

## Oxford Handbooks Online

### **Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality**

Pooja Rangan and Rey Chow

The Oxford Handbook of Postcolonial Studies

*Edited by Graham Huggan*

Print Publication Date: Sep 2013

Subject: Literature, Literary Studies - Postcolonial Literature

Online Publication Date: Dec 2013 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199588251.013.0025

### **Abstract and Keywords**

This chapter investigates the persistence of racism in the production and maintenance of postcolonial cultural identity through an examination of the major critical frameworks that have informed the analysis, over the past several decades, of theorizing in postcolonial studies: the anti-colonial writings of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmit; the poststructuralist turn in race theory marked by the work of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha and Henry Louis Gates, Jr.; and, most recently, the move towards questions of biopolitics, ethnicity and neo-racism as mobilized in the work of Michel Foucault and Etienne Balibar. The chapter evaluates the significance of positing race as a negative and repressive structure while also emphasizing race's generative function as a technology of government within modern society.

Keywords: Racism (or race), stereotypes, biopolitics, ethnicity, governmentality

---

### **Introduction**

The arrest of Prof. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in the summer of 2009 outside his home in Cambridge, Massachusetts instigated outraged responses from a wide variety of different quarters, with a substantial portion of the discourse from both conservative and liberal commentators being focused on speculations as to whether or not race had had an operative role to play. On the surface, the stakes seemed quite simply to be colour-coded—the arresting officer in question happened to be a white man, and Gates a black one. Taking the issue of class into account, however, adds another dimension to the incident. The attention received by the arrest was due in no small part to the fact that the party who was presumed to be guilty is a professor at one of the world's most prestigious

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

universities, an institution where discrimination or setting-apart, albeit of a different kind, is the rule of admission. The complications of analysing the incident then increase in manifold fashion when we consider that the stakeholders in the event were not limited to Gates, the policeman, and the vigilant neighbour who summoned the police to the scene, but included academic communities at Harvard and beyond, as well as television, radio, print and internet publics, all of whom were discursively involved in the extended 'scene' of the arrest.

As with other accounts that have attempted to come to terms with this event, we can begin by dealing with the economy of stereotypes underpinning the incident. Here, the figures of the black perpetrator and the white law enforcer readily offer themselves as footholds for taking stock of the encounter between Gates and the police officer. But while the alarming ease with which we can recognize and apprehend these figures demonstrates that race can still be reduced to stereotypes to the exclusion of other factors, it is more difficult to talk about the role these stereotypes play within the expanded discursive universe that such incidents bring to the fore. As stereotypes generally have a negative or (p. 397) repressive connotation—of someone being victimized and stigmatized because of their race, for instance—it might seem perverse, but is nonetheless pertinent, to ask if and how these devices served a *productive* function within the encounter between Gates and the policeman. This would amount to asking what ideological mechanisms are engaged when we apprehend and take up our places in society in response to the 'interpellation' of the racialized subject—the process in which institutions or figures of authority 'hail' us to recognize ourselves in subject positions that strengthen the dominant ideological structures of society (Althusser 1971). In other words, this would imply asking how racism is not simply repressive but is in fact essential to the production, regulation, and governance of 'good citizens'. While it is nearly impossible to discuss this neutrally, it is ultimately what is at stake in talking about race under postcolonial circumstances, as will also be seen in some of the other instances and incidents we analyse below.

This chapter is devoted to questions of the persistence of racism in the production and maintenance of postcolonial cultural identity. More specifically, it looks at how the notions of race and racism have been conceptualized over the past several decades of postcolonial critical theory, beginning with its conception as a major analytical rubric in the anti-colonial writings of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi, through the poststructuralist turn in race theory marked by Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s influential edited volume, *Race, Writing, and Difference*, to more recently the move toward questions of biopolitics, as enabled by the later writings and lectures of Michel Foucault. Rather than summarizing the last sixty years of postcolonial theory—an impossible task—or adopting a narrowly schematic view, we will attempt instead to approach some of the broader rubrics under which race and racism have been hypothesized. While evaluating the significance of positing racism as a negative and repressive structure, we will also

## **Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality**

---

explore how useful it is to think through the generative functions that racism serves as a technology of government within modern society as a whole.

# The Early Moment of Anti-Colonial Reflection

As Michael Omi and Howard Winant have argued, anti-colonial and postcolonial studies are important interlocutors with the subject of race, since they take as their point of departure racism and racialization as phenomena cultivated within the colonial encounter, rather than beginning, as other sociological or anthropological approaches to racial theory do, with epiphenomena such as ethnicity or class (1994: 37–47). Indeed, postcolonial theory has played a seminal role in dislodging questions of race from the ethnological domain of evolutionary theory, not least by elaborating the treacherous ramifications of deploying race as a self-evident concept of natural hierarchy for the purpose of justifying imperialism. In this regard, the anti-colonial writings of Frantz Fanon and Albert Memmi represent an earlier moment in the encounter between race and (p. 398) postcoloniality in which racism is seen as a structure of power and injustice, enforced and perfected within the circumstance of colonial relations.

