s he adopted the term 'metalinguistics' to denote the new object domain '(Lähteenmäki 2012). Following the Marburg neo-Kantian ideas to which he had critically subscribed since the 1920s, Bakhtin argues that linguistics adopts the methodology of the natural sciences, positing 'things' like phonemes words and sentences, while metalinguistics, as a human science, posits intersubjective acts that activate the meaning potential of these entities, utterances. The term Bakhtin employs in his central essays on the novel of the 1930s to discuss units of language within utterances is *slovo*, a term simultaneously meaning lexical units (i.e. words) and larger bodies of language so positioned. It is in this second sense that Voloshinov (1926) discusses *slovo* 'in life and in poetry' and Bakhtin's generally follows this practice.[2] The Russian *slovo* renders the Greek *logos* closely and is commonly translated into English both as word and as 'discourse', but this emphatically is *not* the word of structuralism or the discourse of Foucault. Instead it denotes what would become the object of metalinguistics:

> [A]ny concrete discourse [*slovo*] (utterance) finds the object at which it was directed already as it were overlain with qualifications, open to dispute, charged with value, already enveloped in an obscuring mist – or, on the contrary, by the 'light' of alien words [*slova*] that have already been spoken about it. It is entangled, shot through with shared thoughts, points of view, alien value judgments and accents. The word [*slovo*], directed toward its object, enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words [*slova*], value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group: and all this may crucially shape discourse [*slovo*], may leave a trace in all its semantic layers, may complicate its expression and influence its entire stylistic profile. (Bakhtin 1981 [1934] 276; 2012 [1936] 30)

Bakhtin's fleshing out of this distinction helps to focus on aspects of Said's project that have been obscured by the dominance of poststructuralism in postolonial thought, and to consider its critical potential as well as its limitations.

There are certainly problems with the way in which Bakhtin proposes a clear division between the methodologies of the human and natural sciences. Firstly, he caricatures the natural sciences as 'monologic' while neglecting the dialogic struggle between paradigms that is central to their practices, and, secondly, he removes questions of biological and even economic determinations from the human sciences and in so doing detaches cultural phenomena from the natural structures into which they are integrated at a 'molecular' level, as it were. This is a direct result of Bakhtin's adherence to neo-Kantian idealism, and it leads him, *inter alia*, to consider the rise of the novel in isolation from that of publishing, of a sizable literate population, and to fail to provide any sustained consideration of the wider socio-economic and institutional changes on which they were based. Among the factors that are given little or no attention in Bakhtin's published works as a consequence are the imperial preconditions for European literary culture and the relationship between philology and colonialism. Non-European cultures therefore appear peripheral in Bakhtin's

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[2] In this article Voloshinov develops Karl Bühler's ideas about the concrete meaning of the sign being conditioned by its place within the speech act. On this see Brandist (2004).

major works. In this context it is understandable why Bakhtin's ideas did not become part of what Brennan (2006, p. 111) calls the 'patented eclectic amalgam' that appears in Said's *Orientalism*.[3]

Bakhtin was not a Eurocentric thinker in the sense of someone who treats European culture as a standard against which others are judged. European literature was, rather, the centre of his specialized knowledge from which generalisations about cultural phenomena were made without reference to ethnic, religious or institutional particularities. He was, actually, quite familiar with non-European literatures and cultures from his formative years in Leningrad in the mid 1920s. What we now, by no means unproblematically, call the 'Bakhtin Circle' involved intellectuals with expertise in Asian literature such as Nikolai Konrad, a major specialist on Japanese and, later, on Chinese literature,[4] and Mikhail Tubianskii, the foremost Soviet scholar on the work of the Bengali Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore. Tubianskii moreover established the teaching of modern Bengali in the USSR and published pathbreaking work on Tibetan Buddhism (for an overview see Brandist 2015). Valentin Voloshinov and Pavel Medvedev worked in an institute dedicated to the comparative history of the languages and literatures of the West and East, and sought to develop theoretical categories that applied equally to those cultures. In the 1930s Bakhtin traced forms of European literature back through anonymous bodies of pre-textual regional folklore to forms of mythical thinking shared by humanity as a whole. This 'semantic palaeontology' is quite distinct from the Nietzsche-Foucault archaeology though, as will become clear later, it shares some features.[5] In the 1950s and 60s he worked as Professor of World Literature at what is now Saransk University, during which time he lectured on a number of non-European literatures, and he appears to have taken a particular interest in Chinese literature (Bakhtin 1999). He did not, however, seem to regard his knowledge sufficient to publish in the area.

