

Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?

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DEFINING THE PARAMETERS and boundaries of the postcolonial territory is a task not without its challenges. Much of the work done under the label “postcolonial” is content to assume a general understanding of its limits and possibilities. A sufficiently thoughtful definitional and conceptual framework, however, continues to elude us. As Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak writes, in postcoloniality, “every metropolitan definition is dislodged. The general mode for the postcolonial is citation, reinscription, rerouting the historical” (*Outside* 217). In a very fundamental sense, of course, “postcolonial” is that which has been preceded by colonization. The second edition of the *American Heritage Dictionary* defines it as “of, relating to, or being the time following the establishment of independence in a colony” (968). Even this minimally descriptive definition, to no one’s surprise, is not empty of ideological content or the power to encapsulate and transfix a “thing” simply by naming it; it is no revelation that one can become a function of what one is called. Rather than contend with definition when it fails, postcolonial theorists are apt to multiply its connotative possibilities to suit their various needs. Despite problems and limitations in terminology, the description “postcolonial,” in a certain abstract sense, obtains and is used with relative impunity by scholars, publishers, journalists, and so on. While the definitional “postcolonial” might be considered a fairly bounded creature, the actual usages of the term make it a very Protean, indeed, often Procrustean sort of being, which allows us to yoke together, sometimes arbitrarily, a very diverse range of experiences, cultures, and problems (see McClintock). Thus is it used not merely to characterize that which succeeds the

colonial, but also the chapter of history following the Second World War, whether or not such a period accommodates the still-colonized, the neo-colonized, or the always colonized. In their introduction to *Orientalism and the Postcolonial Predicament*, Carol Breckenridge and Peter van der Veer suggest that "'Post' implies that which is behind us and the past implies periodization. We can therefore speak of the *postcolonial period* as a framing device to characterize the second half of the twentieth century. The term 'postcolonial' displaces the focus on 'postwar' as a historical marker for the last fifty years" (1). Meanwhile, Gauri Viswanathan concedes that while "postcolonial" can be defined broadly "as a study of the cultural interaction between colonizing powers and the societies they colonized, and the traces that this interaction left on the literature, arts, and human sciences of both societies," its more popular usage is "to signify more or less an *attitude* or position from which the decentering of Eurocentrism may ensue ("Issues")." Viewed as an attitude or framing device, the "postcolonial" becomes a surprisingly elusive and slippery configuration. The denotative and usually fairly restricted aspects of the term co-exist with connotative features so diverse that we are now beginning to use the more diffuse and ubiquitous word "postcolonialisms" to indicate the spectrum/spectral range of its usages. The confusions inherent in these multiple deployments deserve study not only because the term offers interesting opportunities for specular deconstruction (which it does) but because terminology itself can lead to cognitive erasures, displacements, and suppressions. Further, the more liberal and ranging usages that generously encompass much of the non-white world regardless of local socio-political contexts and that divide history into manageable and isolated segments based on the experience of modern colonialism while at the same time arguing against the false homogenization of Orientalist projects, point us to certain lacunae in our explanations about the world when we use the term. These gaps, in turn, have consequences of material and ethical import.¹

Perhaps part of the confusion, as Arif Dirlik observes, stems from the use of "postcolonial" both as a literal description of formerly colonial societies and as a description of global condi-

tions after the period of colonialism or, as Dirlik goes on to explain, “as a description of a discourse on the above-named conditions that is informed by the epistemological and psychic orientations that are products of those conditions” (332). The multiplicity of meanings obliges us to confront two discomfiting propositions: not only that the map is not the territory but that it is possible, as Baudrillard reminds us, that the map no longer precedes the territory. In this sense, the notion of the “post-colonial” as a literary genre and an academic construct may have meaning(s) completely separate from historical moment(s). Dirlik, in fact, suggests that “one does not have to be *postcolonial* in any strict sense of the term to share” in the themes common in much postcolonial discourse (336). Yet a foundationally historical construct cannot be freed from its connections or obligations to history, both past and present. Nor, I would insist, can we afford ethical blind spots in what certainly was meant to be an enterprise growing from a need for moral accountability.