For Fanon, writing in the 1940s as a colonial émigré from French Martinique educated in the metropole, racism results in the psychic injury that the colonized black subject is forced to endure at the hands of his white oppressors, in such a manner that the experience of loss or ‘alienation’ becomes the defining character of black identity. Fanon draws on Jacques Lacan’s notion of ‘misrecognition’ to describe the process of being set in motion by the visual stereotype of ‘Negro’, arguing that the *gestalt*, which Lacan describes as being the founding feature of ego-formation, cannot be better understood than in the colonial context (Lacan 1977). The ‘mirror stage’ is, so to speak, always already mediated by race, so that the black man’s relationship with his self-image is doubly marked by loss and fracture; identification with the white oppressor is both necessary and impossible. This internal fragmentation, Fanon reflects, is reinforced by denigrating interactions in the colonial world, in which the black subject is regularly reduced to his skin and hailed as such—as lesser-than, lacking, resolutely other—to the extent that these internal fractures gravitate outwards, creating psychic schisms within the colonized population as a whole (Fanon 1967). Fanon thereby anticipates Louis Althusser’s description of ‘interpellation’ in his illustration of a quotidian street scene of racial interpellation (‘Look! A Negro!’). This encounter, we should add, is no less constitutive of the self-image of the white child who cries out in wonder and terror at the sight of the black man; for this child, the category of the absolute other is resolutely and ineluctably racialized.

In Fanon’s writing, racism resembles an Oedipal scenario, with the white man occupying the position of the father who must be deposed in order for his reign of tyranny to end and for the black man to gain a sense of positive cultural identity. Accordingly, injury can only be countered with another injury; violent overthrow is the only means by which the black man can externally make good his internal loss, repossess what was taken from him, and assume what Lacan terms an ‘orthopaedic’ totality (1977: 4). Racism is

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

therefore symptomatic of the repressive logic that, for Fanon, defines the functioning of power; it heralds the sign of castration, a perpetually internalized negativity that can only be ameliorated through periodical eruptions of revolutionary violence.

Albert Memmi, the other major theorist of colonial racism and proponent of the ineluctability of violent struggle, also conceptualizes racism as a pathological condition that entraps both the colonized *and* the colonizer within a vicious circle that is ultimately debilitating to both parties. Straddling the Manichaeic tradition of Fanon and the poststructuralist bent of the next generation of postcolonial scholars, Memmi's work represents a series of tentative attempts at defining racism, which he describes variously as an ideological structure resembling Barthesian myth and as a discourse akin to Edward Said's notion of Orientalism (Memmi 2000; see also Memmi 1965; Barthes 1972; Said 1979). At the same time, Memmi is reluctant to endorse the idea that racism has any rational basis, arguing rather that the fundamental character of racism is its irrationalism. As he writes at one point, 'racist reasoning has no secure foundation, is incoherent in its development, and is unjustified in its conclusions ... racism is not simply of the order of reason ... [it] is called forth and maintained, in its essence and goals, (p. 399) by something other than itself' (2000: 21). In his nuanced and rich analysis, Memmi refers to racism as sharing common elements with both normal physiological instincts and irresistible, self-destructive drives. Racism resembles, on the one hand, 'the onset of an allergic reaction toward the other. Indeed the word "allergy" derives from *allas*, the Greek for "other," and *ergon*, which means reaction' (2000: 27). On the other hand, we are drawn towards otherness even as we recoil from it, for '[u]ndeniably, difference is disquieting; it reflects the unknown, and the unknown often seems full of danger. Difference disturbs even when, at times, it seduces' (27). Memmi concludes that racism, or the impulse to single out a scapegoat or victim on the basis of biological differences that are deemed unacceptable, is a subset of the more pervasive modern condition of heterophobia, or the generalized and pathological fear of difference, which he calls a 'refusal of the other' (101). Subsequently, the solutions he settles on for combating this condition of negativity are also acts of negation: both violent overthrow and empathy essentially negate the 'refusal of the other'.

## The Poststructuralist Turn

Memmi's writing, particularly in his later work, draws on the assumption that the coherence of racism is defined and borne out by the dyadic structure internal to the relationship between colonizer and colonized, one that traps the racist and the victimized in a co-dependency of dominance-subjugation. This emphasis on the structural foundations of racism defines the impetus of the next generation of scholarship on race, which remains indebted to the binary thinking of structuralism even as it attempts to deconstruct it. With the advent of poststructuralism, the emergent discipline of postcolonial studies concerns itself not only with the primary figures of Fanon and

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

Memmi, but crystallizes around Marxist poststructuralist scholars such as Edward Said, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Homi Bhabha, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. in a series of conversations that coalesce in questions regarding the determinant role of language in the repression of the other. Said, for example, in his famous discussion of Orientalism, deals with the systematic and structural relationship between textual power and economic-political power, and interrogates the material prehistory of the representational traditions that have contributed toward constructing 'the Orient' as an entity that is racially distinct from—and inferior to—the western world. Arguing that the east and the west are discursive rather than ontological categories, Said demonstrates that the two comprise a dialectical pair wherein the definition of each is propped up—and 'oriented'—by the other (Said 1979). Building upon Said's insights, Bhabha has argued more recently that the book, as a discursive form and linguistic commodity, not only behaves as an emblem of western empiricism, idealism, and monoculturalism, but also functions as the surface that stabilizes the agonistic space of colonial discourse, instrumentalizing language as a vehicle for regulating 'the ambivalence between origin and *Entstellung*, discipline and desire, mimesis and repetition' (Bhabha 1986: 171). Spivak, (p. 400) for her part, is committed to investigating the feedback mechanisms that make the enterprise of intellectual work complicit with the logic of western economic expansion. She writes that while subalternity is the product of very real conditions of material difference, it is secured and compounded by textual production—which would include not just historiography but all practices of academic writing. According to Spivak, the work of interpretation inevitably occludes subaltern subjectivity, condemning it to what she calls, following Jacques Derrida, a space of 'text-inscribed blankness' (1988a: 294; see also 1988b).

