

## REDEPLOYING PARKER, POST-COLONIALLY

### Review article

Parker, I (2002) **Critical discursive psychology**. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. ISBN 0-333-97381. 270 pages.

Parker, I (2005) **Qualitative psychology: Introducing radical research**. Maidenhead: Open University Press. ISBN: 0-335- 213499. 185 pages.

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### Abstract.

*In this paper we review two of Ian Parker's recent books: **Critical discursive psychology** and **Qualitative psychology: Introducing radical research**. Although the books address different audiences (academics versus students) and talk to different problematics (theory versus research), taken together they represent useful resources for those wishing to take a critical stance with regards to the standard fare of psychology, to use critical theory in understanding social and psychological phenomena, and to engage in progressive research. As such, both theory and research methods appear as "tools", and we suggest reading Parker sideways, shifting his intellectual trajectory into directions that illuminate colonial and post-colonial issues through empirical/textual application to real South African contexts. By way of illustration, we offer a post-colonial reading of Parker's work on post-modernism. Concluding comments on tactics for a "post-colonial analysis of discourses" are offered.*

## READING PARKER SIDEWAYS.

Ian Parker is a prominent figure in South African critical psychology, having co-edited a book on discourse analysis in South Africa (Levett, Kottler, Burman & Parker, 1997), acted as consulting editor for the South African book, **Critical Psychology** (Hook, Mkhize, Kiguwa & Collins, 2004), collaborated with scholars from South Africa (e.g. Hook & Parker, 2002), and visited several times. His “Foucauldian” method of analysis of discourses (Parker, 1990a, 1990b, 1992) has been influential in many critical research projects conducted in South Africa (as in our own work). As a tribute to his influence, Parker’s discourse analytical guidelines have become the object of resistance in other critical South African projects, for mostly methodological or epistemological reasons (e.g. Butchart, 1997; Hook, 2001, 2005a; Painter & Theron, 2001; Wilbraham, 2004).

Parker’s attractiveness and usefulness to South African critical psychology might be understood through his prolific writings which have constituted a (somewhat post-modern) pastiche of intellectual positionings. These positions stake out a moral high ground around “social critique”, and present his ideas as imminently suitable for any and every critical task with a (worthy) socio-political agenda. These positions encompass a complicatedly disjunctive theoretical weave of, *inter alia*: Neo/Marxist imperatives for critique and transformation of power abuses inherent in capitalist societal structures, discursive practices and ideological textual misrepresentations; Foucauldian manoeuvres around discursive constitution of subjectivities and truth/s within the swirling individualisms of neo-liberal risk-logics and the psy-complex; Lacanian psychoanalytic schisms of the so-called “traditional unitary psyche”, now elaborately folded from the outside-in; and Derridean tactics for disassembly of contradictory realities inside and outside demarcated texts (Wilbraham, 2004). These interpellations work to hail subjects from miscellaneous communities of praxis. Elements of these theoretical positions are instrumentally harnessed into “progressive” (mostly Marxist) endeavour to usurp ideology/power in service of ruling class interests (Hepburn, 2003). This endeavour achieves direct resonances with South African struggles against (colonial and) apartheid-histories at societal, institutional, inter/subjective and textual levels.

Parker has added two further books to the armoury. **Critical discursive psychology** (hereafter **CDP**) collects more than a decade’s intellectual work into a single volume, and is accompanied by warring responses from a range of discourse-opponents, with trademark Parkerian riposte-rhetoric. While the only new material is the opening and closing chapters, readers now have easy-access to some of the most pertinent, theoretically inspiring, and discursively engaged of Parker’s contributions. The second book, **Qualitative psychology: Introducing radical research** (hereafter **QP**) introduces students to theoretical and methodological issues in ethnography, interviewing, narrative research, discourse analysis, psychoanalysis and action research. These chapters are supplemented with ones on ethics, reflexivity, validation criteria in qualitative research and reporting. As the “radicalism” of the title implies it is intended as a text that promotes critical reflection on the discipline of psychology, and critical research that promotes social change.

Reviewing two books with such different purposes and styles in one paper may, at first glance, seem to be a foolhardy task. However, there are clear linkages between the theoretical aspects of any academic's writings and their practical hands-on advice to students with respect to research. In this review we argue that, taken together, these books represent useful resources for South African researchers and academics interested in a critical psychology that questions received wisdom in psychology, that leverages critical theory to understand social phenomena and power relations, and that deploys qualitative research with progressive intentions.

However, we also argue that Parker's project is a circumscribed one. His partial mentions and elisions around colonialism and post-colonialism, and his lack of sustained engagement with postcolonial theorists, mean that considerable analytical labour is required to ground Parker's work in our local problematics. This is exacerbated by his prodigious theoretical eclecticism that is ungrounded in a sustained analysis (his own) of a large corpus of messy, empirical, contextualized material. His clever analytics of texts (and other researchers' research) constantly shift to "illustrate" aspects of his eclecticism and to demonstrate his criticality. This means that – following Hepburn's (1999) spirited defence of the letter of Derrida's Deconstruction - the nuances and twists of carefully positioned and operationalized argument are lost to some blunt-edged, and largely predictable, "ideology critique". No sustained contexts appear in which the contradictions and slips between theoretical positions (e.g. Marx versus Foucault), and between isolated singular texts (e.g. toothpaste tube's instructions, a Margaret Thatcher joke), might be critically examined.

