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Review of Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*.

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Lydia H. Liu, *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004. 318 pp. ISBN 0674019959.

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An impressive blend of archival research, theoretical reflection, and political intervention, Lydia Liu's *The Clash of Empires: The Invention of China in Modern World Making* (henceforth abbreviated as *The Clash*) constructs a fascinating genealogical account of the intense battles and negotiations around concepts of civilization and sovereignty, power and meaning. Spanning several centuries of interaction between two very different empires—that of the British and that of the Manchu-Qing—the unlikely crux of this genealogy is translation. Liu calls it the "semiotic turn in International Politics."

The Clash is a history of translation in every sense of the history in which translation names the crucial operations of "invention" and "world-making" cited in the work's provocative title. Indeed, if we are ever going to overcome the exceptionalism of national history instituted since the nineteenth century and move on to develop new modes of telling stories about the past that are neither mythic nor substitutions exchanging the framework of *civilization* for that of the nation while still preserving the basic structure of exceptionalism, translation will, by definition, play a central role. A growing body of engaged scholarship, among which the writings of Lydia Liu must be given special prominence, shows that translation has played a crucial, biopolitical role in the transition from ancient imperial realms to a single, global world divided into a geocultural system of sovereign nation-states. Translation, as *The Clash* would have us understand it, not only makes *history* (being the praxis of a self-aware subject of knowledge upon its own conditions of possibility), but of equal importance, also makes a *world* (the frame or ground without which subjectivity would seem to be impossible). The legacy of this modern regime of translation is not limited to the historical injustice inscribed in the framework of international law and the geocultural divisions over which it normatively presides (i.e., it is not limited to the Eurocentric legacy of world history as such) but extends in fact to encompass the disciplinary divisions of the human sciences, the anthropological presuppositions upon which they are based (even today), and, perhaps most pertinent, the geopolitical divisions of the post/colonial world order that organize, justify, and rationalize biopolitical violence. It is no wonder, then, that the narrative voice regularly shuttles between redressing injustice in the distant past and pointing out its specters in the present (or, really the recent past—what amounts to the present in the specialized temporality of academic writing and recognition). In the fashion of the best postcolonial criticism, Liu invites the reader to stand witness not just before the way in which English imperialism manipulated expressions of right and injury to legitimate the defeat of another empire by projecting upon it the negative image of imperialism's own conjuring barbarism, but also before the infiltration of this othering conjuration into the norms that structure knowledge in the postcolonial period. Like Michel Foucault's work, which wrestled the archival method of research away from historicism and turned it into a means of genealogical inquiry, a "history of the present" whose primary interest lay not in the perfection of historical knowledge whose function was largely aesthetic, if not downright anesthetic, but in the transformation of the subject of knowledge herself, Lydia Liu's work is constantly mindful of the overwhelming prejudice that continues even today to structure the entire economy of comparison from which the disciplinary divisions of the human sciences derive their legitimacy.

An exemplary instance of Liu's acute awareness can be found in the author's brief introduction to Charles Peirce's concept of the symbol—which forms, along with the icon and the index, a triad that defines the semiotic object. While the icon is mimetic and the index is deictic, the symbol pertains to the realm of the conventional. What is unique about Liu's treatment of Peirce is the way in which she draws our attention to the operation of translation implicit in the etymological gesture without which Peirce cannot establish the conventional meaning of the word "symbol." The coexistence of multiple definitions in the ancient Greek that triggers indeterminacy throughout the signifying chain suggests how "conventions"—such as linguistic usage and translational equivalence—inevitably refer in the modern era to juridical institutions such as the state that regulate a series of thorny ontological questions concerning the status of the individual. It would be impossible in the space of a review to describe the problems of individuation, let alone the connection between the state form, translation and metaphysics, yet a minimum familiarity with the problem is necessary to proceed with our review. By individuation, we mean the problem which can be summarized under the question, how is it that something comes to be counted as one? Leibniz's assertion that holds "that which is not *one* being is not a *being*" emblemizes (or translates) an entire tradition of ontological presuppositions. Clearly, some sort of presupposition of discrete individuation plays a crucial role in what Liu calls the "hypothetical equivalence" essential to the modern regime of translation. Without the presupposition of an ontological equivalence between entity and unity, there could be no way to posit equivalence. The denouement of these problems lies, of course, beyond the scope of this review, but we shall consider some of the implications.

