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**MODERNITY, (POST)MODERNISM
AND NEW HORIZONS OF POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES.
THE ROLE AND DIRECTION OF CARIBBEAN WRITING
AND CRITICISM IN THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY**

ABSTRACT: My article will take issue with some of the scholarship on current and prospective configurations of the Caribbean and, in more general terms, postcolonial literary criticism. It will give an account of the turn-of-the century debates about literary value and critical practice and analyze how contemporary fiction by Caribbean female writers responds to the socioeconomic reality that came into being with the rise of globalization and neo-liberalism. I will use David Scott's thought provoking study-*Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* (1999)-to outline the history of the Caribbean literary discourse and to try to rethink the strategic goals of postcolonial criticism.

KEY WORDS: postcolonialism, Caribbean literary criticism, Caribbean female writers

The beginning of a new century is a good time to look back on past constructions of canons, traditions and critical practices in order to anticipate some of their future developments. This type of reckoning did not bypass the Caribbean, and by extension the whole of postcolonial criticism. Consequently, the turn of the century abounded with publications about historical, ideological and critical moments that shaped the canon of Caribbean literature and dominant reading practices in postcolonial studies. Many publications stressed the idea that the current Caribbean and, in more general terms, postcolonial literary criticism is heading for some momentous and long overdue changes.¹ Simon During, for

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¹ These publications include among others Alison Donnell's *Twentieth-Century Caribbean Literature* and a number of articles mentioned in the introductory part of this article.

example, claimed that “postcolonialism, with its emancipatory conceptual overtones, only obscures analysis of globalization” (23). During contended that postcolonialism, which was “first nurtured in literary studies, which was so important a feature of the 1980s and 1990s intellectual landscape seems to be less able to deal at least on its own terms with the increasingly urgent issues surrounding globalization” (23). The most trenchant criticism of postcolonial thought came from Neo-Marxist critics, such as Arif Dirlik, who accused postcolonial criticism of being “no more than ideological reflection of capitalism” (Dirlik qtd. in Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 137). According to Neo-Marxist critics, “there is a complicitous and ideological relation between the conceptual themes and theoretical strategies of postcolonial criticism on the one hand and the contemporary character of capitalism on the other” (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 136-7). These articles seemed not only to be real signs of discontent with the dominant views, but they also betrayed a growing realization of the hegemony of the neo-liberal capitalist state and of globalization. They highlighted the shortcomings of postcolonial/Caribbean literary criticism and called for mapping out new directions in postcolonial studies that would be able to take more fully into account the present socioeconomic reality transformed by the ascendancy of neo-liberal ideology and globalised capitalism.

Of all provocateurs who encourage us to rethink strategic goals of postcolonial criticism, David Scott seems to be the most insightful. David Scott, who comes from Jamaica, is a founder-editor of the leading Caribbean postcolonial journal, *Small Axe*, and a teacher of anthropology at Columbia. Scott’s 1999 book-*Refashioning Futures: Criticism after Postcoloniality* is a thought-provoking study that grapples with some of the issues raised earlier. It is interested in “how . . . and with what conceptual resources do we begin to extract a new horizon of possibilities, from within the moral and epistemic contours of our postcolonial present” (3). He evolves a concept of strategic criticism of “reading the present with a view to determining whether (and how) to continue with it in the future . . . determining at any conjecture what conceptual moves among the many available options will have the most purchase, the best yield” (7). So far established paradigms, Scott terms them problem-spaces,² such as Marxism, cultural nationalism, post-essentialism etc. are, in his opinion, no longer apposite to examine the new postcolonial reality or the new international world order

² Scott’s problem-space can be understood as a political or theoretical orthodoxy that scans and analyses literature/political discourse for specific conceptual, political and theoretical positions.

changed by the globalization of capitalism, the failure of socialism and the concomitant triumphant rise of neo-liberalism. Scott thinks that Postcolonial criticism has become bogged down in theoretical practices "that have lost direction and force" (140) and that it is on the wrong path. According to Scott, we are presently in a transitional moment (which he calls "after-postcoloniality"), on the threshold of a new discursive space that demands from us the abandonment of all exhaustively well-rehearsed epistemological claims for the sake of a new set of questions that will contribute to the emergence of a new problem-space. In other words, Scott discusses the inadequacy of the cognitive apparatuses of contemporary postcolonial criticism that have for decades now defined the conceptual terrain of postcolonial critics, the problem-space within whose confines those critics have so far worked and whose confines they ought presently to break.