In the following sections, we provide a brief overview of each of the books by way of orientating the reader. We mark junctures where Parker's insights may be infused with post-colonial questions of South African interest. This focus (on post-coloniality) is then pursued through close attention to Parker's critique of post-modernism. We conclude with a selective review of contributions from post-colonial discursive work, and argue for inclusion of such stylistics into Parker's analysis of discourses in critical psychology.

### **RADICAL RESEARCH.**

In **QP** Parker grounds six method chapters (ethnography, interviewing, narrative, discourse, psychoanalysis, action research) within the complexities of ethics, reflexivity, quality criteria for qualitative research and reporting. Chapters are structured around key ideas within the particular approach, methodological stages, pitfalls in applying the various approaches, theoretical resource links and worked examples. Issues of power, empowerment, transformation and questions concerning the meaning of "radical" research are interwoven into the discussions throughout the book. In a book on qualitative research, Parker (2005:10) is, thankfully, not anti-quantitative research, stating that "radical research can be quantitative". In the South African context this recognition is important, as much research activism has used evidence-based quantitative research to drive democratization of health policy and service provision.

In general, the book is well crafted and thought provoking for students and academics wanting to embark on “radical” research. Parker’s commitment to a progressive politics of action is clear and he makes some valuable contributions in this regard. His questioning of standard research procedures is refreshing. For example, contrary to the requirement of anonymity for research participants, he suggests that they may prefer to be named and be afforded the opportunity to “speak for themselves”.

There are moments, however, where Parker undoes the richness of his own discussions. This is achieved through his “Beware” textboxes and his stretched metaphor textboxes. In the former, Parker critiques community psychology, grounded theory, interpretive phenomenological analysis, conversation analysis, and the free association narrative interview approach. In each he lays out a few bald points of critique that fail to take any of the complexities of the domains or their attempts to formulate various/varied critical aims or accounts into account, resulting in a form of “straw-personing”. If we compare, for example, his textbox on “Beware community psychology” with the debates that appear in the South African text, **Community psychology: Theory, method and practice** (Seedat, 2001), which includes argument for the positioning of one of Parker’s preferred radical theories, Marxism, in community psychology (Hamber, Masilela & Terre Blanche, 2001), we have to see Parker’s argumentation as simplistic and problematic.

In his stretched metaphor textboxes, Parker compares bad ethnography to an operation, interviewing to a journey, narrative research to a performance, discourse analysis to a flight, and psychoanalytic research to cooking. Some of these textboxes are incisive (e.g. the one on bad ethnography), but Parker’s insistence on having one for each method chapter - except for the action research chapter, but perhaps he had run out of metaphors by then - meant that the formula became strained and contrived.

### **CRITICAL DISCURSIVE PSYCHOLOGY.**

**CDP** is divided into three parts. Part 1 has the aim of “sharpening critical reflection on theoretical resources” (2002:19), with the theoretical resources in question being post-modernism, relativism and Wittgenstein. Parker admits that there is some critical potential in each of these, but mostly he draws out their conservative elements (*for* and *against*, in his words). Parker takes a dialectical approach in his assessment of these theoretical positions. He identifies tensions in the approach, highlighting the opposing tendencies that emerge in and against it. Critical responses by several authors to Parker’s initial papers on post-modernism, relativism and Wittgenstein are included, together with Parker’s reply to each. Parker (2002:19) believes that through such a dialectical analysis “the positions they [the authors responding to his interventions] take are revealed to be untenable even *on their own terms*”.

In Part 2, Parker (2002:121) turns to a “more positive constructive mode of argument ... [exploring] what can be progressive about theoretical frameworks when they are put into practice as a critical form of discourse analysis”. The first chapter is the uncut version of a chapter that appeared in Fox and Prilleltensky (1997). In it Parker outlines why his “Foucauldian” analysis of discourses is the “*most radical*”, and fabricates the

“axes of difference” in styles of discourse analysis that have become territorialized as “schools” (viz. micro/macro, inside/outside, quantitative/qualitative, relativism/realism, common sense/theory). The following chapter is a reprint of Parker’s (1990a) initial outline of his method of identifying discourses, followed by less than enamoured responses from proponents of discursive psychology and social identity theory, and Parker’s defensive riposte. These **Philosophical Psychology** debates have become classics in the discursive/critical disciplines of social psychology. The initial paper went on to form the backbone of Parker’s **Discourse dynamics** (1992), a text that is commonly cited in methodology sections of how-to-do “Foucauldian” analysis of discourses studies in psychology (see Wilbraham’s (2004) argument that it is not entirely accurate to dub Parker’s ten criteria for “identifying discourses” as (simply) “Foucauldian” as many recipe-following studies do).