Peirce's response to the problems of individuation in relation to primary nominalization was to introduce a necessary fiction—the scene of an imaginary "first encounter" between peoples with no historical memory of contact—and then to use that scene as a vehicle to privilege "mimetic iconicity," i.e., the primacy of the mimetic and the deictic, over the symbolic. Liu astutely ups the ante by reminding readers that seemingly innocuous theoretical fictions such as "first encounters" often conceal real injustice. Daniel Dafoe's ode to sovereign individualism, *Robinson Crusoe*, provides the archetypical instance of the Peircean scene, concretized in the specificity of social relationships marked by colonial difference and colonial violence. Lacking any common language, Crusoe attempts to communicate his command of the situation to Friday by means of pointing his gun at a parrot, firing the gun, and killing the parrot. Needless to say, parrots only mimic, they do not point; hence, the ultimate supremacy of Crusoe's power is deictic: it does what it says. Liu observes, in a passage to be relished as much for its understated clarity as for its far-reaching implications:

To Crusoe, the failure of communication poses an immediate threat because it means that Friday would not *recognize* him as the sovereign of the island or his gun as that "wonderful Fund of Death and Destruction." His first task, then, is to terrorize Friday, to make him comprehend the sovereign power of himself and his gun and be subjugated. (16)

Since Hegel, the discourse of modernity has been founded on a dialectic of recognition that ultimately forms the negative basis of the modern political system organized around the principle of sovereignty. The doublespeak regularly utilized in contemporary public debate has probably obscured from memory the fact that "terror" in the modern political sense originally—and

exclusively—referred to violence undertaken by a state against its "own" or another population. When Liu emphasizes "that the power of Crusoe's gun lies not in its physical ability to take the other's life but in its very indexicality as a sign of terror" (16), Liu has put her finger, so to speak, on nothing less than the founding metaphysical myth of the modern state.

The state, of course, cannot be thought without reference to violence, and in the context of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century imperialism, the relation between the two as well as the composition of each undergoes tremendous change. It is not a question of reviewing this history here: we are all familiar with the Hobbesian myth concerning the nature of political violence—the quintessentially modern myth (the very *concept* of myth being intrinsically modern) which holds that without the beneficent mediation of the State, human populations would be reduced to a barbaric "state of nature," the war of all against all. This barbaric "state" is projected onto a hypothetical historical origin, giving rise to the time-worn distinction between *civilization* and *barbarism* that articulates a hypothetical teleology—the supposition of *progress* so highly prized by moderns—to an equally fictitious notion of sovereign power as being precisely that power which is so exceptional, it does not require any justification whatsoever outside of its own, self-appointed nature of decision (over life-and-death). Concomitant with the Hobbesian myth of a "state of nature," there is a corresponding series of hypotheses about how power arises from the barrel of a gun, and, in a metaphysical register, about the primacy of indication over signification (not to mention the fundamental discernability of the two). By combining these two hypotheses, we arrive at what ought to be called, in a name that draws from the implicit in Liu's argument, the *irreducible indexicality of sovereign terror*.