Scott, who ultimately rejects Neo-Marxism,³ partially agrees with such critics as Dirlik who maintain that the main deficiency of postcolonialism is its reluctance "to address itself to the impasses [that] mark our political modernity" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 133). The most important of these impasses is the development of a capitalist world economy and the end of what Scott calls the Bandung Era⁴-a period in which postcolonial criticism was animated by anti-capitalist, anti-liberal and anti-imperialist sentiment, and most of postcolonial critics believed in some version of socialism as a goal in the political future. Since all great experiments with socialism have failed and neo-colonial regimes and corrupted governments produced only a growing disappointment, postcolonial critics have found themselves in a kind of ideological void. In the words of David Scott, "we inhabit [a] reconfigured cognitive political space"- "a paradoxical historical moment in which we appear, in Zygmunt Bauman's very vivid phrase, 'to be living without an alternative'" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 134). Therefore, as Scott sees it, what this present historical moment demands from us is to have a closer look at the postcolonial political modernity and how it has adapted to the inroads of liberalism, capitalism and globalization.

The aim of this essay is to look closely at what seems to be the eclipse of an old orthodoxy that paves the way for the emergence of a new discursive space. It will briefly look at the historiography of Caribbean literature and criticism in an effort to define major critical approaches of

³ In his opinion Neo-Marxism is too totalizing and categorical because it is based on the premise that the political is exclusively concerned with the advance of global capitalism rather than cultural matters.

⁴ From the Bandung Conference in 1955 to the establishment of Group 77 in 1975.

the twentieth century and to see how postcolonial Caribbean literature and criticism have responded to the global developments that led to “the end of history,” to use another well-known phrase.⁵ In other words, I will use the analysis of the Caribbean literary tradition to highlight collisions between politics and cultural/literary theory in times of globalization and neo-liberalism. While David Scott’s study is primarily concerned with the political discourse of postcolonialism, my article will focus on the literary discourse of Caribbean criticism. It will attempt to give an overview of key historical trajectories of the of Caribbean literature through the lenses of David Scott’s strategic criticism and problem-space framework to show how major theoretical moves of postcolonial political criticism have shaped the West Indian thematic and aesthetic. My discussion will end with the analysis of the critical reception of the work of contemporary Afro-Caribbean women writers whose novels have often been criticized for “the failure to make the political appear,” to quote David Scott out of context. I am going to try to undermine the veracity of this claim. In spite of the fact that these women writers seem to be more concerned with the issues of identity, gender, sexuality, and less with economics and collective struggles, I will hold that their novels not only express the sociopolitical realities of the post independent West Indies, but that they also address ethical and political questions raised by globalization, especially those connected with diaspora and migrancy.

Postcolonialism was institutionalized in the late 1970s and 1980s at the end of the Bandung Era. By that time it was a constituted field of clearly defined argument-its problem-space had been outlined by anti-colonial movements of the 1940s and 50s. The masculine anti-colonial nationalism in the Caribbean answered the demand for political decolonization, the overthrow of colonial power, political sovereignty and freedom. It focused on the restoration of an authentic relationship between representation and reality and of the self-representation of the colonized. It was bent on establishing national cultural identities posed in opposition to the colonizer’s identity and on founding national traditions in literature on the basis of common cultural roots.