Part 3 is entitled “Critical discursive research, subjectivity and practice”, and “addresses the role of reflexivity and subjectivity in relation to the practice of discursive research” (2005:187). In it Parker’s shift to a critical psychoanalytic understanding is evidenced. His use of psychoanalysis is in some senses Deconstructive. For example, he states that “the issue is not whether psychoanalysis is true or not, rather it is how the theory circulates through culture, and then how the employment of psychoanalytic ideas in the discipline can function as a form of resistance to the routine squashing of human agency” (p203). Parker thus strikes a critical distance from psychoanalysis (as a discourse), while simultaneously using it strategically to serve particular purposes. There is a risk here of slippage from un/witting use of/by discourse, to the hidden truth inside individuals. This slippage is frequently encountered in post-colonial writings about racism/othering (Mills, 1997).

In the second chapter of this section, he demonstrates the usefulness of discourse analytic readings to counsellors and psychotherapists by rehashing his analysis of the instructional text on a toothpaste package (cf. Parker, 1994). Leaving aside the questionable conceptual equivalence between a piece of consumer packaging and psychotherapy, the inordinate attention Parker has paid to a *toothpaste package* is quite “other-worldly” by developing world standards.

A bottom line in Parker’s approach to analysis of discourses is the demarcation of snippets of public domain discourse for analysis as singular “texts” (cf. Margaret Thatcher joke in the **QP** text), which severs it – along Deconstructive lines – from its constitutive context, histories, discursive practices, inter-textuality with other statements, modes of consumption and resistance by subjects, etc. (see Wilbraham, 2004). We return to this problematic, with respect to analyzing post-colonial discourse, in the concluding comments.

### **AUDIENCES OF “WE” AND “US”.**

In the first two parts of **CDP**, one witnesses the highly esoteric qualification and contestation of dense, refined theoretical positions in the British critical social psychology nexus. In it Parker sets up a polemic that illuminates (and exaggerates) differences, drawing deep lines in the sand. These debates – as border-skirmishes that

have marked out academic careers as empires, and as increasingly dogmatic rules and criteria for “good” or “bad” discursive research - have become conventionalized between styles/schools of discourse analysis. It is extraordinary that subsequent writings on *combining* microanalysis of interactive discourse, and texts, with broader scale macro-analysis, using social theory to examine ideological effects (e.g. Fairclough, 1995; Wetherell, 1998; Billig, 1999), are occluded by Parker.

This is not to say that these kinds of territory-disputes are not “effective” as forms of disciplinary surveillance for discourse analysts, as in producing disciplined, positioned, worthy “analysts” and “analytics”. But they also effectively scare off fainthearted discourse-beginners and developing-context users, who tend to be alienated from the means of production and consumption of such sharp and dangerous “foreign” (and bourgeois) tools. Our aim in this article is not to get caught up in ontological wrangling that produces such critical research paralysis. Rather we want to use the two books to argue that, while Parker’s popularity in South Africa is not misplaced as his work offers important leverages for critical work in our local context, considerable work needs to be done to interrogate its central problematic – a British, western, bourgeois psychology.

Parker is quite clear in his arguments that he is not attempting to speak for those or about issues outside of what he calls “western culture”; and of course, given Parker’s critical approach, we trust that he is not using this term in a reified or homogenizing fashion. Indeed, the following extract from the opening chapter of **CDP** makes it clear to whom Parker (2002:3) is talking:

“This privilege (being white and male) was mediated and problematized by the obvious hegemony of North American, mainly US, psychology through glossy undergraduate textbooks, and is so all the more now through a peculiar definition in citation counts and funding indices of what counts as an ‘international’ research journal. It was tempting for a while to react to this by imagining that European psychology was necessarily a progressive alternative to US American varieties ... That was a mistake, and we need to be skeptical about European research as well as connecting with critical work in US America ... The opposition between Europe and US America does draw our attention to the fracturing of whiteness into different kinds of power that our Western psychology enjoys (Bulhan, 1981; Howitt and Owusu-Bempah, 1994). We need to be careful not to abstract the psychology we study ‘here’ from cultural context, and with rapidly increasing globalization that means an international context”.

In this extract we witness some of the struggles and disjunctures in which scholars in Britain, Europe and the USA engage. Parker intimates that a neo-colonialism operates between American and British psychology; he wants to resist this and turns to European theory. However, with further reflection and (perhaps) exposure, he understands that this nexus (Euro-American), although fractured in many senses, operates as the metropole in psychology in global terms. There are several issues worth highlighting with respect to this extract – issues that form the basis of our concern with the two books under review.

Parker invokes an unspecified “we” and “here” in the above extract. We presume this “we” means British critical social psychologists, a motley and fractious community, approvingly distinguished from their misguided “traditional” (uncritical) siblings. It may be argued that this is fair enough – Parker is a British critical social psychologist working, living and writing in Britain. But on further inspection, especially for readers in South Africa, perhaps not so fair enough. This has nothing to do with Parker *per se* but rather with the politics of publication, based as they are on human and financial resources and capitalist market-driven economies of scale – all of which are steeped in histories of colonialism. Given the dominance of texts produced in Euro-American spaces, we (in South Africa) may inadvertently include ourselves in the “we” and the “here” generally referred to as some kind of “global community” of like-minded critical psychologists. Only to find at a later stage that we are excluded, as many of us (South Africans) writing for international journals find when we are told to contextualize our work in ways not demanded of “western” writers.