At this point, the savvy reader will be deeply rewarded by back-tracking a few pages in the narrative to return to Liu's earlier remarks about Peirce's discussion of Greek etymology for the word "symbol." Here, we find a devastating critique aimed at a philosophical program common to much of modern scholarship: "Peirce is clearly engaged in a manner of reasoning, common among those who look toward Greek or Latin roots to help secure the meaning of modern words, that requires the hand of translation to perform the etymology yet simultaneously occults the traces of that redoubled, authorizing gesture" (12). The philosophical kernel of this intellectual project comprises two different steps. The first, which is metaphysical, distinguishes between indication and signification by virtue of a series of exceptions that establish the legitimacy of the distinction, yet do it in such a way as to generate signs (what modern linguistics since Roman Jakobson calls the "shifters" that indicate nothing but the instance of discourse) that control the metaphysical shift or oscillation between the two. The second, which is political, establishes the fictional unity of community by means of translation. In Peirce's case, the exception concerns one of the two etymological meanings of the ancient Greek word *symbolum*, and Liu deftly shows how the act of translation itself exemplifies Peirce's understanding of the symbol much better than his own etymological explanations. True to the poststructuralist understanding of translation, Liu holds that all linguistic practice is accompanied by the epistemological problems of metaphor that defy a rigorous distinction between indication and signification. Yet the true effectiveness of the etymological gesture utilized by Peirce lies in a surplus meaning that effaces the trace of the translational moment. Although Liu regrettably is not interested—at least not up to this point in her career—in pursuing this critique of the etymological gesture to attack the well-ensconced edifice of scholarship and political thought built upon the presupposition of civilizational identity actually derived from the effacement of translation), her critique of Peirce

is quite effective in setting the stage for the central innovative concept advanced by the book, what Liu calls "the super-sign."

In this context, it would be apposite to remark that a sustained reflection on the metaphysical problem of indication and signification and its possible consequences for modern political philosophy has been undertaken by the contemporary Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben. Although Liu cites Agamben in reference to the latter's well-known, later work on sovereignty, *Homo Sacer* (1994); she does not relate it to Agamben's seminal work, *Language and Death* (1991), a book whose consideration of the metaphysical oscillation between indication and signification not only establishes the trajectory that will be pursued by Agamben in his later studies of sovereignty but also would, it seems to me, be germane to the context of Liu's own discussion of indexicality, colonial violence and translation in *The Clash*. Agamben's sensitivity to the metaphysical problems initiated by linguistic shifters does not prevent him from succumbing to the Peircean gesture identified by Liu, whereby a certain historical narrative about first-time events in Western culture, politics, and philosophy occurs through the instantiation of indication ("see, the West is right there!") accomplished by the transfer of signification through translation. The question to be posed to Peirce, Agamben, and the plethora of other scholars like them, is not whether there are archives of texts bearing within them all manner of material differences as well as a high-degree of intertextual referentiality organized around shared themes, conceptual concerns, and inherited signs. The question, rather, concerns the relation between those archives and social formation. What is "tradition" but both the presupposition *and* concomitant effacement of translation? That which distinguishes modernity as an epoch is not the presence of practices and symbols inherited from the past, nor the fact that communication with people who may not understand me is necessary, but rather the organization of such essentially *practical* and *social* differences according to a spatialized representation of translation as exchange between commensurate communal entities—an understanding that essentially hides both the heterogeneity of the translator (and the social relations that call for translation) and the heterogeneity of the languages that supposedly preexist the translational encounter. In previous work collected in a volume titled *Translingual Practice* (1995), Liu had already posed these questions, explicitly placing her work in the context of reflections opened up by twentieth-century thinkers from Walter Benjamin to Jacques Derrida. Liu takes her distance, however, vis-à-vis these Europeanists suggesting that "Perhaps the thing to do is to go beyond the deconstructionist stage of trying to prove that equivalents do not exist and look, instead, into their *manner of becoming*" (16). Nearly a decade later, *The Clash* carries on that fecund promise, taking the examination of "how hypothetical equivalents come into being" to a new depth of scholarly accomplishment.