To critique random and multiple usages is not to suggest that serious criticism does not acknowledge and contend with the above-mentioned dissonances and problems but to indicate that despite scholarly efforts to contain inconsistencies, there is little evidence in postcolonial discourse that it has made a *concerted* effort to examine its foundation in an essentialist and dichotomous binary, or to question the bases and conditions of its very existence, or to measure the gap between enlightened high theory and academically material practices such as hiring, curricular design, and pedagogical method, or to address the material conditions of those inhabiting “postcolonial” societies. Theoretical “advances” in understanding postcolonialism better—evident in the work of a whole range of critics, many of whom are used extensively in this essay and have prompted these reflections—tend to remain theoretical and removed from academic praxis, although their impact cannot be deferred for long. Interestingly, the academy at large has supported and encouraged, even eulogized, the field for various reasons and under circumstances that cannot be left unexplored. The net impact of not engaging in such an examination, even at the risk of being accused of cannibalizing the self in a performative gesture, might

very well be the loss not only of integrity but of any genuine agency in and connection with the actual conditions of the world. If the field has been permitted to gain momentum—and we are assisting in this—let us reason why. If the field is outgrowing what might be considered its initial mandate, let us examine that mandate and how it is changing. If we are now beginning to concede that “the United States is not outside the postcolonial globe” (Spivak, *Outside* 217) and that the term might be “prematurely celebratory” (McClintock 87), let us consider the possibilities that: a) it can no longer be used in conventional ways if it is to be used responsibly; and b) based on implicit definitional grounds, the term itself may obscure a more complete understanding of the issues attached to it.²

The condition of “postcolonial” studies (if one may reduce it to the singular) might be described as “aporetic,” in Nicholas Rescher’s terms, characterized by having to contend with a cluster of “otherwise congenial propositions” that are “mutually inconsistent” since they cannot all be right (21). We cannot claim exemption on the grounds that reason and logic are and have been used oppressively against certain segments of the world’s population because our efforts to explain and examine the “postcolonial” are nothing if not rational projects. My concern, however, is not merely with logical but with ethical consistency, since our enterprise, like any other worth its salt, is value-driven. Currently in the field, definitional and terminological problems collude with a fundamental reliance on binary thinking even as the discipline argues vehemently against it, leading to both under- and over-determinative claims. The currency and respectability of the category “postcolonial,” despite the limitations repeatedly addressed in much “postcolonial” discourse, must be reconsidered at a time when the field is becoming rapidly entrenched in the academy as a discipline, and postcolonial theory begins to assume, incrementally, larger proportions.³ Theory, Spivak has taught us, “worlds” the world, and language is part of this worlding.

One might begin, then, with the word. We can attempt to flesh out the complexity of postcolonialism by hypertextualizing key terms in the dictionary definition—time, establishment, inde-

pendence, colony—and by asking the following questions: How long does this “condition” last? Is every experience that follows from the colonial encounter susceptible to a characterization homogeneous enough to bear the label? (The latter, incidentally, is a crucial question for those studying the “texts” of the areas/spaces called postcolonial.) In a bid to situate it in more specific geo-political terms, postcolonialism recently has been justifiably accused by Anne McClintock of a “panoptic tendency to view the globe within generic abstractions voided of political nuance” (86). One might argue, however, that it can also be charged with a failure to locate itself within a *more* comprehensive historical framework that accounts for continuities along with ruptures. If postcolonialism were to locate itself in this way, a different set of questions would emerge. Within the larger *conspicuous* of historical movements, one might then ask, given that the history of humankind is one of exploitation and colonization of various kinds, is not much of the inhabited world in some stage or the other of postcoloniality? All over the world, people identifying with nations or communities have participated in some kind of colonialist manoeuvre.⁴ History books describe the first settlements of colonists in the fifth millennium, while there is ample evidence of Hindu colonization of far eastern Asia as early as the second century BC (see Mazumdar). It is customary but misleading to fix on colonization as a “Western” preserve, although the term itself may have its roots in Western language.

