



## The Canonic Economy of Communication and Culture: The Centrality of the Postcolonial Margins<sup>1</sup>

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**Abstract:** This paper examines three major paradigms—mass communications, political economy, and poststructuralism—to demonstrate how the process of knowledge production erases their connection with their postcolonial subjects and locations. This mapping indicates that what one perceives to be at the margins actually subtends or holds together the theoretical centre. As such, I explore and explain how a canonic economy of value operates within the field of communication and cultural studies. This discussion is followed by a brief reflection on the institutional, and potentially imperial, effects of this canonic economy on university programs and curricula and on the distinction between what is required and what is optional or elective in a course.

**Résumé :** Cet article examine trois paradigmes majeurs — les communications de masse, l'économie politique et le poststructuralisme — afin de démontrer la manière dont le processus de production de savoir efface leur connection avec leurs sujets et lieux postcoloniaux. Cette cartographie nous démontre que ce qui est perçu par certains comme étant situé en marge, en fait, sous-tend et soude le centre théorique. Ainsi, j'explore et j'explique de quelle façon une économie canonique des valeurs évolue dans le champ des communications et des *cultural studies*. Cette discussion est suivie d'une brève réflexion sur les effets institutionnels, potentiellement impérialistes, de cette économie canonique sur les programmes universitaires et sur la distinction entre ce qui est obligatoire et ce qui est optionnel, ou au choix, dans un cours.

**Keywords:** Canonic economy; Epistemology; Centre/margins; Postcolonialism; Imperialism, Curriculum

"What is a margin?" I asked a friend recently. "You know what a margin is," she replied, "It's what holds the page together. "Also," she added, "it's where you write your notes." By pointing to the metaphor's roots in the spatio-visual configuration of the printed word, this description raises useful questions for interrogating the heterogeneous nature of marginal space. How does it hold the page together? What text is it outside of, and how is it kept there (Berland, 1999, p. 291)?

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The complex relations between the centre and the margin, which Canadian communication and cultural theorist Jody Berland so aptly articulates in the above quotation, speak to the wider dynamics of knowledge production, in which certain questions are considered central and others are placed at the margins. Within a field that has emphatically shied away from the practice of establishing a coherent set of texts to define its epistemological foundations, the question of what is required and what is optional can be difficult to pin down or to agree upon (de la Garde, 2005; Katz, Peters, Liebes, & Orloff, 2003).<sup>2</sup> The obvious differences in focus between programs in North America make any attempt to name foundational texts or paradigms complicated, if not contentious. Despite this, a review of communication studies indicates a certain dynamic between what are considered to be the central problematics of communication theory and what are oft-times shunted to its margins.

In a typical Canadian graduate program, for instance, students who look forward to taking courses in feminist or postcolonial theory are confronted with the courses' status as electives. The unstated assumption is that feminism, critical race theory, and postcolonial theory are optional to the field, rather than integral, or are offered only intermittently. This raises the question, then, of what gets valorized as part of the core curriculum of communication and culture studies, and what gets reduced to a niche option. Restated, what is the relationship between the margin and the centre in the epistemic economy of communication studies? How is it established and maintained?

A reflexive encounter with these questions requires consideration of what is at the margins and centre of the unstated, but very present, canonic economy within the field of communication. Like a palimpsest, where the erased text leaves traces of its original emergence, tendencies, and assumptions, the function of the margins in sustaining the field of study can be traced through the examination of some transformative moments and iconic figures at the heart of communication. This paper offers such a layered mapping of how three central paradigms in the field of communication and cultural studies have renewed, re-charged, and even sustained themselves through the so-called margins. I analyze a host of iconic figures—Elihu Katz, Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Pierre Bourdieu, and Harold Innis—whose works are emblematic and whose names appear on the pages of many a course outline in communication and cultural studies. Ironically, while most of these scholars may not have considered themselves communication or cultural theorists, their scholarship has had a profound impact on the development of theories of mass communication, political economy, and poststructuralism, all of which are central to the two interrelated fields of communication and cultural studies.