We are not suggesting here that theories do not have transnational or trans-contextual significance, but rather that, because of the politics of publishing, a psychology that speaks to “western” (critical) psychologists about issues of concern in the “west” – including concerns about knowledge/power of psy-complexes in developing contexts, HIV/Aids epidemic, or the Iraq War - without *constantly contextualizing* both these issues and the audience, may inadvertently slip into the very neo-colonialism of which Parker would be critical.

Parker (2002:236), to be fair, is more aware of this need than most, and he does state in the closing chapter of **CDP** that “critical analysis needs to reflect on the locations within which we speak”. However, this recognition, together with his understanding of the globalization of Euro-American psychology, is underdeveloped in these two books. The overt colonialism, and more recent neo-colonialism of psychology in global terms, is stated but left untheorized. These points are explored more fully below.

But Parker has a particular project in mind and perhaps it is ungenerous to judge him for not having another. We believe that Parker’s project, while a circumscribed one that addresses particular critical audiences, has the potential of adding significantly to theory and practice pertinent to South Africa, *if read through the lens of theory that speaks directly to our local problematics*. Post-colonial theory – and readings of South African contextualized material as forms of post-colonial discourse – would seem to offer an opportunity to shift the momentum of Parker’s incisive intellectual trajectory into interesting and useful new directions.

### **PARKER ON POST-COLONIALITY, PARTIALLY.**

Post-colonialism itself is not an uncontested lens. Post-colonial theorists draw on a range of insights and theories, including post-structuralism, post-modernism, feminism, Marxism and psychoanalysis; and debates within the domain are fierce and multi-vocal. However, there is a commonality in the various forms of post-colonial critique that centre on the intermingling of the past with the present in ways that illuminate how structural, institutional and local power relations of the present are embedded in

colonial histories (Mills, 1997). The ramifications of colonialism in both colonizing and colonized nations are highlighted through explicitly analyzing the politics and practices of anti-colonialism, neo-colonialism, race, gender, nationalisms, class, ethnicities and global capitalism. The experiences of the marginalized periphery are foregrounded and set against the hegemony of “western” knowledges, and the material, cultural and psychological factors in maintaining and disrupting colonial and neo-colonial power relations are examined (Young, 2001).

South Africa has been characterized as a generic form of the African colonial state (Mamdani, 1996), and social scientific disciplines have generated variously slanted analytics of post-colonial discourse and knowledge/power relations in the periphery. However, although more South African psychologists are using post-colonialism as a theoretical framework than previously (see Butchart, 1998; Hook, 2005b; Swartz, 2005; Macleod, 2006; Macleod & Bhatia, in press), this does not mean that the specificities of apartheid and post-apartheid dynamics should be ignored (Hook, 2003).

Parker locates his work within understandings of colonialism more than many radical writers from the “west” do. This awareness seems more fully developed in **QP** than in **CDP**, which features Parker’s earlier work. However, even within **QP**, there are only partial, oblique references to globalization and post-coloniality.

In **QP**, Parker outlines the theoretical resources that his Bolton/Manchester Discourse Unit in Britain draws on, these being feminism, post-structuralism, post-modernism, psychoanalysis, and Marxism. One notes the absence of post-colonial theory; and this absence is troubling in a book on so-called “radical research”. Take for example Box 1.1, in which Parker (2005:6) outlines how the theoretical resources suggested “show us why we would have been unable to get very far if we had taken the discipline of psychology as our starting point”. Feminism is credited with revealing that psychology is a masculine enterprise, Foucauldian analytics with showing how psychology functions as a apparatus of surveillance, psychoanalysis with interpreting psychology as overly rationalist, and Marxism with demonstrating how psychology serves the needs of capitalism. Yes, and what theoretical resource will reveal western psychology’s complicity in neo-colonialism? Has not a key aspect of the psy-complex – its avaricious and insidious tentacles in globalized, capitalist neo-liberal politics - one that desperately needs exposure, been ignored?

In Parker’s (2005:7) defence, he does refer to Liberation psychology as a “vision of emancipation from imperialism and dictatorship in central America from the 1980s”. However, this is contained within another textbox (Box 1.2), entitled “Contexts for studying ‘psychology’”, not within the theoretical resources section. Indeed, this textbox is about understanding difference – “it is important to know that ‘psychology’ is very different in different cultures at different points in history” (p7) – and contains references, in addition to Liberation psychology, to English empiricism, Black psychology and Activity theory. It warns against “seizing on any one alternative system as an ‘example’ that can be transplanted from one place to another in the hope that it will thereby solve the particular problems we face with our own psychologies at home”

(p7). What is missed in this strangely cultural relativist interlude is how theories such as Liberation psychology and post-colonialism are not just about cultures different to those “at home”, but also about the colonizer. They have central pertinence to a radical project, not only on the periphery, but also in the metropole.