To borrow a phrase from Gates Jr's 1986 introduction to *'Race', Writing, and Difference*, the tendency among poststructuralist theorists has been to emphasize language as 'both the medium and the sign' of racial alienation (1986: 6). The exchange between Derrida and co-authors Anne McClintock and Rob Nixon on the question of apartheid is an excellent instance of how the relationship between theories and practices of racism, or the 'word' and the 'world' as Spivak puts it, is played out within postcolonial contexts. McClintock and Nixon criticize Derrida's attention to the word 'apartheid' as anachronistic, urging attention to be paid instead to the shifting linguistic strategies of racism of the South African government. The discriminatory 'no' of apartheid, they argue, has given way to the rhetorically benign 'yes' of democratic federalism (McClintock and Nixon 1986). Derrida's response to this charge of ahistoricity is to argue that these emerging rhetorics of positivity merely represent a new liberalist alibi for apartheid. But something more is at stake in Derrida's strategic insistence on apartheid's currency: according to him, the avoidance of the word 'apartheid' in political parlance redoubles language's tendency to repress the mechanisms of its own functioning, and, moreover, stages the violent ramifications of similar repressions in the social arena. As 'racism's last word', apartheid preserves, as he puts it, 'the archival record of a failure' (1986: 332). 'Apartheid', for Derrida, crystallizes the complicity between racism as a social practice of exclusion and the exclusion that constitutes the theoretical basis of language. That is to

say, the word 'apartheid' is not just a name that denotes the meaning of racist segregation; it also serves as a reminder of another kind of setting-apart, a process of differentiation without which human signification itself cannot materialize. Derrida's work offers an important reminder of the responsibility of theoreticians of race to interrogate the idioms through which they intervene in racism's historical manifestations, thereby acknowledging their role in the ongoing complicity between language and the act of prohibition (Derrida 1986).

## The Problem of Biopolitics

Derrida's commitment to working within the limits of language, words, and etymologies as a means of addressing the relationship between theories and practices of power stands in contradistinction with the methodology adopted by French theorist and philosopher Michel Foucault, who has perhaps contributed the most towards (p. 401) thinking about the generative (as opposed to repressive) dimensions of discourse and power. Although to many he remains more famous for his writings on the history of sexuality and the emergence of institutional and disciplinary power, Foucault has been acknowledged as an important interlocutor with theories of race and racism, especially with the publication of the English-language translations of his 1976–9 lecture series at the Collège de France. Here, he explicitly discusses the subjects of state racism and what he terms 'biopolitics': the mode of governance specific to the modern state, the regulatory purview of which extends not just to civic or administrative functions, but to the social ecology of life as a whole (Foucault 2008). Unlike many of his contemporaries, Foucault shifts his critical gaze away from an exclusive emphasis on language, disseminating it instead among a diverse network of institutions, including hospitals, prisons, schools, asylums, and states. He argues that rather than operating through one exclusive or primary site, power in the modern era tends to 'swarm' these institutional spaces, whose organization allows them to function both internally and in conjunction with one another as discursive sites or 'apparatuses'. Defined in this sense, power is immanent in the discursive 'force relations' (economic, sexual, informational) subtended by these apparatuses, with subjects, individuals, and citizens as embodiments of its effects (Foucault 1990: 92).

One of Foucault's major innovations has been to theorize power by rejecting what he calls the 'repressive hypothesis', according to which Marxism and psychoanalysis, two of the main cornerstones of structuralist and poststructuralist thinking, derive some of their most important conceptual breakthroughs. Foucault argues that the notion of power-as-law or repression—whether attributed to the father who forbids, the prince who arbitrates rights, or language which censors—takes the juridical form of sovereignty. He disagrees with this formulation of power on two fronts: first, the repressive hypothesis imagines power to be an alienable possession rather than as something that is immanent within the social field. This kind of thinking tends to be limited in its outlook because it can imagine the subject only as a submissive or passive victim of power rather than as a

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

vehicle that actively produces and channels it (1990: 15–50). Moreover, according to Foucault, the repressive view of power is outdated. He contends that the juridical logic of sovereignty best characterizes how power functioned in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, when the sovereign had a monopoly on power, which gave him the right to ‘have people put to death or let them live’ (2003: 240). With the advent of industrialization and the accompanying demographic explosion in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a new modality of power emerged, which Foucault dubs ‘discipline’ (1995: 135–69). Operating through a generalized system of surveillance, discipline spreads virally by way of specialized institutions (including schools, prisons, hospitals, asylums, and the like). Such a system represents a vast improvement in efficiency over sovereign power in that individuals are now enlisted to regulate themselves by internalizing discipline. Rather than enforcing a prohibition on discourse, disciplinary power relies on an incitement to discourse, holding out the promise of a ‘free’ subjecthood as the incentive for acquiescing to subjection. Consequently, the complex libidinal desire to become a subject is harnessed and put to work in the institutionalization of a new economy of (p. 402) social relations that seems to function automatically, by people’s free will, so to speak, rather than depending on force or law.