Anti-essentialist counter move, which is currently *au courant* in postcolonial circles, was a part and parcel of the same problem space. As Bongie eloquently argues in “Exiles on Main Stream: Valuing the

⁵ This phrase was used by Francis Fukuyama who claimed that “the exhaustion of all possible alternatives to Western liberalism” means that we have arrived at “the end of history”—“the universalization of western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (“The End of History?” 4).

Popularity of Postcolonial Literature" (2003), the turn to "polyphonic," "mosaic," "nomadic," "diasporic," and "relational" politics was a predictable reaction against cultural nationalism (29). It was a kind of ideological tug of war, totally predictable because, as David Scott argues, "once the game is known [game in the sense of theoretical apparatus] it is possible to anticipate in advance the moves that are to be made in an argument" (8). According to David Scott anti-essentialists tried to establish epistemological superiority over the older generation of essentialist critics with the effect that "hitherto existing strategies of criticism [were] found out, admonished and dismissed for their epistemological naïveté" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 4). In other words, anti-colonialists' key assumptions about the value of such categories as culture, class, subjectivity, history and knowledge were exposed as erratic and discredited for their Eurocentric epistemic genealogy. For post-essentialist critics it is "an epistemological law that cultures are not pure or homogenous, that subjectivity is never outside the discursive practices that constitute it, that identities are never fixed or immutable; that the boundaries of communities are not given but constructed" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 9). But still, as David Scott is quick to point out, what post-essentialists considered culture, identity, nation, class, or community was largely defined in terms and theories borrowed from the grand narrative of the Enlightenment. Therefore anti-essentialism is for Scott nothing more than an "updated counter-design procedure, a counter-nationalism, a counter-claim"(4) that fails to problematize the old paradigm. Anti-essentialists are "historicists" who "historicize the answers not the questions" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 9).

The critic who, according to Scott, was more successful in creating the problem space was Edward Said. With the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism* (1978), anticoloniality was deposed by postcoloniality (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 3) whose focus was the relationship between the colonial power and the colonial knowledge. Colonialism was no longer seen as a structure of material exploitation, but "a structure of organized authoritative knowledge (a formation, an archive) that operated discursively to produce effects of truth about the colonized" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 12). The objective of postcolonial criticism, as understood by Said, was decolonization of the conceptual apparatuses through which the political objectives [of colonialists, cultural nationalists and anti-nationalists] were thought out" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 12). It aimed at "decolonization of the West theory about the Non-West" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 12). It is a well known fact that poststructuralism (and its project of the deconstruction of representation) was the discursive context which, in the words of Scott, made possible

“a sustained interrogation of the internal structures of the cultural reason of colonialist knowledges” (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 14). It made it possible to step out of anti-colonialism and “problematize colonialism as a discursive formation enduring into the present” (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 14). Scott acknowledges the importance of the towering intellect of Edward Said in whose wake, as he puts it, all postcolonial critics now write, but at the same time he expresses a doubt whether this strategy can achieve anything more.

In the Caribbean the confrontation between cultural nationalist and anti-essentialist reached crescendo during the first international conference on Caribbean literature hosted in 1971 by the University of the West Indies, when Brathwaite, who argued for re-alignment of cultural standards, clashed with V. S. Naipaul, who disapproved of “folking up” the criticism (Kenneth Ramchand’s words). The friction between the two eminent writers and their followers made it clear that Caribbean literary practice and criticism was split into two opposing and apparently incommensurable agendas: the Great Tradition inherited from colonial institutions and, what Brathwaite called, the Little Tradition—the native agenda that “grew from folk traditions, Caribbean languages and politics of social commitment” (Donnell 31). The Great Tradition was based on modernist Leavisite thought—it treated literature as a tool for cultural and moral advancement. The Little Tradition called for “voicing of the folk consciousness, vernacular traditions, social conscience, and the possibilities of horizontal relations between poet or writer, subject and audience. . .” (Donnell 30). The Great Tradition was elitist—it cherished the writer and the critic, and treated the text as a fetish. The Little Tradition was more egalitarian in its insistence on a “horizontal” rather than “vertical” i.e. hierarchical relationship between the author and his or her audience. The Great Tradition valued literary criticism, whereas the Little Tradition valued cultural criticism. According to many critics such as Simon Gikandi or Mary Lou Emery, these two seemingly incongruous traditions—literary and aesthetic, cultural and political—have shaped the Caribbean discourse in terms of content, style and form.