That which is, however, overlooked in the process of this fascinating intellectual itinerary is the kernel of *invention* inherent in some of the better instances of deconstructive reading. (Jeffrey Nealon argues, in *Double Reading* [1996], that this would be the difference between the de Manian and Derridean versions of deconstruction, the former lending itself to sterile institutionalizations, the latter promoting fertile cross-boundary pollinations.) In contrast to Liu, who sees deconstruction simply as a "stage" at which illusions such as the hypothetical equivalency established by translation between otherwise incommensurate languages are shattered, philosophies of difference enable a radical liberation from notions of language as a totality the closure of which can be reduced to the exteriority of a referent to a signifier. I am

convinced, in other words, that the deconstructive understanding of translation is much more expansive than Liu assumes. It enables us to see that translation is precisely what constitutes "languages"—understood in the modern sense as systematic totalities—as such to begin with. This thesis was implicit, we would argue, in the discussions of translation advanced by Jacques Derrida in a series of works from the 1980s. (Readers may consult the second half of Jacques Derrida's *Du droit à la philosophie* [1990].) True, he did not grasp this radical possibility in a fundamental and concrete way—we attribute this inability to the inherently Eurocentric limits of his formation in the sense described by Gayatri Spivak—leaving it to languish as a theoretical possibility. The honor of that accomplishment must be credited to Naoki Sakai, whose work on translation surpasses Derrida by going where the latter's work *would* go if only it could, effectively realizing the inherently *inventive* possibilities of deconstruction. Tobias Warner's summary of Sakai's position on translation is classic and deserves, in this context, full citation:

Naoki Sakai's claim [is] that translation is not a bridge between languages, but rather what divides them. This inversion stems from the deduction that only in translating can one actually claim to deal with two distinct languages. What we commonly conceive of as "translation", then, is a strategy for defining and managing the difference between languages. This most common representation of translation is complicit with diverse strategies of domination and subjectification: because it territorializes linguistic communities, translation elides the fundamental discontinuity that precedes it, manufacturing manageable species difference out of the singularity and incommensurability of languages. In his *Translation and Subjectivity*, Sakai shows how "Japan" as a nation became thinkable only when a group of eighteenth-century scholars translated texts from Chinese into Japanese, a non-distinct language their work performed into existence. The implications of this way of thinking about translation are more than conceptual. Each territorialized, unitary language is paired off against another commensurable unity—a move that in turn enables the representation of larger unities, such as "the nation" or "the West." (Warner, "Bodies and Tongues: Alternative Modes of Translation in Francophone African Literature")

Translation creates not just the hypothesis of equivalency that Liu reveals to be unmanageable, it also creates an illusion of self-sufficiency in place of (the reality) of relation. The most common form of this illusory self-sufficiency is the idea that discrete languages pre-exist the translational situation, making "translation" into a relatively secondary, exceptional case vis-à-vis the mainstream of normal language usage (precisely the position adopted, for instance, by Jakobson). Many of the familiar disciplinary divisions of the human sciences are fundamentally based on this linguistic assumption.

Liu's position amounts to a tense dialogue with deconstructive philosophies of difference that capitalizes upon many of their fundamental insights and themes without, however, subscribing to the radical indeterminacy such work implies. Liu's work constantly arrests the deconstructive machine precisely at the point at which originary difference might call into question the positing of discrete, different languages that pre-exist the indeterminacy of the translational exchange. This interdiction is nowhere more evident than in Liu's concept of the super-sign. Properly speaking," Liu writes,

a super-sign is not a word but a hetero-cultural signifying chain that crisscrosses the semantic fields of two or more languages simultaneously ... The super-sign emerges out of the interstices of existing languages across the abyss of phonetic and ideographic differences. As a hetero-cultural signifying chain, it always requires more than one linguistic system to complete the process of signification for any given verbal phenomenon. (13)

The super-sign, in other words, is the conceptual apparatus by means of which Liu intends to resolve (or again, to deploy and yet contain) the fundamental indeterminacy unleashed by deconstructive practice.