In his 1978–9 lecture series, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, Foucault argues that the issues of biopolitics cannot be thought outside liberalism, the ‘framework of political rationality within which they appeared and took on their intensity’ (2008: 317). However, he spends little time in these late lectures on the connection between racist biopower and neoliberal economics, emphasizing only that biopolitics and neoliberalism are both guided by the dictum of governing as little as possible, reducing the intervention of the state to an efficient minimum. While he takes care to dispel the notion of any easy parallel between economic and governmental rationality, his insistence that neoliberalism provides an impetus to biopower remains suggestive. The driving *economic* principle behind neoliberalism is Adam Smith’s notion of a self-regulating market. According to this theory, the market, guided by the self-interest of private individuals, will regulate itself without requiring state intervention, as if steered by an ‘invisible hand’ (Smith 1976: 456).

The key to neoliberalism’s success as a mode of governance, therefore, lies in its way of privatizing the burden of regulation, which releases the state from the onerous task of supervision. Indeed, if there can be a Foucauldian summation of neoliberalism, we might call it the ‘privatization of the soul’. To that extent, letting people be—*laissez faire*—really means letting them (believe that they) have ownership over their soul, self, property, sexuality, or ethnicity. This is consistent with a technology of power that authorizes individuals to observe and monitor themselves, maintaining relations among one another through a network of ‘private link[s], which is a relation of constraints entirely different from [the] contractual obligations’ that would have mechanized the older sovereign regime of power (Foucault 1995: 222). This logic of a systemic investment in the self—as an entity that has been worked over by and must ‘live’ or ‘survive’ in correspondence to institutional surveillance—can be witnessed historically in the emergence of bourgeois



## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

individualism, and in the proliferation of entire industries and commodified practices devoted to self-help, self-liberation, and self-augmentation (the recent work of Nikolas Rose (2006) on the medicalization of consumer bodies as vehicles of biopower is edifying in this regard).

We can also return to Foucault's earlier writings to understand his unfinished work on the mutual implication between biopower and neoliberalism. Towards the end of *The Order of Things*, Foucault writes that the modern epoch is signalled in part by the appearance of the figure of 'Man' as an 'empirico-transcendental doublet' (1994: 318). A symptom of this is the rise, in the realm of knowledge production, of the 'human sciences'—disciplines that specialize in the objectification and scrutiny of 'Man' as an empirical entity. But while these disciplines, which include economics, biology, and linguistics, ostensibly generate empirical data, they are simultaneously performing the function of adjudicating the boundary between the human and the non- or subhuman. The soul, the transcendental part of the empirico-transcendental doublet and the traditionally definitive quality of man, is thus produced—and privatized—in the same process that weeds out that data which is deemed to be insufficiently human. From a postcolonial perspective, the data disqualified as less-than-human also tends to be used to discriminate (p. 403) against peoples identified as being the west's racial others. When Foucault's earlier observations are studied in light of his later lectures, we can see a consistent argument of how the social controls typical of modern society intensify in tandem with the galvanizing of new apparatuses for biopower. The executive uses of racism are disseminated beyond the domain of the state to the realms of intellectual exchange and discourse, and the production of a private individual with a soul is reinforced with classificatory techniques that are thoroughly implicated in the discursive politics of racialization.

As briefly noted earlier, biopolitics marks the birth of a new and specifically modern kind of governmental rationality, whereby the object of the state is no longer government for its own sake or the aggrandizement of its own sovereignty. Rather, *life itself* becomes the object and stake of power, the conservation, purification, and invigoration of which is now carried out in the name of an abstract entity, a mass body known as a 'population'. Consequently, the onus shifts from individual bodies to the human species as an economic and political problem, and the mechanisms of life at the level of the population—such as sexuality, reproductive health, fertility, morbidity, life expectancy, hygiene, health, birth and death rates, security, scarcity, ecology, and the environment—become key variables to be managed and monitored. Henceforth, the imperative of the state is to develop technologies of administration and management in response to these large-scale phenomena.

Racism presents itself as just such a technology and proves to be a remarkable fit with the problems specific to regulation at the level of the population. Like the abstract category 'population', race lends fixity to flexible and nebulous qualities such as the nature, character, and potential of a group. It does this by locating these invisible traits in visible physical attributes such as skin colour, body build, physiognomy, and behaviour, all

of which can be 'scientifically' observed and documented. This in turn makes race convenient for such tasks as statistical mapping of groups, scientific modelling, and long-term demographic forecasts and planning. Moreover, race updates the pre-modern agonistic impulse of war between human groups by allowing war to thrive, indeed become permanent, by way of the modern emphasis on life. By reconfiguring the older warlike relationship between groups as a struggle for life itself, (the) race (war) becomes a question of the health and future of the species as a whole—and racism, the biopolitical state's means of establishing a caesura within the population so that the extermination of the bad part—the 'enemy within'—becomes the very condition for improving life for the rest. Killing is now regenerative rather than repressive, rational rather than arbitrary, for the purpose of life rather than death, and 'peace itself is a coded war' (Foucault 2003: 51). For Foucault, this is how the discourse of race struggle in modern times converges with the discourse of power. For that reason, he concludes, the race thematic is 'no longer a moment in the struggle between one social group and another; it will promote the global strategy of social conservatisms' in the appearance of a 'State racism: a racism that society will direct against itself, against its own elements and its own products. This is the internal racism of permanent purification, and it will become one of the basic dimensions of social normalization' (2003: 61-2).