Thus the present critical moment is characterized by two parallel though conceptually different trends: essentialism and anti-essentialism, combined with the conceptual move towards the avant-garde. It is at the intersection of these two critical strains that I would place the writing of contemporary Caribbean women, whose work synthesizes the concerns of The Great and the Little Tradition, trying to reconcile modernist relish for the avant-garde with political agenda, promoting stylistic difficulty and radical social change.

Anglophone literature by Caribbean women is often hailed for its linguistic and narrative resourcefulness and there are many contemporary critics who see such rhetorical strategies as formal experimentation, fragmentation or preoccupation with the question of identity, discourse and representation as postmodern characteristics. Emilia Ippolito, for example, notices in her study *Caribbean Women Writers: Identity and Gender* that in contemporary female fiction "there has been a trend toward a rejection of the linear, realistic narrative" (7). Antonia MacDonlad-Smythe gives the example of two Afro-Caribbean writers Michelle Cliff and Jamaica Kincaid as paragons of formal innovation: "the eclectic and fragmented form favored by Cliff and Kincaid for encoding the female experiences is a rejection of linear polemic of some earlier male authored West Indian Writers" (5). Gina Wisker claims that whereas "modernism was enabling for Black men," women in the later part of the twentieth century "turned to the narrative structure of postmodernism-to fragmentation, intertextuality, parody and doubling, locating gender differences as a site for representing and reconstructing new identities." (Wisker 89) In my opinion, putting texts by Caribbean women in the postcolonial frame runs the high risk of stripping them of their political power by means of treating them merely as discursive allegories. In the words of Helen Scott, "contemporary scholarship on postcolonial women's literature is often concerned with questions of 'identity' according to which class, race, sexuality, nationality and ethnicity are primarily understood discursively" (6). This trend towards generic or allegorical readings of the novels of Caribbean female writers has often diverted the reader's attention from the political, historical and social backgrounds from which these novels emerged. This relativizing outlook of postmodernism, as Helen Scott contends, is a very dangerous tendency because the:

linguistic turn and descent into discourse in postcolonial studies risk obscuring the material coordinates of imperialism and depoliticizing a field of study that from its inception engaged with inherently political questions of empire, race, colonialism and their relationship to cultural production (10).

Attributing the enhanced interest in the literary and textual in contemporary female texts to postmodernist precedent allows some critics to formulate interpretations that treat history, reality and the self in these female-authored texts as purely discursive creations. These critics apply postmodern notions of identity to the discussion of Caribbean fiction, picturing it as something cultural and fluid, as it changes under the influence of different and competing discursive claims. As David Scott rightly warns, critical preference for such a model of identity:

depends unproblematically on a notion of the self/identity that is always available for unmaking and remaking . . . , one that thrives on such making and remaking. It depends upon a self/identity that can choose to step back from its moral commitments, and through its autonomy-grounding faculty of critical reason suspend its particular entanglements and enter into the public space of political reason. (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 154)