While somewhat formalistic, Bakhtin's writings on the novel do posit one institutional precondition for the rise of the novel: the standard national language. This development makes the discrepant relationship between 'words' and '*logos*' clearly perceptible. Thus, with the overcoming or domestic confinement of dialectal variations, *raznoiazychie* (literally vari-language-ness, often rendered in English as 'polyglossia'), and the establishment of a unitary language that is adopted by all social groups, the same 'words' take of a variety of socio-specific and ideological senses, which is termed *raznorechie* (literally vari-speech-ness). While generally rendered in English as 'heteroglossia', Todorov's rendering the term as 'heterology' more clearly captures the distinction between 'words' and '*logos*' central to Bakhtin's conception (for a discussion see Zbinden 2006, p.77). While Bakhtin's discussion of the rise of the standard national language is insufficiently linked to specific socio-

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[3] Said scarcely mentions Bakhtin, and explicitly resists using the term 'dialogic' as a result of the 'recent cult of Bakhtin' in his conversations with Raymond Williams (Williams 1990, pp. 181-182). His dismissive tone is perhaps in response to the way Bakhtin was adopted, and in some significant ways distorted, by certain US liberal humanists as a counterweight to more engaged forms of theory in the 1980s. A number of commentators have nevertheless noted the affinity of the work of Said and Bakhtin, not least Brennan (1992).

[4] For accessible overviews of Konrad's career see, in English, Croskey (1991) and, in Russian, Alpatov (1991).

[5] As I have shown elsewhere (Brandist 2011), Bakhtin's approach draws heavily on the palaeontology of plots and genres in the work of Aleksandr Veselovskii, and developed in the 1920s and 1930s by followers of Nikolai Marr such as Izrail′ Frank-Kamenetskii and Ol′ga Freidenberg.

institutional developments and is thus excessively abstract, the effect is crucial: 'words' are but one component of '*logos*', the latter is an *emergent* structure that rises upon a variety of foundational structures, and so cannot be reduced to the former.

Bakhtin had little or nothing to say about large political concerns, about the great empires of the age and, indeed, published little about the cultures of non-European societies. He does, however, have much to say about the dynamic exchange between individual authors, about how ideas relate to authority, how authoritative ideas are articulated, encounter other ideas and stifle them, as well as how those articulations are received and reaccentuated, and about how the ideological structures of discursive forms might be revealed, challenged and undermined. This is a striking contrast to the tendency in postcolonial theory, by default, to absorb the European into the colonial episteme and posit the oriental subject as one who may exhibit either a 'slavish admiration or xenophobic rejection' of a unitary colonial discourse (Figueira 2015 [2002], p. 103). The only position from which critics like Homi Bhabha consider this can be subjected to critique is liminal, a diasporic locality within which the privileged, 'hybrid', cosmopolitan critic can 'slide ceaselessly' (1990, p. 300) and avoid taking a stand on any issue. It is only by irresponsibly generalizing the experience of this critic to the entire field of (predominantly precarious) migrants that the charge of elitism be evaded (Ratnam 1999). The category of 'hybridity' as the effect of slippage between unstable systems of signification, which runs throughout much postcolonial theory, does not fully account for the factors Bakhtin identifies, nor the complex intersection of socioeconomic systems that colonial encounters involve.[6] Indeed, the agenda seems to be to remove communication from its extra-discursive moorings, and the critic from all social responsibility. The modalities of responsibility were the starting point of Bakhtin's intellectual trajectory, and while he may never have been able to resolve the problems he raised, like Said he was not content to espouse a condition of perpetual ambivalence. While Bakhtin's novelist is an ironically detached intellectual, he or she does at least relate actively to heroes who are themselves also actively perceiving, evaluating and interacting agents. Their motivations might often be questionable, but they are never reducible to the effects of anonymous systems. One might readily consider how this relates to intellectual activity more generally.