(p. 404)

## Neoliberalism and Neo-Racism

Foucault's intervention contributes in a unique manner to discourses of race and racism in postcolonial studies. While the notions of exclusion, censorship, and discrimination have been central to the theories of racism we have considered thus far in this chapter, Foucault is arguably the first to make the following two provocative claims: first, that to talk about the specificity of racism in the context of twentieth-century neoliberalisms entails addressing it as a technology of rationalization rather than as an irrational or pathological condition, as Fanon and Memmi have tended to argue; and second, that we have moved into an era in which power operates through the 'yes' rather than through the 'no'. In other words, as a technology of rationalization, racism does not depend on a strictly negative logic but does its work as part of an enabling disciplinary economy with infinite potential for proliferation. Accordingly, analyses of racism need to be attentive not just to questions of subjection or repression but also to racialization's positive and endlessly multiplying capacities.

This linkage of racialization and power offers an innovative rubric for understanding recent geopolitical developments that demonstrate the striking continuity of imperialist dynamics when it comes to the question of race. Within the frame of the USA, these might include the 'oversight' of the Bush government in its response to the 2006 Hurricane Katrina relief operation, in a move which strategically permitted some to die; the ubiquitous sound bites of defence and security after '9/11' that emphasize the identification and rooting out of internal enemies and intruders; and the legislative

phenomenon of 'affirmative action', which came under fresh scrutiny with the appointment of Sonia Sotomayor to the US Supreme Court (see the essays by Morton and Sharp in Part II of this volume). Expanding our purview to phenomena of a more global nature would mean taking note of such disparate situations as McClintock and Nixon's aforementioned account of the shift in the official presentation of South African racism from a language of overt discrimination to the positive rhetorics of democratic federalism; the political and economic significance of genocide in the twentieth century, with such salient examples as the Soviet gulag, the Nazi death camps, the Japanese atrocities in East and South East Asia, and the Turkish massacre of Armenians; the relationship between the consolidation of the European Union and the treatment of immigrant and stateless refugee populations seeking employment or asylum within western European states (Balibar 2003); and the transnational interest in monitoring 'global' epidemiological phenomena such as avian and swine flu.

While Foucault, who was unashamedly Eurocentric in his political and historical perspective as a scholar, might seem an unlikely figure to take up for questions of postcolonial study, his writings on biopower have been fecund in generating theorizations pertaining to race in fields as varied as science and technology studies (Nikolas Rose, Kaushik Sunder Rajan), anthropology (Paul Rabinow, Didier Fassin), new media theory (Jussi Parikka), queer theory (Jasbir Puar), and philosophy (Roberto Esposito, Giorgio Agamben, Achille Mbembe, and Eugene Thacker). While all of these inquiries impinge (p. 405) on our current topic, a particularly relevant set of issues is that posed by anthropologist and historian Ann Laura Stoler's *Race and the Education of Desire*, which explores the relationship between biopower and the cultivation of colonial subjectivity. Focusing on the case of the Dutch East Indies, Stoler argues that the colony served as a 'laboratory of modernity', a site where disciplinary strategies of industrial production and social behaviour were rehearsed prior to being imported to the metropole as bourgeois norms (1995: 15; see also Stoler in Part I of this volume). Taking her cue from Said's still-influential work on the discursive construction of colonial regimes of power, Stoler argues that Foucault, even as he attends to the details of European bourgeois sexuality, is notably negligent of the extent to which 'an implicit racial grammar', rehearsed in the imperial context of European colonies, 'underwrote the sexual regimes of bourgeois culture in more ways than he explored and at an earlier date' (1995: 12). Crucially, while Foucault focuses on the deployment of sexuality as a type of discursive formation, Stoler examines the more unruly terrains of desire—namely, those quotidian activities whose affective dimensions in the colonies might have served to discipline and regulate 'proper' European bourgeois citizens 'back home'. Colonizers' subjectivities, she argues, were cultivated in relation to colonized bodies, through sexual and service relations that converged at sites such as language use, attire, sexual moralities, lifestyles, schooling, church membership, childcare, pedagogy, cultural affiliations, self-discipline, and spending habits.

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

Stoler's study advocates attention to the gentle, the everyday, the domestic, and the intimate—one might even say the softly feminine—over and against the more overtly coercive aspects of the colonial relationship as sites for the 'education' of colonial desire. This calls to mind the early work of Memmi, whose sympathetic psychological portraits of the 'colonizer' and the 'colonized' as ideal social types suggest that racism is socialized as a mundane aspect of collective life under colonial circumstances, and therefore represents the norm rather than the exception in social formations marked by (post)coloniality. Consequently, he argues, anti-racist work needs to address a spectrum of racist attitudes, ranging from brutal and discriminatory acts to 'civilized' expressions of prejudice such as benign tolerance and paternalistic benevolence, which deflect charges of reactionary violence by staking claim to a more 'liberal' position. According to Memmi, paternalism founds a 'new moral order', a kind of gift economy that permits the colonizer to 'stretch racism and inequality farther' while abnegating any duties or responsibilities to his wards. As he explains: 'It is, if you like, a charitable racism—which is not thereby less skilful nor less profitable. For the most generous paternalism revolts as soon as the colonized demands his union rights, for example' (1965: 76). This veneer of benevolence—which absolves the colonizer of guilt while allowing him to hold the colonized at a distance, as an outcast—rehearses at a gentler level the expiatory functions of scapegoating violence, which too is ultimately a drama of the colonizers' 'self-absolution' through collective 'self-purification' (2000: 65). By addressing the ways in which the colony is, *de facto*, a training ground for experimenting with liberalism as a mode of governmentality, Memmi's argument presciently anticipates the work of Foucault, and later Stoler, and most directly Étienne Balibar.