Similarly, the Caribbean region, in the oeuvre of these writers, is often seen merely as a trope or a symbolic concept that helps to reconfigure the meaning of diaspora. Covi, who thinks that the Caribbean has become “an icon for a metaphysical status of in-betweens, a sort of crossroad where all dichotomies find their point of encounter and pre-given solution” (98) objects to reducing the Caribbean to “a facile postmodernist gesture” (130). Even Jamaica Kincaid, reputedly the most “postmodern” of all contemporary Afro-Caribbean female writers,⁶ is fiercely committed to abolishing “the collective American fantasy revolving around the Caribbean” (Als). Covi sees in Kincaid’s later novels antithesis to “seductively reductionist descriptions of the Caribbean as unchartable territory” (99). In Covi’s opinion, though Kincaid’s language and rhetoric play an important role “in the production of social agency and subjectivity,” ultimately they are nothing more than vehicles for “accountability, responsibility, sustainability which have been increasingly developed to counter dominating global forces of power” (99). As Helen Scott recapitulates:

Many critics then discern in contemporary women’s texts a shift from the anti-imperialist, nationalist, and/or class-based political agenda of the earlier (predominantly male) texts and a concomitant rejection of realist (sometimes ‘modernist’) literary forms in favor of experimental (sometimes ‘postmodernist’) narrative strategies. (5-6)

I think that Helen Scott is right to warn readers and critics against dangers of such a neat compartmentalization. First of all “gendered generic generalizations are hard to sustain” (6) in the light of the immense range of female writing and because similar formal innovations can be found in many male writers of older and younger generations. Secondly, “the distinction between modern and postmodern is less definite than often asserted” (Scott, *Caribbean Women Writers* 6). In her article-“Dem tief, dem a damn tief’: Jamaica Kincaid’s Literature of Protest,” Helen Scott maintains that “many of literary features habitually associated with postmodernism are in fact identifiable in the high British modernism of the early mid twentieth century” (Scott, *Caribbean Women*

⁶ Kincaid is often read figuratively, through the maternal-colonial matrix.

Writers 23). This opinion was born out by Kincaid herself who repeatedly rejected all postcolonial labels attached to her fiction. She admitted in the often quoted interview with Cudjoe that she owes much of her inventiveness to the tradition of European literary modernism and that she rather places her writing in the context of Caribbean modernism, usually associated with male exiled writers (such as V. S. Naipaul, C.L.R. James, George Lamming or Derek Walcott,) who reworked basic strategies of European modernism and refused to subjugate their art to the overtly ideological indigenous agenda of cultural nationalists.

The Caribbean (and in general postcolonial) alliance with modernist aesthetics has been a very disputed issue since the outset of the debates between essentialists and anti-essentialists, which I discussed earlier. For example, Chris Bongie insists on treating modernism as a synonym to “morally reprehensible” Eurocentrism and therefore an evil that should be overcome. Bongie thinks that the very selective treatment that Caribbean writers receive from postcolonial critics is proof of their favoritism of counter-discursive novels written in modernist fashion. Caribbean critics tend to pay more attention to writers like Condé, while excluding “popular” writers such as Tony Delsham from their field of vision. He attributes this unanimous critical neglect to the continued reverence for avant-garde novels, calling postcolonial critics “later-day Adornos.” Bongie identifies the postcolonial lingering preference for “writerly novels”⁷ as a legacy of modernism and censures the postcolonial studies as “the last redoubt of modernism.” Following Young’s argument, Bongie posits a theory that postcolonial emphasis on text (preferably highbrow and notorious for difficulty) that is best read in a “modernist way” reflects the anxiety of postcolonial critics to find a common denominator for “such a geographically free-floating concept as the ‘postcolonial’—even more open than its predecessor, Commonwealth studies” (Bongie 16).

I disagree with Bongie who seems to underestimate the political efficacy of modernism. Bongie is quite positive that the modernist “underpinning of postcolonial studies” accounts for its failure to politicize its discourse. I will be pursuing a counterargument that the dispute over the depth of the collusion of modernism and imperialism only obscures the fact that Caribbean writers and critics have invested a lot in modernism, inflecting modernist tradition with the details of Caribbean life i.e. “naturalizing” it or “creolising” it in an effort to adapt

⁷ Roland Barthes’s term meaning avant-garde.

it to their political agenda.⁸ Thus in aligning himself with tribes of cultural nationalists, who would like to obliterate what they consider residual colonial presence in Caribbean letters, Bongie presents a reactionary stand. Bongie's preoccupation with the conjunction of modernism and imperialism compels him to perpetuate anti-colonialists' obsolete views that "stripping away of colonial Eurocentrism, including the principles of modernism, to revive indigenous cultural expressions," (Pollard 198) is a must. In this way Bongie redeploys long established negative clichés of cultural nationalists of the 1940s and 50s.