By "canonic economy," I am suggesting that communication and cultural studies have a certain privileged "repertoire of narratives" (Mitchell, 2005, p. 21), conceptual grids, principles, texts, and iconic figures that serve to circumscribe, delineate, and inform the field. My use of "the canonic economy" draws from Christine Froula's (1983) discussion of "the canonical economy." Froula, in a feminist critique of the literary canon and in appreciation of Virginia Woolf's work, shifts from a focus on the canonical work per se to what she calls "the canonical mode of authority" and how it operated in the academic establishment of literary studies (p. 324). While Froula's project was to unwrap the Miltonic canon in English literature, the term "canonic" is used, in this paper, to designate an epis-

temic economy whose "mode of authority" excludes, through a process of "othering," stories of its own formation from the margins, at the same time as it appropriates conceptual categories that are often generated from these margins. As I argue, this canonic economy underwrites communication and cultural studies as academic areas of inquiry in Canada.

### **From personal influence to cultural imperialism**

Elihu Katz & Paul F. Lazarsfeld's groundbreaking work on "personal influence" and the "two-step flow" model of communication were both developed during the formative days of the institutionalization of mass communication in the United States and Canada. *Personal Influence: The Part Played by People in the Flow of Mass Communications* (1955) was issued as part of the work at the Bureau for Applied Social Research (BASR) at Columbia University. What makes *Personal Influence* such a remarkable scholarly work of its time is how it comprehensively demonstrated, through field research, the power of "intervening variables" in the process of media effects (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955, 19). The two had pointed out that mass communication research was narrowly concerned with "what can the media do?" (p. 18) without looking at what people do with the mass media. This led them to the discovery of four intervening variables in mass communication processes. While it may today seem ordinary, the four variables of "exposure," "differential character of media," "content," and "interpersonal factors" that they helped put on the agenda of mass communication research became the antecedent of the shift from "mass" communication to communication studies (Katz & Lazarsfeld, 1955). Indeed, the fourth variable, interpersonal influence, led to the development of the two-step flow model, where opinion-leader formation was considered critical in the gap between the mass communicator and the audience in the explication of causality. Katz & Lazarsfeld pointed out that "opinion leaders are not a group set apart. . . but rather that opinion leadership is an integral part of the give-and-take of everyday personal relationships. It is being suggested, in other words, that all interpersonal relations are potential networks of communication and that an opinion leader can best be thought of as a group member playing a key communications role" (1955, p. 33).

*Personal Influence* and the names of its two authors represent irreplaceable cornerstones when interrogating the canonic economy of communication studies. In October 2005, a fiftieth anniversary commemorative conference was held at Columbia University to celebrate the book and its contribution to communication studies. What is not celebrated—indeed, what can easily be forgotten in a discussion of such works—is the role that the margins played in the emergence of these theoretical models.

According to Christopher Simpson (1993), the very institutionalization of mass communication as an area of study in the United States is tied, umbilically, to the military and to the international strategic interests of the United States. And this is where the geographic "margins" of the Middle East and much of Asia (with respect to North America and Europe) become significant. As Simpson points out, the Bureau of Applied Social Research (BASR), where Katz & Lazarsfeld worked, relied heavily on U.S. military and propaganda agency contracts (including the Voice of America) to gather intelligence on urban and social dynamics abroad. For

example, an important BASR contract focused on engineering public opinion in the Philippines, to measure the effectiveness of psychological warfare and counterinsurgency operations against the Huk guerrillas.

These programs helped generate several basic building blocks of today's communication theory, including understanding of the key role of opinion leaders in shaping mass public sentiment and the well-known "personal influence" and "two-step" models of communications behaviour. (Simpson, 1993, pp. 332-333)

Simpson deftly explains how the Philippines became a laboratory for perfecting the manipulation of public opinion against a backdrop of "US-backed search-and-destroy counterinsurgency squads, counter-guerrilla 'hunter-killer teams,' the 'pacification' of peasant villages, and other tactics that later became well known in Vietnam, El Salvador, and similar conflicts" (1993, p. 333).

BASR was not the only pioneering communication-research institution to produce some of the founding theories in mass communication that benefited from a questionable ethical framework for doing research in the Third World. MIT's Center for International Studies (CENIS), where first-generation communication scholars such as Ithiel de Sola Pool and Daniel Lerner worked, was also complicit in the enterprise of using the Third World as an anthropological zoo for social-research experimentation, particularly in the Middle East. Lerner's book *The Passing of Traditional Society* (1958) is a founding text in international communication and is essentially a report of Lerner's extensive field work in several Middle Eastern countries. Rohan Samarajiva (1987) has pointed out how Lerner, who worked formerly under the Psychological Warfare Division of the U.S. Army, failed to disclose the fact that the project that led to the book was actually funded by the U.S. security and intelligence establishment.