Colonialism does feature prominently in the ethnography chapter of **QP**; this is pretty unavoidable given ethnography’s association with early anthropological endeavours in the colonies. Said’s insights get a passing mention, and Fanon’s a significant section. However, in other parts, an understanding of the globalizing and/or othering potential of research is missing. For example, in the chapter on interviewing, Parker mentions translation in terms of people’s understandings of each other in the actual interview situation, and translating the spoken text into written form. The imperialism of English, and even a certain kind of English, is not acknowledged. Swartz (2005), for example, refers to linguistic imperialism whereby (South African) indigenous languages are replaced by the (in this instance, English *and* psy-complex) languages of colonizers, thereby silencing the subaltern. “The subaltern’s experience of his or her own life in translation [is] caught forever between the disenfranchised mother tongue and the public voice” (Swartz, 2005:510). The neo-colonial silences and erasures produced in the translation process (of whatever sort) are under-explored by Parker.

In **CDP**, key post-colonial writers who speak to “Third World” issues are virtually ignored by Parker. In the introductory chapter, Parker (2002:10) identifies Foucault, Derrida and Lacan as the “most important sources for discourse-oriented critical psychology”. Remarkably, Said, Spivak, Bhabha and Fanon, some of the most important theorists in terms of engaging with, extending, and putting to use the ideas of Foucault, Derrida and Lacan in post-colonial studies, are for the most part elided, despite Parker’s avowal of “working on issues of ideology and power” (p1). Spivak and Said are mentioned in passing, but there is no sustained engagement with their work. This could mean several things. Either Parker read their work cursorily; or he considered their (post-colonial) readings of Foucault and Derrida, and their methodological re-workings of genealogical/textual analytics, unimportant to his radical project in the early writing collected in the **CDP** volume.

At times Parker (2002) instrumentally co-opts selective elements of feminist or post-colonial theory to illustrate or make a particular critical point (cf. Hepburn, 1999). For example, post-colonial theory is referred to in passing and only when it highlights something central/critical to “western” theory. Feminism gets slightly more space, but is mostly homogenized. One particularly irritating tendency is to trot out the 1970s feminist maxim of “the personal is political” followed by Rowbotham et al (1979) as a citation.

Where writers dealing with colonial issues are mentioned, they are given an uncritical shine. For example, in the chapter on action research in **QP**, Tuhiwai Smith’s (1999) book, **Decolonizing methodologies: Research and indigenous peoples**, is credited with showing “how completely different world views require completely different methodologies, developed from within specific communities, as forms of research that must necessarily aim for change as the research is carried out” (Parker, 2002:126).

Tuhiwai Smith's work certainly is important in terms of highlighting the destructive role that research has played in colonized societies and in reproducing the inequities in knowledge production. However, it is not without its difficulties. Parker does not engage with the essentialized, authentic notion of "the indigenous" – surely implied through Parker's "completely different world views"? - fundamental to Tuhiwai Smith's work that tries to use research to re-centre and restore indigenous identity. The debate around the notion of the displaced indigenous is fundamental to post-colonial discourse, with some post-colonial writers indicating that the indigenous, even in its anti-colonialist usage, necessarily draws on the myth of origin, reifying a particular time and (possibly strategically) essentializing particular understandings of experiences, mentality and subjectivity (cf. Wetherell & Potter, 1992; Yen & Wilbraham, 2003). It assumes a non-colonialist space that remains, today, a chimera (Sunder Rajan, 1993).

Furthermore, in places where the topics represented by Parker produce fecund ground for the introduction of post-colonial discursive analysis, this opportunity is not taken up. For example, in the chapter on Wittgenstein in **CDP**, Parker (2002:101) writes accusingly that, "Wittgenstein smuggles in a series of presuppositions about child development, the possible nature and value of 'simplicity', other language communities as representatives of a simpler past in our more complex present, and in a restatement of a long-discredited anthropological fallacy, he stresses the relationship between simplicity and the 'primitive' [insertion of a quote from Wittgenstein]. Here, 'primitive languages' are simpler sets of games which can be studied to throw light upon our more complex forms of life". *Quid pro quo*. No discussion of the colonialism that this implies, of the search for the myth of origin, or of how "the primitive" (whatever this is) is imbricated in the construction of the more complex modern.

In a later section entitled "context" in his chapter on Wittgenstein, Parker (2002:104) writes about Wittgenstein's class position as well as the "contradictory cultural positions of marginality and dominance that Wittgenstein suffered and enjoyed". The latter phrase is followed by this curious statement, "Like many 'overseas students' today who study in North America or Western Europe with financial resources (in the shape of immediate tuition fees or future endowments to the institution) combined with a certain exotic quality that is invested in them (and which attaches both promise and distance to their contribution), Wittgenstein was shown a degree of indulgence and curiosity" (p104). The reason for the inverted commas around "overseas students" is unclear; either they come from over the sea or they do not (perhaps it is a euphemism for those from the former colonies). Importantly, Parker's offhand comment glides over the complex debate concerning intellectual exile that has been conducted in post-colonial literature, including by "Third World" émigrés to "First World" academic institutions (Said, 1994; Korang, 2005; Zeleza, 2005), and fails to do justice to the dilemmas faced by these intellectuals and their diaspora.