Unlike Bongie, I believe that contemporary Anglophone Caribbean literature is not so much a bastion of modernism, as it is a site of an on-going debate about the values of European modernity-its promises and failures. It is counter-discursive, as Bongie maintains, but in a sense different from the one that he uses. Looking at the contemporary fiction through the prism of Edward Said's strategic criticism-as a counter-discourse to modernity, rather than a reversal of the core-periphery model, is, to my mind, more rewarding. It allows for a better interpretation of the contemporary female prose and offers a fuller understanding of what Scott describes as "a will-to-truth about the colonized" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 12). In other words, I propose to read this literature as an epistemic interrogation of what Scott terms "postcoloniality" through the aesthetics of modernism.

I want to stake out an argument for critics who argue that modernism has a central place within in the nexus of Caribbean discursive representation. One of them is Simon Gikandi whose study *Writing in Limbo: Modernism and Caribbean Literature* (1992) provides an insightful explanation of the Caribbean writers' alliance to modernism and Caribbean critics' objections to it. Gikandi posits a theory that Caribbean critics used to resist modernism because "the questions [modernism and modernity] raised in relation to Caribbean literature and its symbiotic relationship to colonialism, were possibly too paradoxical to fit neatly into a nationalist discourse that was trying to effect a clean break with

⁸ Gikandi sees Caribbean modernism as related to the process of creolisation-this home-made variety of modernism "develops a narrative strategy and counter-discourse away from outmoded and conventional modes of representation associated with colonial domination and colonizing cultural structures" (5). Creolisation, in other words, is a unique kind of Caribbean modernism that manages to reconcile: the values of European literacy with the long repressed traditions of African orality (16). It defies the colonial historiography by showing the colonial subject and colonial culture as capable of transmuting and transforming into freedom. Thus the naturalization of modernism consists in combining European elitist tradition with African Caribbean folkloric and vernacular tradition.

its antecedents" (253). Now they resist because, like Bongie, they think that modernism converges with imperialism and, due to its a-historic formalism and aestheticism, provides an escape from the prison house of colonial history. Whatever their reservations are, Caribbean discourse cannot escape, claims Gikandi, from the history and culture of European modernity and modernism which both "haunts and sustains" Caribbean literature. It is a fact accepted by most Caribbean authors, who, like Walcott, believe that "revolutionary literature is a filial impulse, and . . . maturity is assimilation of the features of every ancestor" (36-7), and who set out to decolonize modernist tradition by mastering it. Those writers, as Pollard contends, are "less anxious to sweep the burden of modernism and more anxious to exploit its resources for new purposes" (211).

Gikandi uses interchangeably the two interrelated terms of modernity and modernism—to describe the vexed relationship of Caribbean critics to the Great Tradition, and claims that "much hostility towards modernist Caribbean texts arises from the tendency to limit definitions of modernism to the twentieth century and to the high modernist aesthetic articulated by Anglo-American writers such as Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, and James Joyce" (5). According to Gikandi, modernism and modernity exist in "a chiasmic relationship" (254)—these terms relate to the high bourgeois theory which is often seen "as a dangerous fallacy that represses the historicity of art and its function as a form of social struggle" (2), as well as to the New Age—the historical period that ensued in the wake of Columbus's discovery:

for Columbus and the European conquerors, the 'discovery' of the Caribbean initiated modernity; but . . . the implication of this modernity for the natives of the islands and African slaves was nothing less than the loss of cultures, physical annihilation and historical displacement. Thus modernity and its art forms must of necessity have different meanings for Europe and the African diaspora. For the former it generates or justifies the rationalist and absolutist claims that anchor the foundational narrative of modern Western culture. Indeed, as contemporary advocates of modernity as a project of Enlightenment have reminded us, by the eighteenth century the period of discovery had become conceptualized in European thought and historiography as the New Age. In this sense the Caribbean is fully implicated in the historical events that initiate Western modernist discourse, it cannot escape from the ideologies of modernity and its consequences; it can confront the possibilities and limitations of modernism. (253)