What makes these American experiments in the Third World unique is the opportunity they afforded researchers to bypass ethics boards and to abuse non-American research subjects in order to produce knowledge for the good of North American communication scholarship.<sup>3</sup> Arguably these invisible subjects assisted in laying the foundations for the theories that helped to define mass communication as a discipline distinct from sociology or social psychology. These projects also served as testing grounds to generate several other theoretical approaches, including diffusion studies and their critical theoretical opposite, the cultural imperialism thesis.

Diffusion of innovation is one particular area of the field of communication studies where the margin that served as a workshop to produce the theory was actually not the margin in the global south, but the margin within the hegemonic countries of the U.S. and, to some extent, Canada. The first experiments were carried out among farmers in the corn fields of Iowa in the United States (Rogers, 2003). The main thrust of this approach was to persuade people to adopt new products and ideas through a communication campaign (Rogers, 2003). Founded on a "transmission model" of communication, diffusion theory was designed to help a "change agent" successfully transform a community's attitude toward a product or idea as part of the process of modernizing its members.

In the quasi-missionary vocation of innovation-diffusion research that consumed much of development communication in the 1970s and 1980s, researchers were confronted with the unexpected process of "re-invention" of innovations in the margins. Re-invention is the degree to which an innovation is modified by a user in

the process of adopting it. Rather than accepting these accommodations as ingenious re-inventions, appropriations, and to some extent as acts of bricolage, the response of theorists was to dismiss these innovations as "noise." In the inadmissible reckoning of diffusionists, it was assumed that Third World subjects were docile receptacles who could not possibly re-invent an innovation. As Rogers admitted two decades later, "the concept of re-invention was not yet in my theoretical repertoire, so I condensed the farmers' experience into my own categories" (Rogers, 2003, p. 17). It took years for diffusion theorists in development communication to accept that the problem of understanding re-invention was with the researchers, not the targets, of innovation diffusion (Rogers, 2003).

What is striking is that while the diffusionists used the margins as the location to test subjects and develop their particular theory of mass communication, when the issues of the margins became the objects of study in the theory mills at the centre, these presumptions of the passive, docile Third World subject were replicated—even in seemingly radical incarnations. For instance, historically speaking, the rise of the cultural imperialism thesis coincides with Elihu Katz's historic flipping of the then central question of mass communication studies from "what do media do to people?" to "what do people do with the media?" (Severin & Tankard, 1988). This moment of reflexivity in mass communication theory gave rise to the "uses and gratification theory." While media use in the context of North America was being interrogated through the prism of rational, sensible, agentive audiences, when it came to Third World subjects or subjects at the margins, active agency was never conceptualized. The impact of the mass media in the Third World was imprisoned in the structural epistemology of a political economy of culture in the guise of the cultural imperialism thesis.

By "cultural imperialism," I refer to the type of scholarship that Herbert Schiller's *Communication and Cultural Domination* (1976) and Cees Hamelink's *Cultural Autonomy in Global Communication* (1983) both helped to inaugurate, and not to media imperialism, which has a focus on the concentration of media industries (Boyd-Barrett, 1977). For instance, in the introductory pages of his book, Hamelink (1983) lists a series of vignettes across the globe to show how they are being fundamentally transformed into the one globally synchronized American culture. He writes: "In a Mexican village the traditional ritual dance precedes a soccer match, but the performance features a gigantic Coca-Cola bottle. In Singapore, a band dressed in traditional Malay costume offers a heart-breaking imitation of Fats Domino. . . ." After listing a total of 17 of such vignettes, all from the Third World, Hamelink declares, "One conclusion still seems unanimously shared: the impressive variety of the world's cultural system is waning due to the process of 'cultural synchronization' that is without historic precedent" (Hamelink, 1983, pp. 2-3).

What Hamelink describes would have been an acceptable rendition of the centuries-old practice of cross-fertilization of cultures, appropriation, and bricolage that characterizes global cultural relations. But his explanation is that this only happens in one direction, from the developed countries, principally the United States, to the Third World. "The process of cultural synchronization implies that a particular type of cultural development in the metropolitan country is persuasively communicated to the receiving country. . . . The metropolis offers the model with which the receiving parties synchronize" (Hamenlink 1983, p. 5).

While the gaze is on what the foreign content does to the local people, what is lost is what the local people do to the foreign content. This blindspot in the cultural imperialism thesis is arguably its Achilles heel.

