Disjunctive Strategies of Empire
Colonial Narratives and Readings in International Relations

by

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# Table of Contents

Abstract (4)
Thesis Submission Statement (vii)
Acknowledgments (viii)

Chapter 1
*Introduction: Strategies of Colonial Discourse* (1)
  Colonial Discourse and International Relations (9)
  Toward Disjunctive Methodologies (22)

Chapter 2
*International Relations and the Textuality of Imperialism* (30)
  Tensions of Imperialism (35)
  Imperialism and Textuality (47)
  Imperialism and Culture (56)
  International Relations in Imperial Culture and Textuality (61)

Chapter 3
*Representing Otherness: Locating Colonial Desire in International Relations* (74)
  Representing the Other (80)
  The Ambivalent Economy of Desire (85)
  International Relations as an Imperial Discipline (108)

Chapter 4
*Imperialism by Another Name: America’s Empire in International Relations* (124)
  Historical Missions (133)
  Transition: Theories of American Uniqueness? (145)
  Writing America’s Empire (151)
  America’s Imperial Mission Revisited (170)

Chapter 5
*Bridging Tensions in International Relations: Imperial Strategies and the Writings of Joseph Conrad and Samuel Huntington* (173)
  When Texts Fail Us... (174)
  Joseph Conrad and the Ambivalence of Fiction (182)
  At the Edge of Imperial Anxiety: Huntington’s World Order (201)
  And What of Post Cold War International Relations? (214)

Chapter 6
*“Humiliating Rediscursions”*: Postmodernist International Relations and the Ambivalent Search for the Other (217)
  Postmodernism, International Relations, and the Crisis of Modernity (226)
Abstract

**DISJUNCTIVE STRATEGIES OF EMPIRE**

Colonial Narratives and Readings in International Relations

One of the most important contributions of colonial discourse theory to the study of imperialism is the ability to survey the interaction between the Western metropolises and the colonial peripheries as an effect of more Marxist, enduring, and profound power relations. Instead of confining colonialism to physical and material forms of governance, territorial acquisition, overseas outposts, and so on, colonial discourse further elaborates the texts, mindsets, and prejudices ingrained on both the colonizers and the colonized that legitimize the establishment of empires. But in many cases the examples used in colonial discourse, such as anthropology, history, literature, and travel writing, appear to have limited applicability beyond their deployment during the height of Europe's empires prior to the early 20th century. With the end of the second world war, the emergence of the United States, the inculcation of an "international" world order, and the creation of newer academic disciplines, there is a need to reassess the relation between colonial discourse and imperialism in recent times. This thesis argues that the discipline of international relations (IR) usefully demonstrates how colonial discourse can be recognized as a transformative and self-rejuvenating entity. While the earlier disciplines and colonial writings tracked the mentality of the colonizer by representing the colonial world as exotic, primitive, barbaric, and thereby giving license to the civilized mission, moral, social, and political changes in the postwar world necessitated a different set of strategies. Such strategies had to relocate articulations of otherness within the scope of contemporary knowledge-production while at the same time continue to promote the presence of the West as something always above and beyond the non-West. These continued assertions of power are seen in IR and they particularly accentuate "disjunctive" as a prime feature of those strategies. As a discipline IR impacts an objective way of imagining the world, a microcosm teeming with sovereign states jostling for power and primacy. But beyond such description of sameness, IR implicitly possesses an attitude that is split between the international political process as a truly new formation and a residual imperial desire that continuously vacillates between a need to dominate (especially by the United States) and the requirements of moral rectitude. In a number of cross-readings between colonial texts and IR, this thesis demonstrates that the vacillation is constituted by the continued displacement of the non-West in another time and place, the anxiety associated with never being fully in control of the colonies or the potential loss of power, and the self-referential nature of anti-imperialism, among others.