To suggest that colonization is not unique to modern times is not to deny the importance of European imperialism—its scale and scope, its extraordinarily organized character, its ideological and cultural licensing of racist dominion, or, most significantly (since the previous features may characterize other empires of the past as well), its longevity and survival into the present. Rather, these observations are registered to speculate on the possible impact of focusing only on modern colonialism as if it were a discrete phenomenon, instead of one in a series of colonialist moves, as if the most recent move was the only one visible, as if this selective focus would allow us to explain satisfactorily contemporary situations.⁵ An examination of pre-modern colonial activities, in fact, may give us a more complex understanding

of structures of power and domination and may illuminate the operations of older histories in the context of both modern colonialism and contemporary global relations. Singular focus on dualistic characterizations of the Western colonizer and Eastern colonized, although more tidy as a configuration, effectively erases realities that lie, even if partially, outside the experience of modern colonization. One might include among them “native” breeds of colonization and oppression—a feature of “Third World” nations that feminists, in particular, have been quick to identify. To attribute a complex variety of problems to one teleological source is not only logically impaired but, more importantly, *it is less useful*. In recovering ancient history and placing it alongside the present, one is not asking for a reduction of disparate geo-political experiences to one generic framework of human motivation and behaviour stripped of historical and material contexts, but rather for a sensitivity to the relationships between them in order to better understand both in ways that relate to the here and now. Notwithstanding that human memory may be short, and the list of immediate concerns long, how do those early experiences, one might then wonder, inform later historical phenomena such as religious fundamentalism and the present-day discourse of colonialism/postcolonialism? The questions raised here seem unnatural because the phrase “establishment of independence,” provided in the definitional, exerts a kind of field force, often obliging us to operate within a paradigm that compels us to date our examination from the development of the modernist discourse of nationhood, thus blunting our ability to see the history that precedes or succeeds it.

Admittedly, it is difficult to escape a conception of post-coloniality as integrally tied to European imperialism. As the term is defined and used at the moment, it discourages us from transcending the temporal in two ways: in the first place, it prevents an understanding of colonialism outside the modern period, and in the second place, the “post” in “postcolonial” is in fact a temporal fiction, as several others before me have suggested. To return to a related issue raised earlier but deferred, let us explore the constraints of the definitional. The phrase “establishment of independence,” employed in the *American Heritage*

Dictionary and implicit in our general understanding of post-coloniality, is a description so embedded in the ideology of nationalism and nation-making that it leaves on the gesture of independence the unmistakable, and perhaps forever indelible, trace of the imperial nation—a product, theorists argue, of decidedly European manufacture resulting from the industrial and capitalist movements of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.⁶ Such a view occludes the possibility that “the idea of a nation is to be found as far back as the ancient world, although it is not clear that there was then what we understand as nation today,” thus preventing us from conceiving of pre- or non-European “nations” as colonizers (Kellas 22). Further, it obscures the temporaneity of “nation” as construct,⁷ and the prevalence of dual, even multiple loyalties based on ethnicity, language, and other factors.⁸ As a matter of fact, the characterization of “postcolonial” reliant on this vehemently national sense obscures both the *unnational* character of many independence struggles in their early stages *and* the dangers that lurk in an insistence on national identity in the face of heterogeneous micro-nationalist and sectarian groups thrust into one national space. Thus not only can the European wave of colonialism be accused of suppressing local cultures in finding them “peoples” but leaving them a “nation,” but that postcolonial status, dependent on nationhood for definition and recognition, itself implies rejection of the people’s pre-national past and the proliferation of atavistic manifestations of these local cultures in the present. Narrower communal identities (Kikuyu in Kenya, Ibo in Nigeria, Sikhs in India, to name but a few) challenge the idea of nation based on citizenship and passports. As Benedict Anderson’s poignant phrase, “imagined communities,” suggests, and as James Kellas argues in *The Politics of Nationalism and Ethnicity*, there may be no true communities larger than face-to-face village groups (15). Critics such as Homi Bhabha alert us to the fact that “despite the certainty with which historians speak of the ‘origins’ of nation as a sign of the ‘modernity’ of society, the cultural temporality of the nation inscribes a much more transitional social reality” (“Introduction” 1). Narratives of glorious nationalism, moreover, completely gloss over the fact that independent