Tomlinson characterizes this weakness of the paradigm best, pointing out that "there is a definite sense of the conceptual problem of 'the moment of the cultural' being forever deferred" (1991, p. 40) in the cultural imperialism thesis in favour of more solid evidence grounded in a political economic approach. A recent wave of literature has questioned the validity of the thesis (Alhassan, 2004; Banerjee, 2002; Chadha & Kavoori, 2000; Kraidy, 2005; Nordenstreng, 2001; Semati 2004; Sinclair, Jacka, & Cunningham, 1996).

Jacobson offers a different critique: "From a postmodernist perspective the cultural imperialism hypothesis falls victim to charges it sought itself to make; i.e., it is itself Western, insensitive to 'difference,' and hence culturally imperialistic" (2000, p. 57) How do we account for the dominance of the cultural imperialism thesis in international communication theory, despite the fact that it was hardly ever accompanied by any field work? And why were the conceptual insights of uses and gratification theory not brought to bear on the research on cultural imperialism? This epistemological split between the ascription of agency at the centre and its lack at the margins still baffles me.

The instances I have so far elaborated speak to a particular dynamic between the centre and the geographic margins. At the initial formation and institutionalization of mass communication, the margins were at the nucleus, as I have illustrated with the discussion of early mass communication research in the United States. The margins served as the workshop to spice up and transform the bland world of mass communication research that characterized the 1950s and 60s into more reflexive forms of communication studies. But as communication theories become perfected into finished products, the margins are erased and only reintroduced as secondary to the core problematics of communication studies. Retracing this knowledge economy then appears in the form of a palimpsest, where the erased foundations can be teased out. Teasing them out will facilitate our understanding of how the knowledge economy of communication, like the commodity economy of imperialism, is one of appropriation, poaching, and pillaging.

### **From political economy to critical race theory**

The influence of Marxism is evident not only in the cultural imperialism thesis and the political economy of communication theory stream. It is inscribed in the very foundations of what has become known as cultural studies and critical communication theory. In examining critical moments in the short history of communication studies in which one can identify crossovers and ways "mass communication" theory got re-charged by critical scholarship from the margins, one can cite the petty academic squabbling of the 1980s and 1990s over cultural studies and political economy of communication. This conflict came to a head in a 1995 special issue of *Critical Studies in Mass Communication* (now called *Critical Studies in Media Communication*). In a heated exchange with Lawrence Grossberg (1995), Nicholas Garnham (1995a; 1995b) asked whether mass communication and cultural studies were at the verge of a divorce. The debates were published as a colloquy on political economy of communication studies versus cultural studies. In retrospect, if we

stretch the metaphor of matrimony that Garnham deployed, what become evident are the gendered terms of the debate that subtend the discussion: the relations between the two streams are understood as a kind of "elopement," where the generative and feminine character of cultural studies has been seduced into running off with the political economy of communication to re-charge the declining masculinity of the latter.

Nowhere is the dire need to renew the political economy of communication stated more clearly than in Vincent Mosco's *Political Economy of Communication: Rethinking and Renewal* (1996), published a year after the less edifying debates between Garnham and Grossberg. One of the core contributions of Mosco's illustrative book is its recommendation that political-economic perspectives on communication break away from thinking in structures and institutions and incorporate the celebration of agency from cultural studies. In appropriating the reflexive theorizing of agency to renew itself, political economy of communication gets re-centred. However, this renewal takes place without acknowledging the legacy of issues from the margins that generated its theoretical core in the first place. Within Mosco's text, the master conceptual category of "class" continues to maintain its analytical dominance over gender, sex, race, and location.

And here, to understand the process of what is marginalized in these conceptual renditions of class and class struggle, Michel Foucault provides a particularly historic revelation: the Marxist political project of class struggle, which defines a key part of the epistemological framework of political economy, is actually appropriated from an earlier European political project of race struggles. Foucault in his January 28, 1976, lecture reminds us that:

After all, it should not be forgotten that toward the end of his life, Marx told Engels in a letter written in 1882 [sic] that "You know very well where we found our idea of class struggle; we found it in the work of the French historians who talked about the race struggle." (Foucault, 2003, p. 79)

Foucault was actually referring to either a letter from Marx to J. Weydemeyer dated March 5, 1852, or his letter to Engels July 27, 1854, in which he described the French race historian Thierry as "the father of the class struggle" (see Foucault, 2003, p. 85 [footnote 6]). While the specificity of the wording may be contested, what is indisputable is the acknowledgment by Marx that he appropriated the intra-European discourse and problematics of race struggle to frame his theory of class struggle.