The problems posed by the concept of the super-sign do not stop there, and it is fitting that our main axis of approach intervenes in the specific details of the one "super-sign" discussed in detail by Liu—the "three-way commensurability of the hetero-linguistic sign 夷/i/barbarian" (33). Discussion of this super-sign in Chapters Two and Three forms—together with Chapter Four's marvelous discussion of the role played by translation in the establishment of the self-justifying universalism instituted by nineteenth-century international law—the theoretically challenging part of the work. Although the word *yi* had been deftly domesticated by the Manchu rulers that assumed the Imperial throne in 1644 into a discursive regime that was essentially geographic, the British encounter with the crumbling Manchu-Qing empire two centuries later irrevocably ethnicized the word. This ethnicization was accomplished by a fantastic equivalency to the English word *barbarian*. As part of the series of "unequal treaties" imposed upon the Qing, usage of the term *yi* was banned from currency in official Qing documents by Article 51 of the Treaty of Tianjin (1858).

Significantly, the hypothetical equivalency enforced by international treaty enabled a compelling narrative in comparative civilizational history that establishes a parallel between the ancient Greek world-view and the imperial Chinese one. Liu's seminal insight about the specious role of translation—particularly from ancient Greek and Latin—in establishing the authority and identity of tradition is apposite here. In effect, the representation of equivalency between Chinese and English enabled by translation serves to efface the crucial role that translation had already played in the establishment of an ancient Greek lineage supposedly inherent to "Western civilization." This representation has, over the course of two centuries, become virtually unquestioned, forming the basis, for instance, for the notoriously misleading (we should say, prejudiced) history of Chinese racism seen in Frank Dikötter's *The Discourse of Race in Modern China* (1994)—a work that essentially exonerates the West through a discourse of comparative civilizational history by exhibiting the fundamental ethnocentrism and racism of other historical populations such as China. *The Clash* is thus an important intervention into a form of prejudice inherited from the colonial era that forms the pernicious part of "common sense" held in honor by contemporary popular and academic discourse alike. This intervention is significant not just for Chinese studies but for popular understanding about China as well; needless to say, it also conveys significant implications for the understanding of the non-West (beyond China), and calls for us to undertake a thorough critique of the ways in which the colonial prejudice continues to haunt contemporary knowledge and social relations. Liu's work forms an essential, leading contribution to this project.

A technical niggler in the way Liu constructs her understanding of the crucial super-sign *yi/barbarian* calls, however, for greater scrutiny. Shortly after introducing the "three-way commensurability of the hetero-linguistic sign" composed by the Chinese character 夷, its romanization as *I*, or again *yi*, and the English word *barbarian*, Liu parenthetically explains that the super-sign will henceforth be "represented as *yi/barbarian* for convenience" (33). Liu does not explain the basis for this convenience. We can assume it is designed to be reader-friendly while at the same time economizing on the considerable editorial cost posed by inserting Chinese characters into English print books. (The book follows the convention of providing a useful glossary of Chinese characters for which specialist readers are bound to feel grateful.) The otherwise insignificant and user-friendly elision of the Chinese character becomes a bit more complicated, however, as the reader realizes that it parallels a fundamental, theoretical oversight in Liu's approach to comparative linguistics that bears profound implications for some parts of the historical argument deployed by *The Clash*.

Although Liu writes at great length about translation and romanization, she does not consider the difference between *transcription* and *transliteration* and their relation to the nationalization (standardization) of language instituted by modern states, including colonial ones. John Whitman, a specialist of Japanese and Korean linguistics, has observed that in the course of colonial history transcription became the dominant mode of romanization, supplanting transliteration. Whitman calls this "colonial romanization" and pointedly reminds us that the initial "consumers of colonial romanizations were not in the first place native speakers, and the purpose of these systems was at least partially pedagogical" ("Transliteration: a Brief History," paper delivered at the faculty fellow seminar on translation, Society for the Humanities, Cornell University, October 31, 2004). Whitman's observations become significant when considered in the context of historical nationalization. The colonial romanization, based on a view of language that fundamentally incorporates the perspective of the foreigner, not only comprises an implicit moment of translation, it also becomes the basis for the national romanization systems used in the process of constructing nation-states in East Asia. Romanization systems are part of the pedagogical system of national education in most, if not all, East Asian states today. Needless to say, linguistic pedagogy is not just a technical convenience but comprises an irreducible ideological component for the construction of a modern nation-state, as native populations with their myriad differences have to be reorganized into members of a homogeneous national community. This is precisely what Liu, following Derrida, calls "the foreigner within the sovereign subject" (106); and it must be distinguished from another sort of "foreigner" that would be the sign, in deconstructive parlance, of originary difference (precisely what sovereignty tries to master in a metaphysical sense). This foreigner is not the one that is constructed in symmetrical form by competing nationalisms, but the one that comes before and escapes all dialectics of sovereignty.