nations emerged not only because of heroic struggles but *also* because the empire was becoming an increasingly expensive proposition. Furthermore, while on the one hand the nation is seen as a European construct, on the other, the erasure of the European ancestry of nationalism and the current explosion of discourse on “nationalism” in the context of Third World ethnic insurgence eliminates consideration of the fact that “the two greatest wars of the twentieth century, engulfing as they did virtually every part of the globe, were brought about by Europe’s failure to manage its own ethnic nationalisms” (Chatterjee 4). Having furnished the formula for their existence, colonial scripts continue to inscribe the experiences of turbulent “postcolonial” states in vocabulary designed to match what can only be described as a neo-orientalist narrative—a symptom, Partha Chatterjee would say, of the persistent anxiety of the script-writers. The connection between the globalization of the world economy and the rise of local nationalisms is further obscured in master narratives of the nation.⁹

Postcolonial discourse has addressed some of these issues better than others. It has been successful in shifting attention “from national origin to subject-position” in its relentless assaults on the narratives of the nation (Dirlik 335). I would like, however, to suggest that these critiques usually are centred on the modernist ideology of nationhood rather than on pre-colonial or contemporary manifestations of nationalisms, which ought to be equally significant in any discussion of the crises of the moment. Transnationality and hybridity figure prominently in postcolonial discourse, but they tend to describe more the condition of postcolonial theorists in metropolitan locations than that of those in the Third World who are facing, with material consequences, the persistence of nationalist ideology that is informed both by colonial and atavistic notions of identity. In this sense, one might argue that attention to the colonial moment and an aftermath defined by it continues to characterize the moiety of postcolonial discourse that, to be fair, often acknowledges disarmingly its address to the West.

I have tried to argue that it may be misleading and, worse, unhelpful to think of “postcolonial” issues as *only* those marked

by European imperialism; nor is it always useful to conceive of the “postcolonial” as an adequate descriptor for the diverse experiences of the many nations/cultures thus described. Nor, alas, as Spivak, among others, has observed, is the present moment in these nations “post” the colonial in any genuine, or even cursory, sense, as covert mercantile neo-colonialism, potent successor to modern colonialism, continues its virtually unchallenged march across the face of the earth, ensuring that the wretched will remain so, colluding in, as they did before, but now also *embracing*, the process of economic and cultural annexation, this time well disguised under the name of modernization (Spivak, “Neocolonialism” 221). The continuing and, in fact, increasing economic and cultural *dependence* of these nations in the new world order makes a mockery of the assumption that, by a certain political rubric, independent status has been achieved (this may be debated even on political grounds as we witness the “puppetry” of ersatz independent rulers) on the basis of a signed document. So, too, as discussed above, do the growing tribalism and communal sectarianism in the many trouble spots around the world mock the very idea of the nation. That the economic and ideological characteristics of neo-colonialism make it rather a different brand of phenomenon than old-style colonialism is cause for more, rather than less, concern, since the enemy is now less visible and appears in the benevolent trimmings of “progress.”¹⁰ Anne McClintock objects that “metaphorically, the term ‘post-colonialism’ marks history as a series of stages along an epochal road from the ‘pre-colonial,’ to the ‘colonial,’ to the ‘post-colonial’—an unbidden, if disavowed, commitment to linear time and the idea of ‘development’” (85). Notwithstanding its other limitations, however, “postcolonial” criticism is committed entirely to a repudiation of both Reason and Progress, the twin ideological mainstays of colonialism; effectively, as Bhabha asserts, “postcolonial time questions the teleological traditions of past and present, and the polarized historicist *sensibility* of the archaic and the modern” (“DissemiNation” 304). Yet none of the elements of the “objective” definition provided by the *American Heritage Dictionary* avails in light of these disturbing observations, nor does the “definition” account for the realities of internal

