

## INTRODUCTION: THE RETURN OF THE NATIVE — NATIVES AND NATIVISM IN POSTCOLONIALITY

The present volume is a follow-up of an international seminar, “The Return of the Native — natives and nativism in postcoloniality”, held at the English Department, Wrocław University on December 5<sup>th</sup>, 2008, and co-organized by the English Department of the Potsdam University. The aim of the seminar was to represent a survey of approaches to the theoretically and politically loaded categories of the native and nativism and draw a framework for locating these concepts in postcoloniality. Their equivocal assessment in postcolonial studies, as in postcolonial cultures, necessitates a discussion of how to contextualize, compare and theorize these concepts today.

Fanon’s astute statement: “For the colonized subject, objectivity is always directed against him” (Fanon, 2004 [1961], 37), points not only at the colonial underpinning of the category of the native whose function is to render the colonizer’s supremacy as an objective fact, but is also directed towards the postcolonial moment where it is tossed constantly between contestation as a colonial residue and affirmation of its counter-discursive, or resistance potential. This tension is all but resolved after almost thirty years of the institutionalized history of postcolonial studies. In “Two Cheers for Nativism” (1994), Benita Parry criticized postcolonial studies for its tendency to downplay nativism as reverse discourse. Nativism, she would argue, need not always be identified with nationalism and more or less overt affiliations with racism. For this she draws on Stuart Hall, who “made a brave case for decoupling ethnicity [one of the forms of being “native”] from its equivalence with nationalism, racism, imperialism” (Parry, 2005 [1994], 39). Parry argues that the most sagacious critique of nativism’s essentialisms and mystifications of race came from its former supporters, who did nevertheless value nativism’s liberating and revolutionary edge. In Parry’s account, nativism should be “cheered” precisely because it ultimately turns out to be one of the ways to create community through an imaginative process of reclamation. For Césaire, Parry

emphasizes, Africa was a “country of the mind...a homeland of dispersed populations in search of solidarity... a tropological construction of blackness as a sign of the colonised condition and its refusal” (Parry, 2005 [1994], 40).

Fanon, however, considered *négritude* (“Negro-ism”) a discursive and, subsequently, political dead-end, for its dependence on the terms set by the colonizer and its inability to move beyond a simple inversion of racial stereotyping. In his call for the creation of national consciousness, Fanon saw a way out of the colonial objectification of the native as Negro. Forging national consciousness, a process dependent on the anti-colonial liberation struggle, would be a move beyond sheer exoticism and particularism of native culture frozen in a fossilized state, and also a chance to capture the dynamic and protean substance that makes the nation. In this regard, Fanon’s idea of anti-colonial nationalism and Césaire’s or Senghor’s nativism dwell in a similar sort of idealism. Fanon’s call for the national consciousness that fosters international consciousness is not, as some critics argued, a vacillation between nationalism and transnationalism, but a clear gesture of recapturing the leftist historicist thought for an anti-colonial revolutionary vision. Nativism in Senghor’s and Césaire’s version was also premised on a vision of a wider than ethnic identity — always readily appropriated by the state — in which race was envisaged as a form of imagined solidarity. It is important to note that nativism remains a point of reference in contemporary attempts to theorize race as a form of performative identity. Gilroy’s category of the Black Atlantic that disassociates race from essentialism of ethnic absolutism and redefines it as a shared culture premised on the historical experience of colonial violence and dislocation of black people, is at least to some extent inspired by nativism’s urge to locate the shared experience of race in a broad, transnational and transcultural dimension.

In *Culture and Imperialism* (1993) Edward Said acknowledges that in order to overthrow the imperial subjection, the colonized “native” has to decolonize the past and the territory, to imagine the land anew, against the imperialist construction of e.g. Africa as an empty territory (culturally, historically, civilizationally) subject to colonization. Again, this is how nativism is defined in terms of its imaginative appeal. Said shows how the peak of the expansion and growth of the novel converges with the urge to consolidate a vision of the empire through a range of expository, historicist, pedagogical, anthropological, sociological and other cultural discourses. The necessity of revising the European canon,

implicated in the imperial venture, maybe even of provincialising it (Chakrabarty) comes down to exploring how much the singular (white) sovereign subject of narration excludes of native subjectivities, histories, stories, fictions, and other articulations of selfhood and cultural autonomy. Exposing strategies of denial and silencing that prevail in colonial texts, such revisionary reading has managed to prove that mastery over the native was subject to constant slippage of power into its opposites, like mimicry, mockery, uncertainty and self-distortion. Exploring the powerful metaphor of Caliban, Said acknowledges that the most dangerous vision for overthrowing colonial subjugation and for overcoming its consequences is the revivalist nativism that lends its idea of pristine precolonial identity to radical nationalisms. Overtly critical of nationalism, and defining nativism as one of major failures of anti-colonial discourse, Said at the same time keenly sympathises with Césaire's call for imagining a solidarity for the racial experience of enslavement and subjugation, a solidarity that would render their diasporic, dispersed and non-subjective history coherent, an expression of a truly imagined community.