Given these partial and cryptic mentions of post-coloniality in Parker's writing, and the problematics of wrestling these down into practical, analytical relevance within local (ex-colonized) contexts, we now turn to read his work on "post-modernism" with such a lens. We focus on reading one section of Parker's work from **CDP**, the chapter,

“Against post-modernism: Psychology in cultural context”. Our aim is to outline how some of the issues covered by Parker in the chapter might (and should) be opened up to post-colonial questions. Clearly this must be a brief discussion that slides over the depth that such a debate could include.

### **“POST-MODERN” DISORDER OF THINGS, IN POST-COLONIAL FRAME.**

Parker (2002) acknowledges the contribution that post-modernism has made to critical psychology, which he identifies as a re-thinking of the unitary self, human consciousness, personal integrity and language, a dispersion of psychological concepts, and a deconstruction of the psy-complex. He writes, “This undermining and unravelling activity (of deconstruction and dispersion) with a view to the proliferation of a multiplicity of horizontal and spatial little narratives is acid in the works of psychology, a corrosive and exhilarating activity of critique as we eat away what had almost consumed us and hallucinate new forms of life beyond close-guarded disciplinary boundaries” (p24). Thus, post-modernism has challenged “the academic and professional apparatus of the ‘psy-complex’ seen as a quintessentially *modern* practice” (p22).

At the same time, Parker argues that postmodernism has “outlived its usefulness” (p23), and that its “progressive potential ... has been exhausted” (p21). He argues that post-modernism’s assumptions about social relations and structures (relativism, amoralism, collectivism or autonomy) threaten a radical agenda, and that the alternative pessimistically implied (scientism, fundamentalism, individualism or organicism) are dangerous. We shall leave aside the question of whether these alternatives are risky, necessary or even obvious.

In post-colonial literature there is a similar ambivalence to post-modernism, with the interaction between post-modernism and post-colonialism being described as a playground and a battlefield (Prentice, 1994). The reasons for this ambivalence are in some ways similar but also somewhat different to Parker’s reasons (see below).

Parker discusses the complexities involved in understanding the “modern”. He details the various arguments that we have always been post-modern and that we have never been modern. Parker (2002:35) states that, “Post-modern psychology mistakenly defines itself against a certain kind of cultural-historical backdrop that it calls the ‘modern’, and it is all the easier for *psychologists* to fall into this trap because the discipline of psychology has constituted itself in such a way that it produces a caricature of historical progress and a repression of self-understanding”.

It is not clear in Parker’s rendition who the “we”, who have never been modern, are. Compare this globalizing tendency with Kenzo (2002) who argues that there are historical antecedents for post-modernism within African culture. For example, he postulates that Negritude as a critique of Enlightenment reason is akin to, but not synonymous with, the post-modern. Furthermore, what is missing from Parker’s account is how a discourse of the modern as historical progress was intricately intermeshed with colonialism, the conquest of land, and the construction of colonized

people as “traditional” or “pre-historical” (Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998). The imbrication of psychology in a colonialist-based fiction of historical progress has been well documented (e.g. Butchart, 1998).

This imbrication of (the illusion of) the modern with colonialism and continued neo-colonialism – and psychology’s enmeshment with both processes - has meant that there is a certain attraction to post-modernist ideas for those writers intent on deconstructing the neo-colonialist complex, and who wish to rethink the self in relation to neo-colonialist power relations (e.g. Kenzo, 2002). Parker (2002:36) acknowledges this in a short, self-labeled detour: “The simultaneous integration and disorganization of capitalism on a world scale, its globalization, do seem to bring to the fore exactly the kinds of processes post-modernists are concerned with. This is evident in the emerging strand of ‘post-colonial’ writing which continues the deconstruction and dispersal of imperialist ideology and identity that post-modernism champions”.

Here Parker basically equates post-colonialism with post-modernism. Although there are writers who would agree with Parker - Dirlik (1994:348), for example, labels post-colonialism as a “child of post-modernism” - many post-colonial authors are as suspicious of post-modernism’s playful proliferations and indexical meanings as Parker is.

Post-colonial writers have postulated that post-modernism arose as a consequence of the break-up and loss of empire, which undermined the universalizing rationality of science and social science. Despite this, they argue, post-modernism is a neo-universalising and neo-imperialist endeavour (Prentice, 1994; Quayson, 2000). Parker (2002:31) acknowledges this latter critique, but adds that it neglects the way “that post-modern rhetoric has filtered through various scientific disciplines and into the ‘Third World’”. However, the source of this critique that Parker cites is Smith (1994), about whose position Parker is critical. Indeed, in other sections, he defends post-modernists *against* Smith’s (1994) critique of “anti-scientific relativism”.

Thus, in dismissing the above-mentioned critique in this off-hand manner, Parker misses the essential point, which is not that post-modernism has not had an influence on intellectual endeavours in the “Third World”; but rather that in its propagation of particular understandings of the world, post-modernism (inadvertently) perpetuates neo-imperialism. This is achieved through the very fracturing of identities and the promotion of relativism that are supposedly liberating (see below).

In terms of identity Parker (2002:22) identifies the “re-thinking of the notion of undivided and unitary self-hood” fabricated (in part) by post-modernism as a positive contribution. Nevertheless, he points to its dangers in the sense that “it presents a threat of psychotic breakdown at the very moment that it destabilizes fixed fast-frozen forms of identity to offer unlimited possibilities of change” (p28). Here, Parker rightly finds a “surprising voluntarist twist ... about the constitution of subjectivity” (p29), and “a vision of change as a function of individual choice” (p29).

