

ZONES OF CONTACT : BRITISH CULTURAL STUDIES IN THE POST-COLONIAL CONTEXT

One of the tasks facing British Studies - ongoing and (relatively) urgent - is the formulation of analytical models for the work it undertakes. In that spirit, the partial grafting of a Cultural Studies methodology on to older landeskunde-style approaches represents a significant advance. This paper proposes, firstly, that Cultural Studies still has much to offer teachers in the field; secondly, that it nevertheless has particular limitations; and thirdly, that a post-colonial perspective, while in no way rendering Cultural Studies obsolete, is necessary to a proper understanding of contemporary British life and culture.

Briefly, the importance of Cultural Studies lies in its sceptical inter-disciplinarity : breaking down disciplinary barriers, challenging orthodoxies and refusing to take phenomena at face value. There are, however, problems with an approach which was developed specifically in relation to British culture and the British nation-state. The first of these is ethnocentrism, and several post-colonial critics, including Edward Said and Paul Gilroy, have commented on this , particularly in connection with Raymond Williams. A second is the inadequacy of a nation-state-based approach in the contemporary world, in which forces of fragmentation threaten to tear the state apart from within (Yugoslavia and Britain provide examples from opposite ends of the scale of violence), while globalising processes (economic, technological, cultural, etc,) render the boundaries of the nation-state increasingly irrelevant.

Post-colonial critics in particular offer ways of thinking beyond the nation-state which avoid much of the shallow rhetoric of celebration associated with postmodernism or, to a lesser extent, globalisation. While Cultural Studies might, for example, concern itself with questions of power relations within the nation state, a post-colonial approach would look at flows of power within and without the state - relocating the national in a global configuration, examining the effects of Britain on the world and the world on Britain. As one of the better-known post-colonial critics, Homi Bhabha, has said, "The Western metropolis must confront its postcolonial history, told by its influx of postwar migrants and refugees, as an indigenous or native narrative *internal to its national identity*.", while according to Gayatri Spivak, the opportunity offered by a post-colonial approach is "to negotiate between the national, the global, and the historical as well as the contemporary diasporic", and the imperative is to "anthropologise the West." I can think of much worse tasks teachers of British Studies might set themselves.