The appeal of Marxism to communication theory is often seen to lie in how Marx (1818-1883) transformed the classical and liberal political economy of Adam Smith (1723-1790), Thomas Robert Malthus (1766-1834), and David Ricardo (1772-1823). By introducing the element of class antagonism, which emphasizes how power is generated and sustained by our relation to the means of economic production, Marx radicalized these theories. However, as Foucault points out, this insight was derived from previous forms of social antagonism based on racial groups within Europe. Foucault, in other words, uncovers the genealogy of the Marxist canon from its era of "primitive accumulation," to use the phrase Marx uses himself when he looks at the formation of capital into its final finished-good form as a valorized epistemic resource.

Marxism, then, is built on the appropriation of French historians' discussion of race struggles, and like capital's formation through a process of alienation, it pushes into oblivion the original sources of the social dynamic that is mobilized to change political economy. Alienation is a key Marxist concept used to explain the miserable trajectory that labour power as a commodity goes through. While labour is at the heart of the production of value, the irony is that the cheaper labour becomes in term of exchange value, the more value (wealth) it produces. This ironic distancing of labour power from its object (commodity), denying the value of labour, is at the crux of the Marxist concept of alienation (Marx, 1964). The more labour power produces value (wealth or commodity) for those who claim ownership and turn a profit, the more its own relative value—and social power—are reduced. Within the language of Marxist political economy, capital depends on this process of the alienation.

The problematic of difference and otherness that characterized the intra-European race struggles gave Marx a cue on how to develop a theory of difference founded on the economic. Yet like the process of commodity exchange and labour power, the reification of class as an analytical category tends to reduce the conceptual purchase of race to near irrelevance. In retrospect, we can turn this Marxist logic on itself and say that the ontology of class struggle is established through another form of alienation. Marxism appropriates the historic example of race struggle, then forgets it as it re-produces itself theoretically.

The dynamics of intra-European race struggles that I describe above later came to be analyzed under the rubric of postcolonial theory. Most fundamental of all to postcolonial analysis are its reflexive critique of modernity and the deconstruction of grand narratives emerging from the Enlightenment tradition. Postcolonial theory is that area of inquiry that critically interrogates the legacy of colonialism by including strategies of resistance, otherness, difference, fragmentation, irony, mimicry, and parody (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2002). These generative concepts around reflexivity and agency, which are at the heart of critical communication scholarship (Grossberg, 2002), come to communication studies through cultural studies.

I am not suggesting that there are no research interests in these areas. Indeed, it was this very concern over a lack of overt intersection between communication studies and postcolonialism as "both an intellectual project and cultural phenomenon" (Shome & Hegde, 2002, p. 249) that led to the publication of a special issue of the International Communication Association journal *Communication Theory* in 2002 calling for more clear engagement. In that issue, Grossberg (2002) points out that there has always been a dialogue between communication studies and postcolonial theory, although scholars of the former are largely unaware of its history. Against this background this critique seeks to uncover the unacknowledged linkages. Shome and Hegde (2002) make a similar argument in their plea that communication scholarship engage with postcolonial theory.

Despite race's historic conceptual legacy and the plea for its centrality to the discipline, it is not guaranteed that one will find a discussion of race within the contents of a required course in communication studies. In the geography of difference that characterizes contemporary Canada, it may be race or gender, not necessarily class, that defines one's life chances. Compared with the theoretical problematics founded on the legacy of the *Paris Commune* (Marx, 1971)—namely, a class-based



analysis of political economy—race, gender, sexuality, and the entire geography of difference in communication and culture are sidestepped or trivialized. A curriculum that favours political economy, policy, or technology studies contains a curious elision that betrays its own origins. This scholarly practice of emptying the margins *conceptually* to redefine the centre to the periphery, evident in Marxist theories of communication, resonates in various forms through other areas of critical scholarship in the field.

### Poststructuralist currents

The texts introduced into communication as a field of study written by or around the works of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Pierre Bourdieu are central to what is known as “poststructuralism” within communication studies. If communication and cultural theory have been re-charged with the established key texts of poststructuralism, I want to contend that it is not poststructuralism that is the source of these currents; it is postcolonialism. My argument is that these figures were postcolonial before they became poststructuralist.