Post-colonial writers have similarly grappled with the implications of the proliferation of subject positions, but their concerns centre on the neo-colonialist potential of such fracturing. Bhabha (1994), for example, is suspicious of the fracturing of subjectivity, stating that the authority of neo-colonialism depends on exactly this kind of fracturing amongst its subordinates as it allows space for non-westerners to identify with the metropolitan culture and values (in addition to “their own”). Others state that the challenges of post-modernism to the coherent, autonomous subject are a luxury of the dominant order, whereas those oppressed by patriarchal capitalist colonialism need to assert or affirm their subjectivity (Quayson, 2000).

Although there is much debate around the latter point - the implications of the assertion of subjectivity through, for example, African nationalisms (see Appiah, 1991; Kenzo, 2000) - what post-colonialism brings to the table is a consideration of the key dimension of agency. While in post-modernism interest centres on image-culture and the multiplication of identities and realities, in post-colonialism the focus is on the politics of representation and agency (Quayson, 2000). Attention to the power relations inherent in particular representations, their social and historical contingency and their implications in terms of agency is necessary. Spivak’s (1988) paper, “Can the subaltern speak?”, is central to this debate.

Closely related to the proliferation of subjectivities and realities are concerns with regards to relativism and moral stances. Parker (2002) mentions both but does not dwell too long on either in this (post-modernism) chapter. However, in a later chapter in **CDP**, “Against relativism in psychology, on balance”, he argues that while relativism has had its usefulness in psychology – “[it] corrodes the truth claims of a discipline which functions as a key ideological apparatus in western culture, and it also opens the way to anti-racist and feminist critiques of its pathologizing gaze” (p59) - we need to strike a critical distance from it (cf. Parker, 1998, 1999). He posits that it privileges apolitical individualism, and suppresses positions that attend to political and social context, and accuses proponents of engaging in rhetorical balancing strategies to obscure the risks involved.

One of these risks Parker (2002) labels in the **CDP** chapter as “undecidability”, which seems to stand for indecision and stymied paralysis of revolutionary zeal/action, rather than the Derridean understanding of the concept as radical disruption of foundational assumptions, leading to unfamiliar “undoing” and “destabilization” of meanings, in a positive sense (Hepburn, 1999). Again this speaks to the perils in Parker’s value-driven transformation-agenda of deploying partial elements of complex theoretical arguments “out of context”, and instrumentally for his own radical purposes (Hepburn, 1999).

The thorny issues of universalism and relativism are ones that have occupied post-colonial writers too. In the same way as relativism has, in Parker’s words, corroded the truth claims of psychology, so too has an emphasis on the local, the marginal or the periphery challenged the truth claims generated from the colonizing centre. At the same time, colonialism itself was a dividing, separatist endeavour (cf. apartheid). This means that emphasizing contextual, cultural, geographical and historical differences may

reproduce colonialism's partitioning strategies (Castle, 2001). Furthermore, the relativism implied in post-modernism frequently disguises the assertion of a singular western norm. Bhabha (1994) argues this point in relation to the cultural relativism implied in multi-culturalism. While multi-culturalism explicitly constructs cultures as equivalent, what is effectively produced through this neo-liberal rendition is an emphasis on assimilation into the dominant culture.

Parker (2002:36) states that "the political advantages of a 'post-modern' position of critique and styles of mobilization has been recognized by activists in the 'Second' and 'Third' worlds". He uses as examples "right-wing Croatians" and "left-wing Zapatistas", thus emphasizing the flexibility and expedience of post-modernism (and power/knowledge) as a political project. He also recognizes that post-modern rhetoric may be used as "a *strategic* part of a struggle embodied in Enlightenment hopes for justice and rights to speak" (p38). Here Parker (2002) implicitly draws on critical (Neo-Marxist, Gramscian) work of Jameson (1991) on the "economic logics" that organize surfaces for (post-modern) subjectivities in late capitalism, and the discrepant realities (and voices) such fictions fabricate, disguise and suppress.

This separation of the "modern" and Enlightenment is important for Parker as it allows for post-modern ideas to be strategically deployed while maintaining a commitment to a foundation of justice. A similar point is made by Appiah (1991), who believes much African post-colonial writing has been misrepresented as "post-modern". This is because these writings are post-realist, seeking to de-legitimate not only the western imperium, but also (importantly) an African realism that "sought to naturalize ... a nationalism that, by 1968, had plainly failed" (p349). He posits this work as a "murderous antidote to a nostalgia for *Roots*" (p351). Appiah (1991:353) finds elements of post-modern thought in such writings, but argues that they appeal to an ethical universal based on "respect for human suffering, a fundamental revolt against ... endless misery".

