

Miller qualifies his assertions by writing that he actually “do[es] not believe in telepathic foreshadowings,” he is unable to abandon this thesis: “it almost seems as though Kafka must have had some occult telepathic premonition of what the genocide would be like, though he got the details sometimes a little garbled” (65). The “almost” invokes the precarious language of analogy; there is a resemblance that Miller as a post-Holocaust reader finds, but an analogy is not an identity. As Bernstein argues, history is not predetermined; the Holocaust did not have to happen. Had it not happened, would we still insist that Kafka’s work obscurely foreshadowed what nearly happened?

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Works Cited

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- Kertész, Imre. *Kaddish for a Child Not Born*. Trans. Christopher C. Wilson and Katharina M. Wilson. 1990. Evanston, IL: Northwestern UP, 1997. Print.

Rumina Sethi. *The Politics of Postcolonialism: Empire, Nation and Resistance*. London: Pluto, 2011. 190 pp. £16.00.

World War II was a watershed. Before, European colonial states in Africa, Asia, and the Caribbean; after, anti-colonial struggles culminating in decolonization. During the conflicts, subaltern intellectuals gave voice to the colonized’s yearning for collective self-determination, a yearning eventually satiated, the story goes, with decolonization. Newly independent, postcolonial states started fulfilling the promises of decolonization with modernization projects and policies designed to conserve the cultural heritage. To do so, they borrowed, often at usurious rates of interest. To finance these loans, they submitted to ruinous debt repayment regimes. Local production virtually asphyxiated by the imposed lifting of import restrictions, national economies collapsed. Those who could (skilled professionals and the educated) fled, most to Europe and North America, where a few entered the Academy. But access to the Academy, like emigration, exacted a price. At the level of the Postcolonial Studies curriculum, coming to terms with structuralist and post-structuralist theories entailed substituting hybridity and multiculturalism for foundational concepts of anti-colonial discourse such as the nation. At the level of ethics, it meant disengaging one’s pedagogical practices and schol-

arly projects from ongoing struggles in the postcolony, including resistance against transnational capital. In the Canadian vernacular, it meant refusing to dance with the one what brung you.

For Rumina Sethi, this refusal, this ideological disengagement from the postcolony, has been costly for Postcolonial Studies. For one thing, it has spawned a cadre of academic “celebrities” whose suspect analyses of postcolonial life are cast in the opaque idiom of “‘high’ theory” (9). For another, having successfully challenged the essentialist notions of national identity that anchored struggles against colonial governance—for example, the stable, unchanging, and even primordial ethnic self—and having in some quarters even declared the nation-state itself irrelevant to the Empire of transnational finance capital, it has failed spectacularly to come to terms with the fact that the postcolonial nation remains, in fact, the site and object of the ongoing contest between globalization and its discontents. For Postcolonial Studies, the consequence has been ideological and political paralysis. So what to do? Give Postcolonial Studies “a historical-materialist twist” (123), Sethi recommends, returning to the nation and the tradition of *activist* scholarship that made national liberation possible. In short, Back to the Future! *The Politics of Postcolonialism* exemplifies this slogan as critical practice.

In part, this return to the past entails historical memory. Beginning with nineteenth-century pluralism (Herder), Sethi draws attention to the geopolitical and economic forces at work when Postcolonial Studies was emerging as an academic discipline in the West: the post-Cold War ascendancy of the United States as a hyper power, the rise of monetary institutions (the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank) and trade regulatory agencies (GATT, WTO), and postcolonial nations’ loss of economic sovereignty. She links them with the poststructuralist assaults on foundational concepts such as “origin,” “truth,” essence, and the referential capacity of symbols, assaults that inspired the discipline to break with Marxism, abandoning the emancipatory ethos that had animated anti-colonialist discourse (Fanon, Senghor, Gandhi, etc.). She denies neither that the analytical methods of “high theory” vary nor that some of its insights (for example, the unintended material effects of colonial governance, such as cultural contamination and synthesis) are valuable. But she does insist that, on balance, it has stripped Postcolonial Studies of its “rigour and radicalism” (59) and enervated its pedagogy. Nor is she more generous in her critique of “postcolonial” studies of US society and culture. For her, postcolonialism has a very specific historical reference: growing out of the 1955 Bandung Conference of non-aligned nations, it refers to “a radical philosophy that promised not only to expose the

ways and means by which territory and sensibility are colonized but also to show how knowledge itself is a form of colonialism" (103).

This is not to suggest that the return Sethi that proposes is, at its core, nostalgic. Rather, it is to show that it is methodological. Her aim is to outline a modality for producing what we might call an *activist* analysis of postcolonial phenomena. The keyword in her method is grafting. By "*grafting ... postcolonialism onto Marxist principles,*" we will again be able to understand "both structures of power and the means of resistance" (21; emphasis added). This horticultural metaphor means setting aside the teleological narrative of the nation as the imaginative horizon of decolonization for one which recognizes that the nation is "the major living political reality" (26) of our times and the site of the ongoing conflict between globalization and its discontents. Thus, her vigorous repudiation of the "end of the nation" hypothesis elaborated by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000). Her repudiation will likely find favour with those whose national borders have been fortified, like those living near the US-Mexico border or passengers holding non-European passports, like Ngugi wa Thiong'o on Virgin Atlantic's Nairobi-London flight 5672 in December 2010. To paraphrase Mark Twain, though the nation-state may have been reduced to a "market unit," rumours of its demise are much exaggerated. Indeed, it is so vital that, far from abolishing it, transnational corporations use it to deploy their liberal "free market" ideology against the collective *national* interests of its own peoples.

To recuperate the activist heritage of Postcolonial Studies and restore its link with "the world outside the academy" (111), Sethi proposes that we rethink the wholesale dismissal of the nation as a category of analysis, revisit the critique of binary thinking, and undertake empiricist analyses of migrant communities in nations of metropolitan capitalism. By so doing, we will become better attuned to the voices of proponents and opponents of globalization. Occasionally given to redundancy, *The Politics of Postcolonialism* nonetheless offers a bracing reconception of the postcolonial nation-state. Focusing almost exclusively on globalization, however, it fails to provide a critical analysis of the role that local politics and kleptocratic regimes play in delegitimizing the postcolonial nation-state and discrediting its authority. For that, perhaps, another book.

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