Take for instance Foucault, who unravels Marx. What is the postcolonial factor in the transformation of structuralist Foucault into a poststructuralist icon we love to celebrate—a story that forgets Foucault’s biographical connection with France’s colonial history? There is not much that I have so far come across except some anecdotal evidence relating to his stay in Tunisia in 1966. I want to identify two things that happened while Foucault stayed in Africa, which we may call the Tunisian effect:

- While in Tunisia, he laid the groundwork for his definitive work *Archaeology of Knowledge* (1969), which would clearly establish Foucault as having departed from structuralism.
- It was in Africa that Foucault shaved his head! (Miller, 1993).

This second point may sound flimsy. But the production of iconicity includes the image, in this case the shaved head with wire-rimmed glasses. Indeed, Miller (1993) does point out that this familiar face of Foucault for several years was used by the *London Review of Books* to advertise for readers’ subscriptions. In some parts of the continent of Africa, of which Tunisia is a part, head shaving can be an important ceremony of initiation and rite of passage. I wish Foucault were alive to answer whether shaving his head in Africa was an act of initiation. Although we are permanently denied the opportunity of asking Foucault, I take the liberty of interpreting his head-shaving as an act of initiation into postcolonial politics, *before* he entered the world of poststructuralist epistemology with his publication of *Archaeology of Knowledge*. In undertaking this symptomatic reading of Foucault, I have good company.

James Miller’s *The Passion of Foucault* (1993) discusses the development of Foucault’s political consciousness, pointing out how it was contingent on a student uprising in Tunisia. A local university had exploded into student protest two months prior to Foucault’s arrival to work there. Miller notes that Foucault was struck by the passion of the students and their willingness to sacrifice and that he became involved surreptitiously by helping students print their manifestos and escape arrest. “It was, in fact, his first inkling that politics, like art and eroticism, could occasion a kind of ‘limit-experience,’” recounts Miller (1993, p. 171). Foucault himself recalls of Tunisia: “It was a formative experience for me” (quoted in Miller,

1993, p. 171). In an interview on October 25, 1982, Michel Foucault was asked how he came to work on *Discipline and Punish*. He answered: "I must confess I have no direct links with prisons or prisoners, though I did work as a psychologist in a French Prison. When I was in Tunisia, I saw people jailed for political expediency, and that influenced me" (Martin, 1988, p. 12). Foucault's experience at the margins of empire is often not celebrated when he is mobilized into communication theory. Will an acknowledgment of his African influence lead us to rethink the marginal position of postcolonial theory and, for that matter, the geographic margins in communication studies?

Robert Young has also pointed out that if poststructuralism were to be considered the product of a single historical moment, then that moment is probably not May 1968, but rather the Algerian War of Independence—no doubt itself both a symptom and a product. In this respect it is significant that Sartre, Althusser, Derrida and Lyotard, among others, were either born in Algeria or personally involved with the events of the war. (2003, p. 32)

In this respect, Jacques Derrida is a quintessential postcolonial scholar. "I was born Algerian," he said in an interview, "but already my family, which had been in Algeria for a long time, before the French colonization, was not simply Algerian" (quoted in Ahluwalia, 2005, p. 137). While the work of writers such as Gayatri Spivak point to the influence of Derrida's analysis of binary forms of power on postcolonial theory, my interest in Derrida is simply to answer this question: How much of colonial and postcolonial experience helped to shape Derrida's scholarship?

On this very subject, Kenyan-born postcolonial theorist Pal Ahluwalia contends that "in order to understand the project of French poststructuralism, it is imperative both to contextualize the African colonial experience and to highlight the Algerian locatedness, identity and heritage of its leading proponents." Ahluwalia takes on Derrida's comment that "I do not believe that anyone can detect by *reading*, if I do not declare it, that I am a 'French Algerian' and goes on to ask "What happens when his Algerian locatedness is taken into account? What impact did his formative years have on his later work? . . . Is it their sense of exile, of being on the margins that allows them to challenge Western theory?" (Ahluwalia, 2005, p. 140). Let us remember that Derrida did not leave Algeria for France until he was 19. It is arguable that by then the foundations for the disruptive assertions that were to be the hallmark of his theory of deconstruction were already laid.