(p. 406) In their co-authored 1991 volume *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*, Balibar and Immanuel Wallerstein address the systemic transformations in dominant forms of racism in the contemporary world. Methodologically, they argue the significance of historicizing the relationship between the economic stage of capitalism on the one hand, and, on the other, social and cultural formations such as racism, nationalism, and class struggles. By charting epistemic shifts in the tactics of racialization and racism, Balibar and Wallerstein's work provides an important point of dialogue with Foucault. Not only do they present such shifts as being intrinsic to modern society's mode of operation, but the stresses they put on cultural formations also—much like Foucault's writings on biopower and neoliberalism—steer us away from Marxism's more economic emphases, encouraging us to rethink political economy itself as a condition of possibility rather than as a determining force that ultimately instrumentalizes the subject.

Balibar's work is particularly instructive in this regard. In 'Is there a Neo-Racism?' (Balibar and Wallerstein 1991), he raises the issue of whether neoliberalism inaugurates the evolution of newly rationalized expressions of prejudice that have become the hegemonic form of racism in the post-World War II era (17–28). His thesis, which is central to the present discussion, is worth quoting in full:

The new racism is a racism of the era of 'decolonization', of the reversal of population movements between the old colonies and the old metropolises, and the division of humanity within a single political space. Ideologically, current racism, which in France centres upon the immigrant complex, fits into a framework of 'racism without races', which is already widely developed in other countries, particularly the Anglo-Saxon ones. It is a racism whose dominant theme is not biological heredity but the insurmountability of cultural differences, a racism which, at first sight, does not postulate the superiority of certain groups or peoples in relation to others but 'only' the harmfulness of abolishing frontiers, the incompatibility of life-styles and traditions; in short it is what P.A. Taguieff has rightly called a *differentialist racism*. (21)

Like Foucault, Balibar identifies Nazism as a turning point in the history of racism. According to him, World War II precipitated movements within Europe toward the 'culturalist' or 'differentialist' mode of racism that had already achieved predominance in North America. Significantly, this post-war embrace of discourses of cultural relativism represents an *improvement* in the efficiency of racialization as a technique of governance, rejecting expensive and extreme measures such as genocide and adopting affirmative measures such as cultural diversity instead (in ways that are consistent with the post-war ethos of democratic liberalism). The usefulness of 'culture' lies in its Janus-faced flexibility: the universality of culture can be deployed as a category of inclusion (we are all cultural beings, and hence the same) but cultural difference can at the same time be a matter of irreconcilable divergence, serving as grounds for separation, discrimination, exclusion, and even, in the extreme case, death. The liberal emphasis on both the difference and equality of cultures simultaneously authorizes the recent European project of post-national integration and citizenship; by the same token it can be mobilized in the (p. 407) service of discrimination, of setting-apart or cultural distancing, and herein lies the fertility—and resilience—of the coupling of 'culture' and 'life'. For Balibar, this regulation of what he calls 'thresholds of tolerance' is not only still in force, but has also intensified with the unification of the European Union; and this flexible biopolitics has become a stand-in for the disintegration of traditional state sovereignty in the age of globalization today (2003: 37; see also Farrier and Tuitt in Part II of this volume).

Meanwhile, in the contemporary political climate of the United States, the rise of discourses of multiculturalism, together with the last decade's resurgence of official and unofficial ethnic fundamentalisms, attests to the fact that today's Americans are very much operating under the sign of differentialist culturalism. In the multicultural era, there has been a tendency to overwrite the repressive connotations of the term 'race' with the discourses of 'ethnicity'. Ethnicity positively emphasizes aspects of cultural diversity such as nationality, cultural heritage, language, lifestyle, behaviour, and mores while circumventing the biological and eugenic connotations of race. Indeed, some postcolonial theorists, too, have escalated their efforts to disarm biological and evolutionary racisms, drawing on the latest developments in molecular and genetic science in order to de-naturalize the link between racial classification at the biological level and its socio-political implications (Gilroy 2002). But despite these initiatives—or

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

perhaps in concert with them—ethnicity, as the cultural counterpart of racial science, seems to provide racialization with less systematic but nonetheless highly generative and sophisticated new forms through which to persist in the twenty-first century. It is urgent that we turn our attention to ethnicity for this very reason. While this means on the one hand that race has emerged again as an analytic of biological truth, ‘viewed ... through a molecular gaze’, and needs to be theorized as such, as Foucault scholars Rose and Rabinow have argued (2006: 204), what needs to be emphasized is that ethnicity has become a privileged line of force within present-day global biopolitical flows, a line that possesses a chimerical currency not unlike Balibar’s specialized conception of differentialist culturalism. Unlike race, which in current genomic discourses is located within the logic of biological determinism, ethnicity functions within a complex, because constantly shifting, symbolic economy, confronting us with a whole range of biopolitical antagonisms at multiple, cross-cultural levels.