Eliding the Chinese character 夷 allows us to forget the fact that before the twentieth century, there was no standard "Chinese" pronunciation for that character. Indeed, seen from the perspective of modernity, with its nationalized languages, ideographs such as Chinese characters seem inherently designed to obviate the need for translation. Written the same way, 夷 could be pronounced in any number of different ways, depending upon the "dialect" in use. In other words, *I* (*yi*) is a transcription, not a transliteration. Of course, the term "dialect" in reference to non-standard Sinic languages such as Cantonese, Hokkienese, Shanghainese, etc., or again other,

non-Sinic languages such as Korean, Japanese and Vietnamese, etc., is itself part of the ideology of national language instituted by the modern idea of sovereignty. For this very reason, the nexus of thorny questions concerning the convenience of proper nouns referring to nationalized languages and peoples cannot be easily put to rest by simple "deconstruction." The possibility of talking about such differences without subscribing, in our terminology, to nationalized appellations remains to be invented. As Agamben notes: "it is only by breaking the nexus between the existence of language, grammar, people and state that thought and praxis will be equal to the tasks at hand" ("Language and Peoples" 69). As an interim measure, it does not require a great deal of imagination to explore the repressed aspects of historical difference. For instance, what are called "dialects" today certainly could have supported the same project of nationalization to which Mandarin was actually subjected. (Indeed, in the course of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, some activists proposed such measures; contemporary advocates of a nationalized "Taiwanese" language provide yet another example.) Hence, the equivalency legislated by the infamous Article 51 of the Tianjin Treaty concerns not just that between Chinese and English, but also that between *I* (*yi*) and 夷 such that difference is codified and incorporated into a unitary formation called "Chinese." Although such an insight might be thought to be Eurocentric inasmuch as it would appear to grant the English word *barbarian* a certain organic unity vis-à-vis the English social formation, this idea can be dispelled when we take into account the work of postcolonial scholars like Gauri Viswanathan, who shows that popular English literary education—destined to educate the working classes in proper national identity—was actually developed and informed by practices in the colonies (India).

It is thus ironic that the example of the super-sign discussed by *The Clash* unwittingly serves to establish a hypothetical equivalence between Chinese and English as *national* languages even as it adroitly builds a critical narrative about the "*manner of becoming*" specific to a particular form of hypothetical equivalency—that established by translation in the nineteenth century which served to mobilize the inequities of colonial difference and codify them in international law (not to mention disciplinary knowledge). We must not forget that other salient form of incommensurability between "Chinese" and "English" overlooked by Liu in her discussion of the nineteenth century: English, by this time, was already entering into a stage of high *nationalization* (whereby differences are homogenized and re-codified by class); by contrast, "Chinese" was a highly differentiated *imperial* formation (including multi-cultural and multi-lingual variation as well as social "class" status) typical of pre-modern social formations. In effect, we are suggesting a new form of historical narrative in which all manner of differences—from class to ethnicity and gender—would need to be reinscribed in a new framework of minoritarian relations composed of labor, life, and language.