The essays gathered in this volume take up the challenging question of representation (counter-representation; self-representation) of the native in a range of postcolonial contexts, and the issue of nativism always lurking behind projects of cultural reclamation. Notwithstanding the diversity of these approaches, they share a common ground. along two connected lines of articulation.

First, they all scrutinize colonial and also postcolonial implications of the category of the native, pointing out how they are manifested in contemporary uses. Dirk Wiemann and Tanya Meyer analyse how the national pedagogical discourse operating through the educational authority of the museum represents the tribal in India — the *adivasi* — as the metonymic Other of the nation contained within ethnographic knowledge and denied access to historical representation within the broader narrative of the nation. Linda Guddat discusses *tino rangatiratanga* — the movement of Maori self-determination in New Zealand — as a project holding a powerful transformative potential for a non-colonial intercultural dialogue within a multicultural state. Teresa Podemska-Abt argues that labeling literature and art by the Indigenous Australians “native” is dubious because it encloses the indigenous creativity within the objectifying categories inherited from colonial discourse. Likewise, she proves that despite the fact that the Australian indigenous (Aboriginal) literature strongly fosters ideas and ideologies of cultural identity

and self-determination, this cannot be easily classified as nativism, because most of these texts project points of view that are antinativistic — critical of any finite racial or ethnic containment. Anke Bartels, in her analysis of M.G. Vassanji's novel *The In-Between World of Vikram Lall* (2004), shows how, in a postcolonial state like Kenya, the “native” escapes narrow racial limitations and confuses attempts to politicize it as a privilege of belonging to the exclusion of others, a curious gesture of inverse racism of the postcolonial state. Magda Heydel gives an account of her experience as an editor of Derek Walcott's translations into Polish, asking a crucial question how to retain the author's hybridity of language, culture and poetic vision in the language of translation with as little universalization and reappropriation as possible.

Second, the essays show how nativism's precarious location on the border of nationalism and exclusivist chauvinism precludes its realization as a wider solidarity imagined in the negation of colonial enclosure. Kiran Nagarkar gives an account of his experience as a Marathi author from multilingual Mumbai who switched to English and got caught up in language wars of sorts, threatened by Marathi nationalists in the Indian state of Maharashtra for nothing less than the crime of cultural treason. In his impassioned call for multilinguality in India as the only way to restore India's true diversity and to overcome nationalist language wars, Nagarkar deftly proves that language nationalism is a direct continuation of the colonial politics of divide and rule left by the British. Opening up to language multiplicity will be a bold move out of the colonial confines over 60 years after gaining independence. In his presentation on nativism's surprising tenacity, Bernd-Peter Lange discusses this nativism of communal divisions that in spite of its marginal position in India's academy still survives in cultural debates. Alongside, he also provides a succinct survey of nativist projects to prove their futility as viable politics. Dorota Kolodziejczyk applies Žižek's concept of the theft of enjoyment which Eastern Europe threatens the West with to reading Andrzej Stasiuk's travelogues. She analyzes how Stasiuk's fascination with the Carpathian region of Central/Eastern Europe develops into a program of negative nativism in which Eastern Europe positions itself ambivalently on the sense of its own inauthenticity and inferiority vis-à-vis Western Europe, and is at the same time afraid of becoming one with the object of its desperate desire, the West.

Surveying this broadly comparative collection, one conclusion may be drawn with all certainty — that such historically, politically and theoretically loaded concepts as the native and nativism resist any easy generalisation. Needing contextualisation wherever they are deployed, they develop new, protean and hybrid forms, necessitating new interpretations.

**Works Cited:**

Fanon, Franz; 2004 [1961], *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox, New York: Grove Press  
Parry, Benita; 2005, Resistance theory/theorizing resistance or two cheers for nativism, in: Parry, Postcolonial Studies. A Materialist Critique, Londn: Routledge