Competing regimes of power/knowledge

There is an interesting history behind these contrasting approaches. The idea of a unified orientalist discourse derives from Stalin-era characterisations of what was called 'bourgeois orientalism'. The 'classical' formulation of this coincided with the beginning of the Cold War, when the journal *Voprosy istorii* (Questions of History) published a leading text on the 'Urgent Tasks of Soviet Historian-Orientalists' (Anon 1949). Here we see that 'bourgeois oriental studies serve imperialism in an extraordinarily vigorous manner and strive "to prove" the historical inevitability and even the "necessity" of the rule of the western colonial powers over the multi-million masses, who are lagging behind in their progress and, therefore, "incapable" of independently deciding the fate of the East themselves' (Anon 1949, p. 5). Such scholars produce 'false, pseudo-historical "theories" and "conceptions"', which may 'differ in details and on particular points but they bear a testimony to a complete unity

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[6] Interestingly 'hybridity' was posited by many Russian scholars of Bakhtin's time to describe rather than subvert the identity of the subjects of the Russian Empire itself (Gerasimov *et al*, 2016).

on the principal and fundamental question' (Anon 1949, p. 5). This involved the propagation of a particular type of exoticism about 'the special type of "Eastern soul"', relishing 'unimportant details of the religious cults or repeat entertaining palace-anecdotes about dynastic histories' (Anon 1949, p. 6). Soviet orientalist-historians were encouraged 'to facilitate with the help of their own studies the exposure of the false theories of the bourgeoisie' (Anon 1949, p. 6).

This sentiment, with the rhetoric somewhat softened, reappeared in the 1951 edition of the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* and the delineation of a Soviet orientalism distinct from that of the West gained importance particularly as a result of the April 1955 Bandung Conference which eventually led, in 1961, to the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement. Perspectives on the tasks of Soviet as opposed to bourgeois orientalism were further developed at the First All-Union Conference of Orientalists in Tashkent in June 1957, at which continuities between pre- and post-Revolutionary Russian orientologists were stressed (Gafurov 1957, pp. 13–14), beginning with the publication of the *Complete Works* of the great historian of Central Asia Vasilii Bartol'd (Bustanov 2014, pp. 65–70). These perspectives were subsequently conveyed to many intellectuals from the various national liberation movements who were educated at such institutions as the Patrice Lumumba Peoples Friendship University in Moscow, founded in 1960, the same year that the USSR hosted the 25th International Congress of Orientalists. Here senior Politburo member Anastas Mikoian gave a speech declaring that henceforth 'the peoples of the Orient themselves create their own history, their culture, their economy; in this way the peoples of the orient have been promoted from being objects (matter) of history to the rank of creators'. This speech, and a number of other Soviet sources, were quoted in Abdel-Malek's 1963 article 'Orientalism in Crisis' (1963, p. 122), where the author also contrasted the persistence of 'europeocentrism' in the West with the 'truly colossal effort in the field of modern orientalism' in the USSR since the Bandung conference (1963, p. 127). Elsewhere Abdel-Malek (1968, pp. 105–106) echoed the contemporary Soviet contention (Gafurov 1957, p. 16) that that it was the Chinese Revolution of 1949 that was decisive, along with the 'national and social revolutions which smashed the hegemony of the traditional imperialisms, and which victoriously defy American neo-imperialism [i.e. Vietnam – CB]'. Abdel-Malek was an important source for Said's ideas about orientalism (Tolz 2006, p. 127; Said 1995 [1978], p. 96-98).

This image of competing regimes of power/knowledge was taught to the many intellectuals from independence movements who were educated in the USSR, but many engaged actively and with considerable independence. This was particularly encouraged by the Sino-Soviet split as a result of which Moscow was identified with advocating 'peaceful coexistence' with imperial powers, while Beijing made claims to lead the colonial world in its struggle for self-determination (see, *inter alia*, Friedman 2015). The split of the Communist Parties into monolithic and dogmatic organisations like the pro-Moscow Communist Party of India (CPI) and the pro-Beijing Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPIM), competing for leadership of the movement against imperialism, weakened the influence of both organisations and their ideologies. While intellectuals from independence movements often accepted crucial elements of the Stalinist image of the world, which also remained fundamental to Maoism, they resented the USSR's attempt to subordinate independence movements to Soviet foreign policy. The result was a 'Third World' approach, catalyzed by the Bandung

Conference, in which the 'first' and 'second' worlds were largely equivalent, both attempting to subordinate the emerging, postcolonial states to their own interests and meta-narratives. The decline of the USSR as a model of development for decolonizing nations in the late 1970s and the Chinese turn to the market at the end of that decade further weakened the ideological hold of Communist Party orthodoxy. Marxism was now often, understandably but erroneously, equated with the crudities of that ideology. Later, French post-structuralists, and their 'postmodern' followers in US universities in particular, sought to provide some intellectual consistency to the fragments that remained, but the complexities of dialogue, the relations between theory and practice, and between ideological positions and institutional configurations remained subordinated to abstract structures of discourse.