Thinking the notion of neo-racism together with Stoler’s excursus on the racialized education of desire is particularly helpful at this juncture, as it helps us address the intertwined global economies of ethnic labour and ethnic violence. If interpellation in multicultural times functions by hailing the subject through a stereotype that is always already ethnicizing, then it is necessary to acknowledge that the libidinal labour of assuming subjecthood in a neoliberal multicultural society is, in the last instance, also a biopolitical event. In this sense, Gates Jr.’s arrest is exemplary of the kind of racializing interpellation that has become normative in current times, and which—as was evidenced by the ‘good sense’ of his neighbour, whose vigilant surveillance of the neighbourhood precipitated the arrival of the police and Gates Jr.’s eventual arrest—allows us to assume our roles as good citizens. Althusser’s argument about the interpellation of citizen-subjects by authority figures plays out here as a drama of racialization, where (p. 408) ethnic identity is ritualistically enforced by a mutual play of call and response, or surveillance and confession. The difficulty of theorizing the labour of assuming ethnic citizenship is that this labour is driven by a desire for the positive benefits of inclusion associated with the benevolent, universal dimensions of ethnicity. But this expression of desire can simultaneously be construed as a confession—whether voluntary or not—of difference that warrants discrimination, exclusion, and persecution (Chow 2002: 1–49; 95–127). Similarly, we can think of the ritual function of ‘ethnic cleansing’, for which the paranoid imperative to watch, identify, and call out the other takes on more extreme proportions. Such momentous instances of violence are instructive in alerting us to the stakes of drawing on ethnicity whenever the obligations of (collective) self-reflection, rejuvenation, and improvement are placed on society as a whole.

## Conclusion

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

Biopolitics and neoliberalism, then, may provide postcolonial studies with an astute perspective on the epistemic changes taking place within the very functioning of race in modern society. Whereas previously racism may have served to legitimize the divisive dynamic between colony and metropole, Foucault's insights compel us to examine the increasingly deterritorialized and rationalizing roles played by racism as a motor that propels, manages, and refines the everyday social workings of an entire population. The writings we have considered here argue that the violence of racialization has become normalized and internalized within social institutions and apparatuses, including the very mechanisms through which we inhabit our positions as subjects and enter into relationships of exchange.

This is, of course, far from a definitive statement on the multiple ways in which race and racism continue to operate in contemporary societies. We have not, for instance, considered the writings of the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben, which have exerted a considerable appeal in recent years for scholars of the postcolonial condition (see Morton, Farrier and Tuitt, and Smith and Turner, all in Part II of this volume). Against Foucault, for whom the repressive hypothesis does not adequately describe the discursive promiscuity of modern power, Agamben argues that the sovereign right to kill has been institutionalized and intensified in modernity as 'thanatopolitics': a politics of death. In Agamben's model, power is defined by the capacity for arbitrating the separation of *zoē* (the objective or biological fact of living) and *bios* (the subjective way of living or being-in-the-world proper to any group or individual) (Agamben 1998). Once stripped of *bios*, the entirety of its cultural and political dimensions, life is rendered 'bare', abject, and vulnerable to sovereign power. But unlike Foucauldian biopolitics, in which even death is a means to the enhancement and regeneration of life, for Agamben extermination means that 'bare life' is bereft of political or social consequence. In this view, the concentration camp serves as a transcendent universal condition as opposed to a logical culmination of biopolitics, the point at which rationality turns on itself and (p. 409) becomes madness (as is the case with Foucault). In his apocalyptic view of the present, Agamben implies that death, abjection, and loss have been internalized as the principle of existence and the motivating force behind a power that is fundamentally negative in its functioning.

Agamben's suggestion, in work such as 'Beyond Human Rights' (1996), that the figure of the refugee—the dispossessed, rightless, and stateless person—increasingly represents the paradigm of contemporary political consciousness, coincides with the turn in postcolonial studies toward theories of loss, abjection, and grief as ways of theorizing postcolonial racial politics. In recent decades, various scholars have drawn on Freud's notion of melancholy—a process of mourning that remains incomplete—for arguing the damaging and hostile psychic dimensions of racialization. Building on Judith Butler's seminal schema of melancholic gender formation (Butler 1990), Anne Anlin Cheng, for instance, has argued in her 2000 book *The Melancholy of Race* that the psychical 'wound' inflicted by racism plays a similarly constitutive role in racial or ethnic subject-formation, the outcome of which is that normative racial identity is fundamentally melancholic in constitution, while marginal racial subjects are rendered doubly abject as the suspended, abandoned objects of white desire. Other theorists have found this model of the

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

racialization of desire to be productive of hostile differences, and the British sociologist Paul Gilroy has argued, accordingly, in favour of a 'post-racial' optic for the sake of thinking about multiculturalism as a joyous convivial condition, without hierarchy of any kind (Gilroy 2004).

In the work of theorists like Butler and Cheng, postcolonial melancholy offers an updated psychoanalytic reading of a scenario not entirely different from Frantz Fanon's description of racial injury—it is the wound or castration that is responsible for the production of fractured and schizophrenic colonial subjects. Strangely enough, while Fanon upholds the white subject as the mimetic standard and ideal of an unattainable totality, the recent turn to questions of melancholy seems to regard sexual or racial otherness (or, in the case of Gilroy, cultural diversity or polymorphism) as representative of some original, lost condition—a move that, for obvious reasons, deserves more in-depth interrogation (Chow 2008). These issues of bare life and melancholic subjectivity are major areas in which the controversies of race, racism, and postcoloniality are likely to continue in the foreseeable future. They cannot be resolved easily in relation to any discussion of neoliberalism, the market, and biopower; rather, it is the *nexus* of these conversations that demands further informed theorization and critical debate.