### **RE-DEPLOYING PARKER, POST-COLONIALLY?**

In **CDP**, Parker (2002:11-12), citing Spivak, states that: "Post-colonial theory has also [in addition to what feminist and queer theory offers] helped us to step back and situate modern knowledge and its post-modern mutations in a global context, and to explore and deconstruct the process of othering that constitute this culture and its forms of discipline". The implicit audience Parker addresses is the "us" of "this culture" (unspecified). This kind of sentence produces a strange "outsider within" status (Collins, 1999) for scholars outside of the Euro-American nexus. On the one hand, as critical psychologists (whatever that term means) in South Africa, we are insiders, sharing Parker's (2002:1) concern that "psychology just does not seem able to tolerate a consideration of those kinds of issues [of ideology and power]". On the other hand, we are excluded from the "us" referred to in "this culture". Thus we are simultaneously hailed and proscribed from this space. It is for this reason that we, as South African readers of Parker's texts, should be simultaneously excited and suspicious of his work. There is much that is of use to both academics and students; but there is also much

labour involved in re-deploying Parker's insights from their central problematic into our own local context.

Although **QP** provides an array of "qualitative methods" that might be harnessed for this task, the methodology of analysis of discourses has obviously been one of Parker's central academic projects; and it is in this area that Parker is arguably the most influential in South Africa. Parker is complimentary about the work discourse analytic scholars have carried out in South Africa. In **CDP**, Parker (2002:140) uses Levett, et al (1997) to illustrate how "some of the most radical discourse analytic studies have been carried out in contexts where it has been impossible to feel comfortable with common sense". One could ask, of course, *whose* "common sense"? That much good discursive work has been conducted in South Africa is incontrovertible. However, this work – now regarded as fairly mainstream - has relied heavily on the methodological debates about discourse analysis conducted within (mostly) British social psychology. Thus, our lack of dialogue with post-colonial studies, through discourse analysis, is a lacuna.

The studies that appear as caveats to this statement of lack (of post-colonial writing) have been produced – ironically – by South African psychologists who have either shunned interpellation into Parker's critique-machine entirely; and/or have developed intricate critical responses to his quasi-Deconstructionist, quasi-Foucauldian medley of discourse analytical guidelines. These writings "turn back" towards the techniques of Foucault's archaeology and genealogy – much as Said (1978/1995) did - as a means of trailing through local archives of historical and contemporary accounts of institutionalized practices on/with bodies and psyches (e.g. Butchart, 1997, 1998; Hook, 2001, 2003, 2005a, 2005b; Swartz, 1999, 2005).

From a genealogical perspective (see Foucault, 1984), Butchart (1997) argues that the widespread Deconstructive analyses of discourses in South Africa haplessly "find" always already constituted (reified) discourses, and their objects and subjects, in predictable ways, in narrowly demarcated textual fragments. This is because Parkerian "texts" – that toothpaste package again, or a Thatcher-joke – are severed from the historical and institutional conditions, and discursive practices, of their manufacture, existence *and* consumption (cf. Deconstruction); and Parkerian textual readings generalize, abstract and theorize aspects of macro-reality, as "ideology" or "reality" (beyond the text) from limited, singular texts in the public domain (see Wilbraham, 2004). Parker has consistently contested such criticisms of his radical position; his arguments are recycled in **CDP**, and elsewhere he posits that his approach can flexibly be applied to *any and all* textual material (Parker & Bolton Discourse Network, 1999).

Hook (2001) follows a similar line of resistance (as Butchart's) to Parkerian "textuality"; and he develops an archaeological (or later genealogical) praxis modeled on the discursive mechanisms of inclusion/exclusion in Foucault's (1971) *Orders of discourse* inaugural lecture on regimes of truth. This has direct bearing on the post-colonial project in that analysis would unpick the knowledge/power nexus within which acts of (psychologized) colonization take place, and would highlight the rules of inclusion and exclusion that characterize the relationship between the colonized and the colonizer

(Ashcroft, Griffiths & Tiffin, 1998). Hook (2005a) advocates demonstration of a historical slice of discursive practices to critically establish the conditions of possibility for certain knowledges about particular objects and subjects; and the government of those subjects.

Subaltern studies have attempted to write histories of the margins and to recuperate the agency of the subaltern subject through the interstices of colonial archives (e.g. Guha, 1998). In this post-colonial discourse, there is a reading against the grain, locating conflicts and contradictions that indicate subaltern resistance, and performing interpretive inversion (Moore-Gilbert, 2000). Swartz (1999, 2005) weaves these complex influences into discursive work on colonized genealogies of mental illness in South African psychology.

Said (1978/1995:20) outlines his “principal methodological devices for studying authority” in **Orientalism**, as: “... *strategic location*, which is a way of describing the author’s position in a text with regard to the [Oriental] material he (sic) writes about, and *strategic formation*, which is a way of analyzing the relationship between texts and the way in which groups of texts, types of texts, even textual genres, acquire mass, density, and referential power among themselves and thereafter in the culture at large”.

It is engagement with such tactics, we believe, that might lead Parker’s analysis of discourses from the metropolitan/critical spaces it currently occupies, into a post-colonial periphery-fray where powers and histories collide. Said (1993:59) advocates a process of contrapuntal reading, in which there is a “simultaneous awareness of both the metropolitan history that is narrated and of those other histories against which (and together with which) the dominating discourse acts”. This is where we should be going, how and why.

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