colonization or the role multinationals play in conquering and “annexing” international “territories” and “markets.” It is tempting to concede that abstract shorthand definitions are useful as points of departure or we would discourse ourselves into stasis before we even began, but the point of departure ultimately may determine not only *where* we might go but also *how far*. Analysis of this variety, one is aware, may not only be a vertiginous task but has the potential to paralyze—one might be tempted to dismiss semantic quibbling and academic versions of digging holes only to fill them again and to settle for the satisfaction that a rose by another name would smell the same and a proboscis by the name of a nose would still smell a rose—but let us indulge this genre of analysis for a moment and suggest that, bearing both the seeming indulgence and dangerous potential for total stasis in mind, one might say a little discomfiture is not entirely out of place at a time when the term has gained acceptance and currency in the academy with altogether too-suspicious ease.

However unsatisfactory the definitional and literal might be for the purposes of postcolonial discourse, they have continued to influence, for the most part, the content of what can and cannot be included within the “postcolonial” frame. In much usage that relies on static definitions, the terms “colonial” and “postcolonial” both occlude all but a certain variety of exploitation dating from the marauding and appropriative enterprises of European mercantile expansion; this is because the definitional leads us to a nationalistic conception of colonial enterprise and nation-making, which we have learned, historically is located in European movements. Colonialism, thus, is “modern” colonialism,¹¹ a totalizing term used for the last wave of imperial expansion.¹² Moreover, combining temporal selectivity with what might be seen as conceptual and moral binaries, the term almost exclusively connotes the oppression of indigenous peoples by European invaders, *usually* without acknowledgment of the following: opposition within the mother country to owning colonies (see Nadel and Curtis 3) ; refinement of the proposition that the European civilization was uniformly imperially racist;¹³ recognition of the violence wrought by colonialism on and by *both* colonizer and colonized;¹⁴ acknowledgment of possible benefits

resulting from the encounter; investigation into the very different role played by “*memsahib*” women in colonial situations and the challenge posed by their textual productions to a purely masculinist vision of imperialism; admission of native complicity¹⁵ and internal modes of colonization;¹⁶ serious challenges to romanticized views of the colonized;¹⁷ consideration of the implication in the colonial project of pre-European societal and production models in the colonial project; or discussion of “pre-colonial” colonialism. At the same time, the term “postcolonial” customarily is used to apply to a recent phenomenon that has now passed (which is why it is “post”), to a time that usually indicates British and French departure from Africa, India, the Caribbean, etc., during the last 100 years. Of course, the term can be and is used in reference to the United States and other settler colonies as well, often to the annoyance of those who see these as colonizing nations in their own right. One might note that critiques of such appropriation of “postcolonial” status can only be levied under the comfortable umbrella of the essential binarism that characterizes much postcolonial discourse: critics in Western metropolitan universities can thus pretend that they are outside the economic and political structures of the countries in which they reside, while those in more “legitimate” post-colonial locales can ignore internal modes of colonialism in their own countries, or relegate them to a “different” system of exploitation, or even position them on a continuum with and as a result of European occupation.

The split between colonizer/colonized, vehemently and repeatedly rejected by many postcolonial critics, already problematizes the conventional divisory formulations that characterize our discipline. Nevertheless, this stale split continues to be the basis of postcolonial studies and to characterize many responses to postcolonial writers who venture to critique their native culture and challenge, thus violating, the static principle of “colonizer bad—colonized good.” V. S. Naipaul’s refusal to romanticize colonized peoples and exalt their values on this principle, for instance, has been very ill received by many post-colonial critics. While it may be useful to criticize his failure to depict the ongoing depredations of neo-colonial mercantile

manoeuvres as he touts the importance of responsibility in the developing world, far too little attention has been paid to the fact that decolonization generally has failed. Moreover, there has been no development of a genuinely *decolonized* discourse that might resonate at a more fundamentally material, even economic, level. Thus, for instance, while one may read the recent *Forbes* magazine article entitled “Now We Are Our Own Masters” as a classic example of India’s capitulation to capitalist multinational neo-colonial overtures—symptomized in particular by the launching, by “Dosa King,” of a traditionally Indian item under the fast-food model, announced in an accompanying banner by a figure bearing an uncanny resemblance to Abe Lincoln(!)—the same issue might also fruitfully be investigated in a general frame of collective responsibility and historical understanding.