## References

Agamben, Giorgio (1996). 'Beyond Human Rights', in Paolo Virno and Michael Hardt (eds), *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics*, trans. Cesare Casarino. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 159–65.

Agamben, Giorgio (1998). *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

(p. 410) Althusser, Louis (1971). 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses (Notes Towards an Investigation)', in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster. New York: Monthly Review Press, 127–86.

Balibar, Étienne (2003). *We, the People of Europe? Reflections on Transnational Citizenship*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Balibar, Étienne and Immanuel Wallerstein (1991). *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities*. London and New York: Verso.

Barthes, Roland (1972). *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers. New York: Hill and Wang.

Bhabha, Homi (1986). 'Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree Outside Delhi, May 1817', in H. L. Gates, Jr. (ed.), *'Race', Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 163–84.

Butler, Judith (1990). *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge.



## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

Cheng, Anne Anlin (2000). *The Melancholy of Race*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Chow, Rey (2002). *The Protestant Ethnic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Chow, Rey (2008). 'Translator, Traitor; Translator, Mourner (or, Dreaming of Intercultural Equivalence)', *New Literary History*, 39.3: 565–80.

Derrida, Jacques (1986). 'Racism's Last Word', in H. L. Gates, Jr. (ed.), *'Race', Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 329–38.

Esposito, Robert (2010). *Bios: Biopolitics and Philosophy*, trans. Timothy Campbell. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Fanon, Frantz (1967). *Black Skin, White Masks*. New York: Grove Press.

Fassin, Didier (2007). 'Humanitarianism as a Politics of Life', *Public Culture*, 10.3: 499–520.

Foucault, Michel (1990). *The History of Sexuality, vol. 1, An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel (1994). *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*. New York: Vintage Books.

Foucault, Michel (1995). *Discipline and Punish*, trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Random House.

Foucault, Michel (2003). *Society Must Be Defended: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1975–1976*, trans. David Macey. New York: Picador.

Foucault, Michel (2008). *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France, 1978–79*, trans. Graham Burchell. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Gates, Henry Louis, Jr. (1986). 'Writing "Race" and the Difference It Makes', in H. L. Gates, Jr. (ed.), *'Race', Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1–20.

Gilroy, Paul (2002). *Against Race*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Gilroy, Paul (2004). *Postcolonial Melancholia*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Lacan, Jacques (1977). 'The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I', in *Ecrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, Héloïse Fink, and Russell Grigg. New York: Norton, 1–7.

McClintock, Ann and Rob Nixon (1986). 'No Names Apart: The Separation of Word and History in Derrida's "Le Dernier Mot du Racisme"', in H. L. Gates, Jr. (ed.), *'Race', Writing, and Difference*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 339–53.

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

---

Mbembe, Achille (2003). 'Necropolitics', trans. Libby Meintjes, *Public Culture*, 15.1: 11–40.

Memmi, Albert (1965). *The Colonizer and the Colonized*. New York: Orion Press.

Memmi, Albert (2000). *Racism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

(p. 411) Omi, Michael and Howard Winant (1994). *Racial Formation in the United States from the 1960s to the 1990s*. New York: Routledge.

Parikka, Jussi (2010). *Insect Media: An Archaeology of Animals and Technology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Puar, Jasbir (2007). *Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Rabinow, Paul (2007). *Marking Time: On the Anthropology of the Contemporary*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rajan, Kaushik Sunder (2006). *Biocapital: The Constitution of Postgenomic Life*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

Rose, Nikolas (2006). *The Politics of Life Itself: Biomedicine, Power, and Subjectivity in the Twenty-First Century*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rose, Nikolas and Paul Rabinow (2006). 'Biopower Today', *Biosocieties*, 1: 195–217.

Said, Edward (1979). *Orientalism*. New York: Vintage Books.

Smith, Adam (1976). *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*, vol. 1, book IV, ed. R. H. Campbell and A. S. Skinner. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1998a). 'Can the Subaltern Speak?', in Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (eds), *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 271–316.

Spivak, Gayatri Chakravorty (1988b). 'Deconstructing Historiography', in Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (eds), *Selected Subaltern Studies*. New York: Oxford University Press, 3–34.

Stoler, Ann Laura (1995). *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things*. Durham and London: Duke University Press.

Thacker, Eugene (2010). *After Life*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

**Pooja Rangan**

## Race, Racism, and Postcoloniality

Pooja Rangan is Assistant Professor of Culture and Media in Eugene Lang College at the New School (US). She holds a PhD in Modern Culture and Media from Brown University, where her dissertation, 'Automatic Ethnography: Otherness, Indexicality, and Humanitarian Visual Media', was awarded the Marie L. Langlois Prize in 2012. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Camera Obscura*, *South Asian Popular Culture*, *Interventions* and *differences*.

### Rey Chow

Rey Chow is Anne Firor Scott Professor of Literature at Duke University (US), and serves on the board of around forty journals, book series and research centres worldwide. Her scholarly writings, which have appeared in ten languages, include *The Rey Chow Reader* (2010) and *Entanglements, or Transmedial Thinking about Capture* (2012).