The emergence and critique of the abstract dialectic

The work of the Bakhtin Circle emerged not during the collapse of the paradigm of competing Soviet and bourgeois discourses, but during its formation. In the USSR in the 1920s ideologies of European superiority were subjected to severe critique, and this was nowhere clearer than in the critical onslaught against the colonial agendas operative in much European philology. Research institutes in the 1920s were, *inter alia*, laboratories for the development of new critical paradigms aimed at undermining the ideological foundations of the imperialist world order. In works as varied and Lenin and Bukharin's theories of imperialism, Fedor Shcherbetskoi, Sergei Ol'denburg and Tubianskii's work on the philosophical sophistication of Buddhist sutras, Konrad's discussions of the relationship between Japanese literature and the rise of capitalism and Nikolai Marr's controversial work on the colonial agendas behind Indo-European philology, the modes of conceptualization and generalization in much European scholarship was systematically unpicked and revealed to be ideologically impelled. The perspectives of younger scholars like Konrad and Tubianskii were formed by dialogues between representatives of the 'old' Russian oriental studies and the 'new' and exploratory field of Marxist oriental studies within Soviet institutions with definite research agendas. While there was a certain unified framework within which scholars operated, the period was marked by sharp disagreements and debates over fundamental issues in almost all areas.

The idea of competing bourgeois and Soviet orientalisms discussed above was no more than a crude and highly selective summary, an opportunistically deployed formula derived from long and intense debates about the relationship between knowledge about the colonial world and the policies of the various colonial powers in the revolutionary period. Sometimes this was tacitly acknowledged in post-Stalin Soviet scholarship, as in the 1963 survey article 'The Study of the History of India in the USSR 1917–1934' where the author, Leonid Alaev (1963: 167), notes 'Soviet scholars came to the correct evaluation of imperial policy in India as the result of a long struggle of opinions'. The Party was generally held to have guided such struggles, and consequently the 'evaluation' ultimately regarded as 'correct' was not settled on by virtue of its factual accuracy or rigor, but according to its correspondence to the policies of Stalin and his successors. Unlike the preceding period, by 1934 statutory authority proved considerably more powerful than scientific authority in deciding these matters, and what emerged was a philologically unified doctrine that had largely stabilized by the time of Stalin's death in 1953. By the early the 1960s attempts to codify what Yurchak (2005: 47-51) calls a 'monosemic'

language of socio-political terms was underway, with the publication of reference texts that aimed to remove all ambiguity from usage. The perspectives of late imperial orientalists according to which oriental studies would contribute to a 'peaceful convergence' of the peoples of the East with Russia (Bartol′d 1963 [1900], p. 610), leading to the formation of a hybrid identity, became dominant once more. So Nikolai Marr's controversial idea that languages evolved from plural origins to unity rather than, as in Indo-European philology, the other way around, gained authority because it corresponded to Stalin's pronouncement at the 16th Party Congress in the summer of 1930 that national cultures would, and *should*, in the future, merge into a unity 'in both form and content' under socialism (Stalin 1954 [1930], p. 380). The peoples of the USSR were now allegedly converging because of the USSR's movement towards 'socialism in one country'. Until there was a final victory of socialism on a global scale this convergence would remain limited to a unity of ideological 'content' coexisting with a 'flowering' of various 'forms' of national culture. The reality was, however, that unity of 'content' reflected the ideological subordination all Soviet national regions in the interests of the central state's economic and military struggle with the West. 'Indo-Europeanism', as it was called, became a term of abuse because its narrative of increasing variation of languages and cultures from original unity contradicted the Stalinist prognosis. It became something resembling a Foucauldian discourse of power-knowledge, a tendentious metanarrative where evidence is adduced merely to establish a 'truth' that is to one's advantage. As Marr had put it, Indo-Europeanism is 'flesh and bone the expression of moribund bourgeois sociality' that has been 'built on the oppression of the peoples of the East by the murderous colonial policies of European nations' (Marr 1934 [1924], p. 1). While Stalin would denounce Marrism in 1950, 'bourgeois orientalism' inherited the features of 'Indo-Europeanism' as developed by Marr's most doctrinaire followers.

