
Pal Ahluwalia has already published substantial work dealing with postcolonial politics and theory: most notably, *Plantations and the Politics of Sugar in Uganda* (1995), *Politics and Post-Colonial Theory: African Inflections* (2001), *Edward Said: The Paradox of Identity* (1999) and *Edward Said* (2001) (the latter two co-written with Bill Ashcroft), along with several edited and co-edited books and journal articles. He is co-editor of three journals published by Routledge (*African Identities, Social Identities*, and *Sikh Formations*) and one of four editors responsible for the Routledge series on Postcolonial Politics (his new book is the second in this series), and – until his recent appointment as Pro-Vice-Chancellor and Vice-President of the University of South Australia – he held a professorship in politics at Adelaide University, with occasional visiting appointments at University of California and London University. His contribution to the field is expanded by this new book, which draws together his knowledge of Edward Said, African colonial and postcolonial politics, and French post-structuralist theory in order to make an interesting argument about the influence on most of the central twentieth-century French theorists of their Algerian experience. Looking closely at selected work by Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, Frantz Fanon, Jacques Derrida, Hélène Cixous, Louis Althusser, Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault and Jean-François Lyotard, who (but for Foucault) either were born in Algeria, lived and worked there for a while, or were deeply involved in the Algerian struggle for independence, Ahluwalia argues that the development of post-structuralism is fundamentally indebted to the postcolonial stances adopted by these various figures. Too often, he claims, postcolonialism is seen as indebted to post-structuralism; in this book, the tables are turned.

After a short introduction and a substantial and useful first chapter on the colonization of Algeria in 1830 and the Algerian War of Independence (1954-1962), Ahluwalia devotes a chapter to Camus, Fanon and Sartre as precursors to postcolonial post-structuralist thought. Camus was born in Algeria, Fanon was born in Martinique but immigrated to Algeria in 1953, and Sartre was an ardent supporter of the liberation movement, and, of course, a key commentator on Fanon. Ahluwalia engages in some detail both with studies on them and with their own writing, making a strong case for the impact of Algerian colonial history on mid-century French intellectual life, and thus on the destabilization of notions of Western superiority and its definitions of ‘development’ and ‘progress’ that fed first into the anti-colonial struggle and then was theorized as part of post-structuralism. To a lesser extent Ahluwalia also sees in these ‘border intellectuals’ some of the problems which postcolonial post-structuralism would need to overcome: Camus’ continuing belief in European cultural superiority despite his Algerian sympathies, Sartre’s lingering fixation on identity politics, and Fanon’s ‘new humanism’. Ahluwalia’s bringing these three thinkers into interaction is instructive, not least in relation to their different takes on humanism and on anti-colonial violence, as is his close look at their reception and differing impact. Although Valentin Mudimbe has dubbed Sartre a ‘Negro philosopher’ (quoted in Ahluwalia 43), and despite Sartre’s famous preface to *Senghor*, Ahluwalia claims that Sartre’s influence on the negritude movement has...
been largely ignored in postcolonial studies. Ahluwalia argues that Sartre’s anti-colonial writing – independently of his work on Fanon – is deserving of greater attention in the English-speaking world: gathered into volume five of his ten-volume *Situations*, this writing was published in French in 1964 but translated into English only in 2001 under the title *Colonialism and Neocolonialism*. Ahluwalia quotes usefully from it.

The discussion of Fanon is even more vitally connected to the book’s overall argument. From his position as director of a large psychiatric hospital in Algiers, Fanon’s observations of psychiatric disorders among indigenous Algerians led not only to his resigning his position after a mere three years in order to join the Front de Libération Nationale (FLN) but also to his writing *The Wretched of the Earth* (*Les Damnés de la Terre*, 1961) and *A Dying Colonialism* (*L’an V de la Révolution Algérienne*, 1959). His earlier book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (*Peau Noir, Masques Blancs*, 1952) issued from his Antillean experiences. Nonetheless, Ahluwalia looks at this in some detail largely in order to provide a foundation for the claim that it was through his later Algerian experiences that Fanon would conceive a ‘new humanism’ (62). In Ahluwalia’s account, Fanon’s identification as ‘other’ to Europe meant that he rejected the Enlightenment humanism in which Europe functioned, if sometimes surreptitiously, as the universal, and his crucial shift was not to reverse the Europe-Algieria hierarchy but instead to promote a non-exclusivist process of identity-formation. Fanon’s ‘new’ humanism – also called ‘transnational’ – transcends the binary or Manichean thinking that tends to be marshalled during nationalist rebellions and usually persists thereafter; it thus facilitates the transformation of national consciousness necessary for what Said implied was true ‘liberation’, as opposed to mere ‘independence’ (Said, cited in Ahluwalia 72). Ahluwalia speaks of Fanon’s new humanism in positive terms for prefiguring the post-humanism associated with post-structuralism (62).