In a recent biography, Jason Powell (2006) discusses how Derrida's adolescent life in North Africa was later reflected in his intellectual life. "His Algeria seemed to have death in its soul; it was wounded and murderous. This aspect of Derrida, the African side, is perhaps fully developed in his work in the fascination with death, the mixing of life and death, and his rejection of here and now" (Powell, 2006, p. 18). For the intellectual influences on Derrida, Powell explains how the North African Christian bishop St. Augustine, Nietzsche, and others helped to found Derrida's imagination. "In years nine and ten, by 1944, when Algiers had become something of a cultural capital, Derrida was dreaming of writing books and was reading Nietzsche, Valéry and Gide" (Powell, 2006, p. 16). He narrates the profound impact that the Vichy laws aimed at segregating Jews for targeted discrimination in France and its colonies, including Algeria, had on young Derrida. Like all

other Jewish children attending school in Algeria, Derrida was expelled from school. Too young to understand why he was expelled, he was told by his head-teacher to go home to his parents for an explanation (p. 15). Derrida as an epistemic resource, like Foucault, comes to communication studies without an acknowledgment of his biographical links to France's colonial legacy.

Of all the French scholars of poststructuralism, it is probably Pierre Bourdieu who is most indebted to the margins for his transformation into an ethnologist, a self-taught anthropologist, and finally a full-blown poststructuralist. Writing in the *International Socialism Journal*, Jim Wolfreys (2002) points out that it was in Algeria that Bourdieu learned to part company with structural sociology à la Levi-Strauss and Althusser to develop his reflexive sociology, which invigorated key Marxist concepts in cultural theory. After studying philosophy in France, Bourdieu worked as a teacher for a year and was then drafted into the army. He served for two years in Algeria, where French troops tried to crush the Algerian rebels. In 1959-60 he lectured at the University of Algiers and studied traditional farming and ethnic Berber culture.

When Bourdieu died in 2002, the U.K. publication *Guardian Unlimited Books* published an obituary by Douglas Johnson, who wrote of Bourdieu and his Algerian odyssey:

In many respects this was a normal career trajectory. But in 1958 he took up a post as lecturer in the faculty of Algiers. To go there at a time when the future of Algeria and France's involvement there was dangerously uncertain, was courageous. But it showed the sort of man Bourdieu was. Algeria was, without doubt, the outstanding problem faced by France at the time. (2002)

It is this act of elision, couched in the language of empire and a missionary job, that hides the fact that it was Algeria that made Bourdieu, and not the other way round. Bourdieu's first four works of distinction are about Algeria. By writing about Algeria, Bourdieu re-wrote himself (if I may paraphrase American cultural theorist bell hooks). As with Foucault and Derrida, it is North Africa that helped him to part with the Althusserian influence and re-build himself.

My biographical readings of these icons, which emphasize the life-story connection of these key figures with the postcolonial margins, is by no means an exhaustive one. Some of the obvious other examples include Welshman Raymond Williams and how the experience of English colonialism transformed him into a perceptive and subtle theorist of culture. In addition, Jamaican-born Stuart Hall's project of theorizing the margin into the mainstream is by itself a remarkable example that is a well-known story. As Roger de la Garde (2005) demonstrated in his recent study, Stuart Hall's *Encoding/Decoding* is probably the most listed work in communication studies courses in Québec (see also Gurevitch & Scannell, 2003).

Perhaps the most paradigmatic example is Canada's Harold Innis, a historian who gave us our understanding of power, space, and the staple in the structuring of empires. Innisian scholarship is a veritable cottage industry in theorizing communication in Canada. But even Innis, who can be positioned as a scholar from the margins of his time, is also a scholar from the centre, with respect to gender. In a recent meticulous re-tracing of Harold Innis' intellectual legacy, Black (2003)

points out how existing Innisian scholarship does not acknowledge his indebtedness to his wife, Mary Quayle, who greatly contributed to his problematization of time and space with respect to the materiality of media forms.

The more we learn about her life and work, the more room there is for speculation about her influence on Innis' thought. Features of Innis' books that are enigmatic in light of his own background may well be explained by Mary's presence. Among these features is the remarkable fact that Mary, daughter of a telephone engineer, wrote about media before Harold Innis did (Black, 2003, p. 435).

Innis' ambivalent position as a scholar of both the centre and the margins represents the perfect metaphor for Canada, a postcolonial country that is also part of the hegemonic states of the world, politically speaking, as a member of the G7, which also includes Britain, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, and of course the United States.