In reality, of course, the concrete work of Soviet scholars could never be reduced to instances of this closed discourse, especially in areas distant from policy decisions. The work of Bakhtin and his colleagues emerged as this 'discourse' was being formed and it is marked by and resists what we might call the *rectification*,[7] or, to use Bakhtin's term, *monologization* of the ideological field that was taking place. In 1929 Voloshinov wrote about the way in which the ruling class tries to impart a 'supra-class, eternal character' to the ideological sign, 'to extinguish or drive inward the struggle of social accents that takes place within it, to make it monoaccentual' (1973, 23; 1995, 236). Later in the book he identifies Saussure's 'abstract objectivism' as the conception of language consistent with this perspective, a characterization that more accurately captures proto-structuralist interpretations of Saussure's *Cours*. In Bakhtin's 1929 study of Dostoevsky (2000 [1929], p. 35-36) Hegelian readings of the work of the Russian novelist are criticized for 'monologising' the unmerged and individualized struggle of socially specific perspectives and meanings that take place in the novels. Hegel's 'monologic dialectic' is shown to be quite the antithesis of Dostoevsky's static dialogue, but while the revelation of dialogue is held to be the novelist's great strength, the static worldview is his greatest weakness (2000 [1929], 39). In the mid 1930s Bakhtin presents the novel as a genre that expresses a 'dialogizing' orientation within culture that is antithetical to the 'monologizing' forces expressed by poetry. The novelist reveals the intersecting verbal activity of

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[7] The term 'rectification' is employed here in the sense of the conversion of alternating to direct current.

socio-specific agents characteristic of the process of historical becoming, while the poet strives to overcome such discursive plurality and achieve a single, privileged and authoritative word. Bakhtin here describes a *dialectical* process, modeled to a considerable extent on Ernst Cassirer's account of the unfolding and coming to self-consciousness of culture through a dialectic of mythical and critical symbolic forms. In the 1970s Bakhtin characterizes contemporary structuralism's derivation of an abstract dialectic from the plurality of contending positions thus: 'Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness' (1986, 147). This structuralist distillation of a unitary discourse of oppositions from living dialogues and the putative 'Soviet' discourse that would be locked into an abstract dialectic with that of the bourgeois world are strikingly similar. Individual agents engaged in acts of communication are lost, with 'the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning' replaced by a 'mechanical contact of "oppositions"' (1986, 162). Far from evidence of a consistent 'contempt for dialectics' as Morson and Emerson (1990, 57) suggest, Bakhtin's rejection of the monologic dialectic was simultaneously an attempt to affirm a *dialogic* dialectic. Thus his distinctly Hegelian formulation: 'dialectics was born of dialogue so as to return again to dialogue on a higher level (a dialogue of personalities)' (1986, 162).

Bakhtin's 'personality' is a concrete, socially and historically positioned, active agent, and as such is quite different from the poststructuralist 'subject', as a mere 'position' constructed by discourse or by 'formative structures' such as the Cold War. Bakhtin's conception of personality, which is based on the jurisprudential notion of the bearer of rights and responsibilities, undoubtedly has its problems. He brackets out all dimensions of human life that supposedly constitute the objects of the natural sciences (though they constantly make their presence felt indirectly), while his repeated appeal to the category of *voice* would leave him open to Derridean accusations of 'logocentrism'. In reality, though, Bakhtin's anti-monologism seriously weakens any such charges. To account for the complex forms of dialogue between colonial intellectuals and those seeking to shake off foreign domination we need a multifaceted conception of the *person* as an embodied and emergent being embedded in natural and social structures. Only this allows us to consider 'the complex dialectic of needs, desires, interests, rights, mutual understandings and misunderstandings, reciprocal obligations, and so forth, which make up the ethical life' (Norris 2015, 207). Forms of cultural interaction must be considered within the institutions that make them socially and politically significant.