The two subsequent chapters, devoted to Derrida and Cixous, provide equally interesting and sometimes provocative detail about their upbringing, education and philosophical development. The wealth of biographical detail and the commentary on theoretical positions are supported by a generous amount of quotation from Derrida and Cixous themselves as well as from others writing about them, which is generally Ahluwalia’s style throughout this book. Reluctant to give details of his Algerian upbringing for fear of critics’ facile connections, Derrida nonetheless sometimes referred to his feeling of ‘non-belonging’ and his philosophical habitation of a ‘non-site’ (cited in Ahluwalia 77, 84). While at pains not to engage in the simplifying causality that Derrida feared, Ahluwalia makes much of Algeria as ‘the repressed’ in Derrida’s references to his life, arguing that Derrida’s silence about his origins squares with his philosophical rejection of origin as a locus of meaning. Complicated by his Jewishness in an anti-Semitic milieu, Derrida’s Algerian origins issued, Ahluwalia argues, in a double cultural displacement that pervades and even defines his philosophical outlook. This is particularly evident in Derrida’s concept of *différance*, which Ahluwalia sees as a concept intimately related to Derrida’s sense of self. At the same time Ahluwalia is troubled by what he sees as Derrida’s retreat from politics, criticising him for being insufficiently rooted in ‘worldliness’ (89) and for failing to detach from the intellectual domination of the West.

Ahluwalia leaves the fuller discussion of alterity for his chapter on Cixous.
This decision makes sense given that Ahluwalia wished to discuss Cixous’s interest in gender and the gendered body in relation to alterity, but it would have been good to hear discussion of Derrida’s theorizations of hospitality and cosmopolitanism in light of his encounter with the ‘other’, whether French or Algerian, not least since these theorisations are palpably rooted in the ‘world’.

In the chapter on Cixous, Ahluwalia makes interesting connections between her Algerian roots, her Jewishness and her interest in ‘difference and otherness’ (106), while also seeing her part-German parentage and her femininity as complicating factors in the contexts, respectively, of World War II and contemporary male domination. Cixous, who left Algeria as a young woman and made her career entirely in France, adopted what she called a ‘literary nationality’ (quoted in Ahluwalia 114) rather than one of the actual nationalities available to her, and her écriture féminine provided further means to pursue her delight in the unknown. Ahluwalia departs rather more in this section than in the others from the Maghreb as a geo-philosophical source, but he argues interestingly that Cixous’ practice of writing the body cannot be understood without recognising that body as ‘marked by the spectre of Algeria’ (130). It would have been useful in this regard to hear something about Arab conceptions of gender as a possible impetus to Cixous’ interest in departing from the normative logic of gender. It is only in the later discussion of Foucault that gender and sexuality enter as a substantial topic.

The final chapter of the book, apart from the brief Conclusion, deals with Althusser, Bourdieu, Foucault and Lyotard. Of these, only Althusser was born and brought up in Algeria, but the periods that Bourdieu and Lyotard spent there as academics were formative both of their thinking and of poststructuralist theory more generally. Althusser’s rejection of humanism, his concept of interpellation, and his definition of ideological state apparatuses are seen as rooted in his responses to the violent and degrading treatment meted out to Algerians. Bourdieu’s rural upbringing (he was the first in his family to complete high school) added to his sensitivity over questions of power and prestige, and the fieldwork he engaged in among the peasants of Kabylia in eastern Algeria (during his time teaching at University of Algiers) gave basis to his work on acculturation and deculturation. From his Algerian research Bordieu also developed the concept of ‘habitus’ – the complex of social and personal factors that determine choices – through which he rejected the structuralist distinction between the subjective and the objective. Recognising the determining effect of the observer’s position, and the fundamental importance of cultural specificity in the social sciences, Bourdieu vehemently opposed Fanon and Sartre for what he saw as overgeneralisations. He also departed from their utopian vision of revolution, arguing that the peasantry had been too massively pauperised and demoralised by the French for any such restorative effect. (Bordieu’s first entry into Algeria was via military service.)

Lyotard taught philosophy for about nine years in Algeria. His encounter with what he called an ‘entire people, from a great civilization, wronged, humiliated, denied their identity’ (quoted in Ahluwalia 153) led to his initial promotion of a socialist revolution but ultimately to a suspicion about grand narratives, including any politics of redemption. Ahluwalia finds in Lyotard the political engagement he misses in Derrida, even in Lyotard’s ‘differend’, the instance within a conflict that brings both sides to a state of speechlessness, the point where all language, all

rationalisation, all justification, fails.