For Gikandi then, the resistance to literary modernism is a corollary of the resistance to historic modernity and while it seems that many Caribbean writers throughout the twentieth century embarked on the project of creating a "counter modernity"⁹ by subverting the modernist

⁹ Homi Bhabha's expression.

dictum-its political and ideological assumptions-some critics (especially those engaged in the stubborn defense of the Little Tradition) do seem to lag behind, pulled backwards by their gnarled skepticism of everything European. While these critics hold back, Caribbean writers engage in the Western modernist discourse and dismantle modern regimes of representation. As Gikandi asserts, "what Caribbean writers have done then is to weaken the foundation of the Western narrative, expose what Laclau calls 'the metaphysical or rationalist pretensions' of Western modernity and its absolutist theory of history" (253). In doing that (so I argue) the artists of Caribbean modernism anticipated Edward Said's agenda and set the stage for his incisive theories.

According to Gikandi, the task of abolishing metaphysical assumptions regarding history, subject, knowledge and community was started by modernist writers of the 1950s and 60s¹⁰ and is continued by the second generation of Caribbean mostly female writers, such as Kincaid, Cliff or Brodber. These writers are also vocal about the damage wreaked in the Caribbean by the advent of modernity. Their writing either revises the philosophical foundations of the political discourse of modernity (Kincaid) or provides a devastating critique of the failures of political modernity (Danticat) that has enshrined liberalism as the only political goal in the future. Thus Afro-Caribbean women writers create another kind of counter-discourse-a counter-discourse to modernity. What Caribbean female writers write back to is not only the canon of nineteenth century Victorian literature, but first and foremost the precepts of the Enlightenment project which still configure the political and cultural discourses on their islands. These women neither reject modernity (as cultural nationalists) nor embrace it (as liberal nationalists)-they constitute what Gilroy would call "a counter culture to modernity." Their writing invites readers to engage more seriously in "a critical interrogation of the practices, modalities and projects through which modernity inserted itself into and altered the lives of the colonized" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 17).

What then should we look for in the texts of Caribbean women and what strategy of reading should we adopt? Chris Bongie encourages us to study popular cultural forms as the primary sites of cultural invention and resistance, and as a way of offsetting the elitist practice of modernism

¹⁰ These writers include Harris, James, Lamming and Selvon, who productively adapted modernist strategies and ideas, and yoked "the language of modernism" to reclaim "colonial modernism" as "a narrative of liberation" (256 qtd. in "Traveling with Joyce" 210).

and its hierarchical assumptions about the aesthetic value. He thinks that critics should give up literary criticism altogether because, as he argues, due to its literary (often modernist) genealogy, it is so ill-prepared to face the challenges of the problematic political modernity. Instead, Bongie proposes that critics should turn to cultural studies, which seem to be better prepared to face the challenge of the present times. I think that what Bongie calls for has already happened—in the words of Simon During, “transnational cultural studies is gradually ‘eroding’ postcolonial studies” and the influence of cultural studies on postcolonial literary criticism can already be clearly discerned. According to Huggan, also cited by Bongie, postcolonial theory has already followed the suit of cultural studies: “some of the most recent work in the [postcolonial] field gives the impression of having bypassed literature altogether offering a heady blend of philosophy, sociology, history and political science in which literary texts, when referred to at all, are read symptomatically within the context of larger social and cultural trends” (239). Bongie clearly thinks that postcolonial criticism has a lot to learn from cultural criticism—first and foremost that the idea of literary value is nothing more than a cultural construct. Therefore postcolonial/Caribbean literary criticism should give more heed to the reception theories and study how postcolonial texts are received by the reading public in the Caribbean, in the transnational literary marketplace and in academia. Though I acknowledge the importance of cultural studies, these changes seem to me to be rather cursory and not likely to problematize the present problem space.