Colonial philology revisited and reconsidered

In a recent study of early British India Daniel White articulates well the need to move beyond viewing colonial discourse as a monologic unity:

> Cultural histories of Western Orientalism, crucial as they have been, need to give way to the stubborn fact that Britons and Indians inhabited the same globe, a material and imagined terrain where unequal relations of power and representation were contested through alliances and conflicts, communication and mistranslation, sympathies and failures of feeling and understanding. (White 2013, p. 2)

Suitably modified and supplemented, a Bakhtinian theory can help to provide a theoretical foundation for such an approach, but while Bakhtinian ideas have been applied to postcolonial cultures, outside literary studies the theoretical bases have remained relatively undeveloped.[8] Indo-European philology, which, as Said (1995 [1978], p. 131) reasonably claims, provided Orientalism with its most important 'technical characteristics', is a case in point. Philologists directly aided colonial domination with the translation, codification publication and promotion of ancient Persian and Sanskrit texts on law in India, which became the basis of British attempts to 'nativise' their colonial legislation. This culminated in 1776 (and more systematically in 1794) with the publication of *The Laws of Manu*, the ancient Sanskrit texts employed by brahman jurists to teach their community the principles of ethical behavior and to make judgments according to the Indian caste system. Yet while this enterprise sought to 'eliminate competing forms of social authority' in the form of Hindu and Muslim jurists (*pandits* and *mulavis*), their collaboration was not reducible to mere bribery (Ahmed 2018: 110; see also Karttunen 2015, pp. 59-63). These texts are more complex than exemplars of a unitary discourse of European domination, since brahmin pandits had an interest in leading British philologists to focus almost exclusively on Sanskrit texts through which privileged castes claimed their legitimacy from a superior cultural heritage. Non-canonical Buddhist texts, regional folk traditions and archaeology that might have provided important correctives were marginalized or passed over in silence (Mani 2015, p. 199).

While the importance of producing canonical legal texts was crucial in establishing the power of the colonial state over indigenous forms of ethical regulation is undeniable,[9] it is important not simply to identify the work of philologists with the imperial state, just as the work of Soviet scholars working on the Orient cannot simply be identified with the interests of the Stalin regime and its successors. The texts that many philologists produced had no immediate relevance for the colonial administration, and they were often genuine enthusiasts for the cultures they studied, respecting their indigenous collaborators in producing translations of and commentaries on a variety of ancient texts. The selected texts nevertheless propagated idealized images of a glorious Aryan heritage that Europeans and lighter-skinned Indians supposedly shared. Privileged-caste Indians welcomed the glorification of their ancestors, vindicating, as it did, their supposedly '"innate" superiority over the "lowly shudra masses" and the "alien Muslims"' (Mani 2015, p. 194). The 'hegemony' of the 'new philology', as 'basis of both critical method and colonial domination', was not achieved simply 'because it enabled modern institutions to impose analytic and bureaucratic order on multilingual terrains' (Ahmed 2018: 39), but also because it encouraged particular strata of the indigenous population to collaborate with colonial powers while pursuing their own distinct objectives and making their own claims to authority. Hegemony is a dynamic, dialogical arrangement in which members of a group conditionally pursue their socio-political

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[8] Most significant in this area are Irschick's (1994) consideration of the dialogic nature of colonial rule in south India, while Urban (2001) makes effective use of Bakhtin's ideas about carnival in his study of the Kartabhaja sect in Bengal.

[9] Ahmed (2018: 125) notes that 'Colonial law thus revealed its raison d'être: not just to establish private property or any particular mode of production, but also to concentrate juridical power within the state'. As Pashukanis (1980 [1924]) showed, however, the establishment of the capitalist mode of production required precisely this 'concentration of juridical power'.

aims and objectives by subordinating them to those of a preponderant group, which to some extent accommodates them. The entire Bengal Renaissance, led by the accomplished Sanskritist Ram Mohan Roy (1772–1833), was based on the pursuit of such alliances as were the very different campaigns of Hindu chauvinists later.[10]

Collaborating pandits were rarely credited in published work, and ideological factors certainly guided selection of, as well as the conceptualization and generalisations of commentaries on, the texts produced. The very production of such texts nevertheless had effects that were not always supportive of the colonial ideology. Indian Marxist historian Irfan Habib (2005, p. 45) points out that regardless of the views of individual scholars, the very work of 'editing and translating texts, codifying grammars, establishing lexical meanings, and reconstructing "dead epochs"…. results in continuously altering our fundamental notions of the past as well as present. What were hitherto regarded as unchanging or insular societies may by archaeological discoveries or closer studies of sources, or intensive field-work turn into changing and outward looking ones'. One of the foremost Russian Indologists, Sergei Ol′denburg, made a similar point as early as 1915, arguing the myth of European superiority relied on an identification of 'material culture' with 'culture in general', with the assumption that 'where there were no visible features of the former . . . there are only savages or people who have lost their culture'. The East thus came to be exoticised as 'a strange, fairytale wonderland, alien, wild and strange'. The 'scientific movement of the 19th Century' eroded this by showing that the East is 'one of the necessary links of world, all-human culture' (1915, p. 2). In contradistinction to the majority of British and French philologists, Russian Indologists concentrated on studying the Buddhist texts brahmin-led European philologists neglected as part of a greater Indian cultural sphere that extended through Tibet and Mongolia into Russia's own orient. It should also be noted at this point that while most European philologists sought to justify colonialism, the image of a glorious Aryan past that they constructed nevertheless often implied critiques of present-day Europe. Max Müller, for instance, held that *all* branches of the Indo-European family had degenerated, but the European branch had been protected from idolatry by protestant Christianity.