Foucault is the odd one out in this chapter. Interestingly, Ahluwalia uses his presence in the book to help drive a double wedge into any tendency for his book to produce its own ‘grand narrative’: ‘It is often argued that the events of May 1968 revolutionised a whole generation of French scholars much as the colonial situation and the Algerian War for independence had done for Sartre’s generation. However, in Foucault’s case it was the student revolts of Tunisia that had the effect of politicising his work’ (152). Ahluwalia makes a strong case for Foucault’s academic stint at the University of Tunis functioning to give him the ‘firsthand knowledge of the rebarbative effects of colonialism and its impact on the postcolonial state’ (146) that Algeria gave the others. And Foucault’s political support for the Iranian revolution also serves as an Algerian analogue; discussing it gives Ahluwalia space to assess the post-structuralist turn to postmodernism via Foucault’s increasing political interest in the anti-modern. Foucault felt massive distaste for Western modernity, and lamented its delivery to other parts of the world. Disagreeing with critical assessments of Foucault, Bourdieu, Lyotard and Althusser as insufficiently rooted in the world, Ahluwalia uses this chapter to restore postmodernism to the political.

Ahluwalia has set himself the difficult task of wanting to foreground the Algerian colonial context as crucial to the interest in alterity that he sees at the basis of post-structuralism yet at the same time not to engage in simple arguments of origin or cause and effect. The point of the book is not just to look at a generation of French theorists bound to have been influenced by Algeria, but rather more to find the opportunity to discuss them as intellectuals marked by ambiguous relations with both Algeria and France (their ‘inside/outside positions’, as Ahluwalia puts it) and by a deep ethical commitment deriving from the violent colonial context. All in all, this is a generous book: it is based in an immense amount of reading, which Ahluwalia shares liberally, largely through frequent quotations. Perhaps its major contribution is to lay out the field so unstintingly as to open it up to a large number of questions about the future of postcolonialism and post-structuralism in our politically fraught times. As if using Bourdieu’s ‘habitus’ as a model, Ahluwalia makes clear that although the Maghreb functions as a common context, the particularities of the situations of each of these theorists led to different positions within the general field of post-structuralism. For instance, if Fanon’s ‘new humanism’, as Ahluwalia claims, bears a prefigurative relation to post-structuralism’s post-humanism (which – though Ahluwalia does not say so – has widely varying meanings; see, for instance, the introduction to Cary Wolfe’s What is Posthumanism?), it must also square with Fanon’s view of the transformative function of revolutionary violence: violent revolt shifts what he once called ‘prisoner[s] of history’ (Black Skin, White Masks, 229) from abjection into agency. Violent revolt at the same time functions for Fanon to transform the oppressors’ sense of themselves and to forge the new kind of connection between oppressors and oppressed that, says Ahluwalia, is a crucial an aspect of Fanon’s new humanism. Ahluwalia brings up the topics of humanism and violence later, too, in noting Althusser’s similarity to Fanon (134-135), and thus opens up to further debate the following question: how does one speak in one breath of (a) a postcolonial and post-structuralist ‘post-humanism’ and (b) the possibilities of triumphant transformation that revolution brings, while at the same time evading the existing theoretical frameworks used by humanism? This is just one of the questions
students of post-colonialism who read this book may want to think about.

Finally, in continuing to pursue the usefulness of this publication for students, I wish to note various problems that a more careful editing process should have ironed out. Firstly, quite differently from Ahluwalia’s previous books, the referencing system in this one is often bizarre, habitually following a quotation with the words ‘cited in’ followed by the name of the author responsible for the quotation (the words ‘cited in’ make one think, rather, that the reference is to a book which quotes or cites the quotation). The text also unaccountably uses parentheses in the references where none are required: ‘see (Bourdieu 2004)’ for instance, instead of ‘see Bourdieu 2004’.

Secondly, for a book of this kind, where publication dates are clearly of importance in the overall argument, it is not a good idea to provide the dates of the English translations rather than of the original French publications. For instance, in the context of the discussion of Fanon’s hasty composition and publication of The Wretched of the Earth before his death in 1961 (he was diagnosed with leukaemia in 1960), it is distracting to see the date 1967 after this first reference to the book. And then the body of the text needed editing: to excise unnecessary repetition, to simplify unwieldy sentences, and to correct proofreading errors and poor word choice (the word ‘problematic’ is often misused, and ‘albeit’ is habitually misused). Academic authors, who these days have either too much teaching or too much administration or both, need to be able to depend on conscientious editors (especially if they are to continue publishing at the rate that Ahluwalia does) so that our students – eager users of Routledge publications, no doubt – might be presented with writing of a more consistently high standard than this.

Dorothy Driver
University of Adelaide

Note on Reprint Received

In the review of Pal Ahluwalia’s Out of Africa: Post-structuralism’s Colonial Roots in the May 2011 issue of Transnational Literature, Dorothy Driver included a final paragraph on the careless editing evident in the book. After receiving the review Routledge contacted us to advise that they had identified this error shortly after publication, and they had since corrected the issues, pulped all remaining stock, and reprinted the book. Transnational Literature received a copy of the reprint some months later. Dorothy Driver reports that a habitual error made in the book – the misuse of the term ‘cited in’ – has now been ironed out.

Editor
October 2011