My argument counters that of cultural critics for whom the popular is the main site of resistance. I strongly believe that postcolonial literature, such as the literature of contemporary West Indian women, has a very important role to play in the struggle with the global reach of economic imperialism and its attendant social ideology. As David Scott argues, opposition to globalization will not be possible without the concerted effort of all Third World countries, and it is my contention that the literature of Afro-Caribbean women, global in outlook and international in scope, prepares the ground for such an organized resistance. Many of these cross-over women writers live in diaspora and hence they are a part of global connections. Their fiction creates alliances across diverse communities and, through the themes of dislocation, migration and assimilation, brings into focus the unjust mechanisms of the global workplace, and illustrates the detrimental effects of the intensified globalization of culture. Numerous novels by contemporary West Indian women dwell on the social and political evils brought about by neo-liberal/capitalist policies: the conditions of austerity in towns

and villages, the incursion of First World powers and international institutions into their home islands. Occasionally they document mass struggles against oppressive and corrupt post independence bourgeois regimes that have been unable to fend off new forms of foreign domination that have replaced colonialism. In this sense, I would argue, the work of these female writers, though sometimes full of formal sophistication, retains an organic unity with the complexity of the postcolonial world and does make the political appear. I think that if anybody should be castigated for failing to make the political appear, it is the critics who tenaciously and single-mindedly insist on reading mainstream Caribbean fiction discursively rather than politically and contextually.

David Scott encourages contemporary critics not to relinquish their interest in the political. As literary critics, we should also adopt a new approach to modernity/modernism and our strategic criticism should be geared towards "thinking fundamentally against the normalization of epistemological and institutional forms of our political modernity" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 20). Scott thinks that we should preoccupy ourselves with the nature of modern power, which, contrary to what neo-liberals or post-Marxists think, is not a "benevolent and liberating form of power that carries with it the new possibility of freedom and agency" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 152). For Scott such a claim is nothing more than a repetition of the old Enlightenment fallacy. Modern power admittedly differs from the pre-modern power-centralized, embodied and malevolent—"concerned with subduing the body, with taking hold of it and directly extracting from it a useful surplus" (Scott, *Refashioning Futures* 152), but the difference is not so big. Modern power does not govern the body, but manipulates the subject through the discourse of identity formation: "modern power is concerned above all . . . with identifying and restructuring the conditions of subject formation and action so as to oblige these into a desired direction." In the words of Michel Foucault, whom Scott quotes, modern power "[structures] the possible field of action of others" (152). Thus the abolition of slavery and the creation of the secular modern state is not proof of the progressive emergence of freedom. There is still a lot to be done to expose the manipulative value systems by means of which the postcolonial peoples are "urged in an *improving* direction" (153) by neo-liberal governments reorganizing the emergent global political space. I think that the writing of contemporary Caribbean women engaged in re-imagining the status quo produced by the Enlightenment project provides a fertile ground for such an investigation. For these women authors race, class and gender are interrelated axes of power that manipulate the ex-colonial subject

through the discourse of identity formation. Therefore even though the work of these writers does not seem to be so overtly political as the literature of the national liberation period, it is my belief that it is not entirely true that their fiction is “radical more for its formal innovation” (Scott, *Caribbean Women Writers* 5) than its subject matter. In my opinion, their highly original aesthetics enhances rather than impairs their politically oriented art, while their approach to the politics of power and their rendition of the political in fiction validates David Scott’s observation that the political is not exclusively limited to discourses and practices of the state.

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