Indian intellectuals did not simply accept the philologists' image of their past out of slavish admiration, but actively selected, reaccentuated and asserted features in order to promote Indian cultural and intellectual capacities and to claim their own leadership. Privileged-caste intellectuals selected among ancient Sanskrit texts, gerrymandered a canon and translated them freely into the vernacular in order to show that ideas and ideals usually credited to the European Enlightenment were already embedded in a much older Hindu tradition (see Figueria 2015 [2002], p. 95). The ideological dichotomy of Aryan and Semite that runs throughout Indo-European philology, the terms of which, one should note, were actively disputed by important Jewish philologists, as well as by early Soviet scholars like Marr, was translated by Indian Brahmin intellectuals into a dichotomy of Hindu and Muslim tradition. The Brahmins were, of course, custodians of and authorities on matters of what they called Hindu tradition, and influential figures like Justice Ranade (1902 [1885], p. 101) argued that the British had liberated India from Muslim rule and so laid the basis for Indians themselves to regain their past Aryan glories. What was needed, they argued,

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[10] It is notable that Ahmed (2018) provides no consideration of the Bengal Renaissance in his predominantly Foucauldian discussion of the entanglement of colonialism and philology.

was a 'Hindu protestantism' (Ranade 1902 [1895]) that would cleanse doctrine of the accretions of obscurantism perpetuated by a degenerate and self-interested priesthood to reveal the enlightened monotheism at the root of the true Aryan heritage. What Yelle (2012) called 'protestant literalism' clearly held an appeal for such intellectuals.

Later generations of high-caste nationalist intellectuals argued that it was the South Asian rather than European branch of the Aryan people that had retained the most essential features from past Aryan glories. One especially prominent advocate of this putative Hindu tradition was Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) who, armed with a physiognomy of the Aryan (Figueira 2015 [2002], p. 135), set out to re-Aryanise Europe and the United States by returning to them the Aryan spirituality that they had forgotten through their pursuit of technological progress. Such movements gained momentum following the defeat of the Russian fleet by the Japan in 1905, which placed assumptions of European superiority and invincibility in question. While in South Africa Mahatma Gandhi argued against British dominion over India on the basis that one group of Aryans should not dominate another (Mani 2005, 192–193), while proclaiming common cause with black Africans was impossible (Desai and Dahed 2015). The caste that governed for the British thus stated their ideological claim to become the ruling class as the independence movement extricated the Indian economy from the colonial drain.

In some cases the Aryan element was reconsidered, such as when privileged Indian intellectuals seized upon the work of the French Indologist Sylvain Lévi (1929) to propose a model of an Indian civilizing mission in South Asia dating back beyond the putative Aryan invasion (for overviews see Bayly 2004; Stolte and Fischer-Tiné 2012). The 'Greater India' idea contributed to a number of very different ideologies, both within and beyond India as intellectuals perceived a valuable resource for the pursuit of their own agendas. Hindu suprematists selectively drew upon the idea to claim that Hinduism is the original culture rooted in the soil, unlike that of Muslims who invaded India, and whose heirs cannot truly be regarded as Indians. The task for ideologists of Hindutva was to reconcile the idea of Hinduism as primordial to India while lauding the achievements of Aryans who one of the movement's celebrated precursors, Bal Gangadhar Tilak (1856-1920), held to have originated in more temperate or even Arctic climes (Tilak 1903).[11] The main ideologist of the movement M.S. Golwalkar (1906-1973) managed this by arguing that the North Pole was then located in present-day India (Thapar 2008 [1999], 75). Meanwhile, Levi's 'greater India' idea provided grist for the mill of Russian Indology, which traced the sources of the living traditions of Siberian peoples, and specifically rejected the 'philologism' that dominated most European work in the area.[12] It also provided valuable confirmation for Marr's campaign against Indo-European philology in asserting the cultural achievements of pre-Aryan peoples. Marr, Ol′denburg, Shcherbatskoi championed Levi becoming a corresponding member of the Russian Academy of Sciences in 1919 (Ol′denburg et al 1919).