### **Conclusion**

I started thinking about writing this critique as an exercise in self-reflexivity. I wanted to understand the trajectory of my own academic formation. I enrolled in a doctoral program with a research proposal to study ethnicity and media, but I ended up with a doctoral dissertation on development communication policy. While I do not recall meeting a sentinel that re-directed me to write a policy-related thesis, I can in retrospect understand how I came to be interpellated through a particular canonic mode of address into my current formation.

The main point of this critique has been to demonstrate the function of the margins in the theoretical and epistemological edifice upon which university programs in communication and culture are founded. As in other cognate areas of inquiry, communication and cultural studies have established their very existence on the canvas of the margin, be it the geographical other (colony); the racial, gendered, sexual other; or the economically disadvantaged other. By tracing the genealogies of what have been positioned as key paradigms or iconic figures in communication studies, it is possible to demonstrate how their theoretical works drew upon or were written over earlier problematics. By revealing the canonic authority underlying these privileged texts, one may open up a discussion of how relations of power and privilege are sustained academically.

The three paradigms and iconic figures that I have reviewed here help us understand the pull toward more established modes of inquiry. Yet, ironically, a close examination of these three paradigms reveals that what are seen as the margins of theory in communication and cultural studies are what actually hold the field of study together. And here we should recall the quotation of Jody Berland (1999) at the beginning of this paper, which plays with the metaphor of space marginality to theorize how the margins play a profound role in structuring the very condition of possibility of a written text.

The icons that I have discussed travelled to the laboratory of the margins to produce their finished good: theory. In my analysis of the canonic economy of communication and culture I have tried to demonstrate how theory is often generated from the margins to edify the centre at the same time as these contributions are often erased. As with the structure of an imperial economy, the periphery becomes a site for producing the "raw materials" for the production of the finished goods, often

consumed elsewhere. Such an economy denies the very presence of this structuring absence. In view of this supporting evidence, communication theory, without acknowledging the spaces, places, and people that underlie it, easily becomes complicit in the imperial project of producing a canonic economy. To deny these dynamics can only re-establish colonizing relations of knowledge production within the epistemic space of communication studies. If these margins hold the centre of communication and culture together, so to speak, is it not high time we acknowledge this and work together to collapse this system?

If race, gender, sexuality, otherness, identity, and marginality are the fountains from which communication, social, and cultural theories are rejuvenated, then what is the place of these issues in our curriculum and in our pedagogy? Should feminism, critical race theory, and queer and postcolonial theory only come in as optional electives, despite their conceptually generative projects? Is it not high time we justified how we come to decide on required and elective courses in the various communication undergraduate and graduate programs in Canada? In other words, should these areas be further marginalized as niche markets in an unacknowledged imperial epistemic economy of communication and culture? These questions require more time and space than this paper will allow. This is a task reserved for another day, as it raises the next line of inquiry, which will require a more comprehensive study of specific graduate and undergraduate curricula in Canadian universities.

Given the official image of Canada as a multicultural country, one would expect issues about interethnic diversity, gender, sex, and other forms of identity-based and geography-based groupings to feature appropriately, and prominently, in communication curricula. If you look around your program, department, or school and see that it is not so, you may join me in asking why. If you share my concern, then consider this critique as a first attempt to alert our epistemological sensibilities to these matters to initiate a constructive and transformative dialogue.

## Notes

1. A shorter version of this paper was presented in Montréal at Trackings: A Symposium on the History of Communication Studies in Canada at the Department of Communication Studies, Concordia University, on November 4, 2005. In this expanded version, I acknowledge the timely comments of two anonymous reviewers, as well as the suggestions of Kim Sawchuk and Fred Fletcher.
2. Roger de la Garde made this point at the Concordia University symposium on the history of communication studies in Montréal on November 4, 2005. His paper was entitled "Required readings for students: convergence or divergence?" For an American attempt at defining canonic texts in communication studies, see Katz et al., 2003, where after some trepidation, some texts are suggested as having acquired or nearing canonic status.
3. When they had to end this unethical practice years later, Pool lamented, "The organization with which I am affiliated, the Center for International Studies of MIT has in the past had contracts with the CIA. A year ago, we decided regretfully not to take any new contracts, not because some people do not like the CIA but for the simple reason that the classification placed on the existence of contracts, even though the work was unclassified and published, prevented disclosure of the party for whom the work was being done" (quoted in Samarajiwa, 1987, p. 11).

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