It should be clear now why I feel considerable confidence in concluding—and repeating—that the "super-sign" is the conceptual apparatus by means of which Liu intends to resolve (or again, to deploy and yet contain) the fundamental indeterminacy unleashed by deconstructive practice. I doubt that such a resolution is theoretically necessary and hence am not surprised that Liu has proposed the idea—which seems philosophically untenable to me—of "substitut[ing] the notion of *competing universalisms* for cultural particularity to help understand the modes of cultural exchange and their genealogies beyond the existing accounts of colonial encounter" ("The Question of Meaning-Value in the Political Economy of the Sign," 19). Any universalism worth its salt could not possibly comprehend a different, separate universalism: differences would be

intrinsically comprehended as particularities. This is probably the most common fallacy informing comparative work today: since any number of different historical civilizations can be made into objects of knowledge, comparison between such objects becomes inevitable. What is consistently disavowed, however, is that the terms of comparison are fundamentally *subjective*. This is quite different from disqualifying the relative objectivity of archival sources and historical knowledge; it is rather to admit that the only way social objects can be construed and then compared is from the point of view of the subject that triangulates their relation. From the point of view of the actual social formations themselves—inasmuch as they really aspire to universalism *at the level of knowledge* (rather than, say, praxis)—relations to other social formations would have to be *understood* as the relation between a universal and a particular (otherwise the social formation in question could not *know* itself to be "universal"). The call for studies in competing universalisms necessarily assumes another, presupposed level (i.e., that of triangulation) that constitutes, in this context, the "true" universal. The subject that apprehends these objects, triangulates their distance, and compares them in terms of their "competing universalism," *knows* not only *both objects* but also that *neither of the objects is simply "universal"* (the universalism of each is relativized by the comparison with a competing other). The practical effect of studies undertaken in this mode would be to reinforce the presupposition that the only real universal lies in the (hidden) subject of knowledge today. In terms of practical effects it is clear that such privileging of the subject of knowledge comes at the price of dampening the possibilities for subjective *invention* at the level of praxis otherwise promised by the work.

Apart from these niggles and quibbles, *The Clash* sets the record straight on the abuse of civilization and sovereignty in the institution of colonial violence (a history that repeats itself today in relations like those between the United States and Iraq) and provides the only viable horizon against which the vaunted contemporary Chinese national chauvinism should be measured: the crux of the problem lies, then and now, in the violence of colonialism and the subtle ways in which that violence has been instituted. Such institutions cover both social ones such as law as well as epistemological ones such as disciplinary knowledge. What is called "the West" is really not an identity at all, but the name for a certain bipolar relationship in which a dominant pole disavows the relationship, setting itself up as exceptional. Armed with the advantage of this exception, it then proceeds, by means of exploitation and destruction, to actualize the previous disavowal. It cannot be stressed too much that the purpose of this measure is not to substantiate an economy of *ressentiment* in the postcolonial subject (which would favor the creation of identities based on the model of return), but rather to unlock possibilities for the creation of new subjectivities that are completely liberated from (post)colonial sovereignty. Liu's critique of Negri and Hardt is essential:

The genealogy of modern sovereignty as traced out by postcolonial scholars is sufficiently different from the Eurocentric ones constructed by Foucault, Bataille, Agamben, and even Hardt and Negri as to merit serious consideration. The main point of dissent, as I view it, is whether coloniality enters the big picture in the manner of a belated negative dialectic or as the originary condition of modern sovereignty. The postcolonial scholar would argue that modern sovereignty is colonial sovereignty *tout court* rather than its negative mirror image, and, by extension, what Hardt and Negri

identify as imperial sovereignty should be properly grasped as a response to postcolonial sovereignty. (25)

Modern sovereignty is colonial sovereignty.

Conclusions such as this make *The Clash* exciting and required reading for those interested in international relations and biopolitics today. It is to be hoped that the "missed opportunity," as Liu laments, "to engage seriously with the challenge that postcolonial scholars ... have presented [to Negri and Hardt] and to intellectual discourse in general" (248) is only a temporary setback, not a strategic defeat, on the road to the invention of new, practical subjectivities.

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