As Indian intellectuals began to emerge from outside the privileged caste in the late nineteenth century a new type of engagement with European philology began to emerge. The most important was the Maharashtrian thinker and activist Jotirao Phule

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[11] Tilak derived this argument from Boston University President and professor of systematic theology William F. Warren (1885).
[12] See, for instance, Stcherbatsky (1932).

(1827-90), who argued that the narratives in the *Vedas*, that had recently been translated and published, should be interpreted in the light of local folk-culture and ritual. In Phule's work (2002 [1873]), written in the Maharashtrian vernacular in the form of philosophical dialogues, the Vedic narratives published by European philologists were presented as distorted accounts of the subordination and violent conquest of a culturally advanced civilization by a rapacious, invading force. The festival of light, divali, centred on the motif of the peasant king Bali, is now revealed to be a collective popular memory of a golden age of egalitarianism and plenty predating the Aryan invasion.[13] Phule's 'archaeological' approach to canonical texts made available through philological studies closely resembles that of Marr, for whom canonical Christian and other philologically celebrated texts must be explained in the light of the dynamics of oral folk and material cultures.[14] Moreover Phule's presentation of the Aryan invasion of India closely resembles that which Marr developed about Europe, where the Indo-Europeans subordinated and culturally expropriated the Japhetites. Marr's characterization of 'Indo-Europeanism' is rather like Phule's characterization of brahmanism - a Foucauldian discourse of power-knowledge.

Half a century later leader of the Dalit movement B.R. Ambedkar, presented Hindu nationalism as the bastard offspring of the Aryan-Semite dichotomy at the basis of the Indo-European ideology. In a lecture of 1936 he argued the very idea of Hinduism was one coined by Moghul invaders and that Hindu identity only transcends that of caste 'when there is a Hindu-Muslim riot' (Ambedkar 2014 [1936], 50). The thesis of the Aryan invasion rests on the unwarranted assumption 'that the Indo-Germanic people are the purest of the modern representatives of the original Aryan race' with a homeland somewhere in Europe and that a structurally similar language in India must have come from outside (1990 [1946], 79–80). The fundamental distinction at the base of the caste system was, for Ambedkar, cultic rather than racial, and as a result the division between *Ārya* and *Dāsa* (pre-Aryan India) should be viewed as one of class and ideology rather than race or complexion. Ambedkar concludes that the entire Aryan race theory survives only because of the confluence of brahmin and European colonial interests, being taken up and pursued by their respective scholars, which can be revealed by outlining the ideological assumptions that persist.

Conclusion

The conflation of power and knowledge into an anonymous discourse makes it impossible to understand how and why relations between power and knowledge change historically. The sheer variety of Indian responses to colonial philology illustrates this clearly. Precolonial societies were class societies rather than organic wholes, and the colonial enterprise depended on unequal dialogues between specific groups from the colonizing and colonized societies, each with its own distinct interests and agendas. Forms of collaboration and of opposition were shifting and complex, recognition of which is not to depoliticize critical approaches to colonialism (Ahmed 2018: 145-46) but, on the contrary, to recognize that politics involves making alliances across the boundaries of cultural difference in order to transform the totality of social relations.[15] Approaches that remain on the terrain of cultural difference and

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[13] I have discussed the similarities with Bakhtin's ideas about carnival elsewhere (Brandist, 2017).
[14] For a discussion see Ganalanian (1985).
[15] For a stimulating discussion of this see Mulhern (1995).

posit such notions as the closed discourse of orientalism obscure these crucial dimensions. Bakhtin's subtle hermeneutics of engagement may point towards an alternative approach, once dialogic engagements are viewed as embedded in, affected by and in turn affecting, more general social and historical forces, economic, political and military processes. In the case of the colonial and postcolonial world this chiefly means the realities of imperialism and how various social forces intersect with that drive. It is only from this perspective that the social significance of various positions can be ascertained, and this takes us far beyond Bakhtin.

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