It is now necessary to ask, but what is the “diabolical” MNC (multinational corporation, often synonymous with American MNC) replacing, and how effective were earlier economic models? Who, apart from the faceless MNC, celebrates the demise of the small producer—individual farmers and farm labour (many of them women and children), indigenous and small industry—implicit in this new model, and why? The sobering fact that “for 95% of the population of underdeveloped countries, independence brings no immediate change” and very little thereafter, and the reality of persistent class-based discrepancies tell us not only about the nature of multinational capitalism (now assuming a faceless, originless, *denational* aspect) *but also about those who embrace it* (Fanon 75). In a divisive discourse of “Us and Them,” the former is not an issue that can be engaged usefully since it would implicate “Us” in the undeniable plight of the people. These questions, for the most part, are addressed selectively in fiery speeches by Third World Opposition leaders, and very rarely in ethical debates.¹⁸ To continue to hold the “colonizer” responsible for superior moral behaviour without engaging the question of one’s own ethical complicity is to deny one’s own agency and to admit to powerlessness—the latter will guarantee that no efforts to change the situation will occur. The dualism apart, this traffic in victimage can have serious conse-

quences for any legitimate efforts to produce a discourse free from colonial reminiscing or, more importantly, to develop an indigenous economic and political model that is able to address local concerns. Most egregiously, moreover, the failure to move beyond perpetrator/victim models seriously belittles the efforts of those who are resisting effectively transnational capitalism and maldevelopment projects in the Third World.¹⁹

Any developing hegemony of a postcolonial method that relies on the colonizer/colonized dichotomy should give us pause, particularly if it casts the “postcolonial” as passive victim and encourages a culture of blame and self-pity—the celebration of self as victim is really to victimize the self anew—at a time when it may be a great deal more useful to examine more carefully one’s own practices. The ease with which European imperialism gained hold in the colonies certainly was due to its superior resources, but it was also a function of the willingness of subjects to be colonized. The question here is not whether native complicity makes colonialism more or less right or wrong, but what does it mean for us today? Until this unpalatable question is examined, it may not be possible to recognize the ways in which previous subjects of the empire are now willing to be *neo*-colonized. In this context, the “neo-colonized” might benefit from the reminder that the “multinational” is not only “them” but also “us.” This observation is rendered more poignant if we consider that virulent critiques of MNCs come not only from erstwhile colonies such as India but often are generated by “postcolonial” critics resident in the putative home countries of MNCs and fully implicated in their economies (see Spivak, “Transnationality”). The metalepsis involved in anchoring the present moment (usually redolent in this context with suggestions of crises) to a selective past and suturing seamlessly the history of the present with the experience of colonial imperialism will only ensure that no genuine understanding of either will ever ensue.

In the academy and the associated publishing industry the term “postcolonial,” hyphenated or not, has been used largely to describe the literatures of former colonies, although increasingly

this restriction does not apply. The cognate terms "Commonwealth" and "Third World" have all but disappeared as prefixes from the body of literature now largely designated "post-colonial," succumbing, on occasion, to the appellation, "new literature in English": the "new" differentiates the writing from "old and established," while the Anglophonic character of the term gives it continuity and position with the old and established. Needless to say, non-English literatures produced in these parts are either still subsumed under the category "postcolonial" or designated by national origin or ethnic markers. "Postcolonial," then, would seem to be the term *du jour*. In the interim, let us also note the rise and fall and resurgence of "minority," "resistance," and "multicultural" literature, all of them betraying significant overlaps with the term "postcolonial." Salman Rushdie's objections to "Commonwealth" and Aijaz Ahmad's to "Third World" as descriptive categories are being registered here to suggest the flavour of criticism against these terms and to salvage relevant materials for a fuller discussion of the deployment of the term "postcolonial." In his 1983 essay "Commonwealth Literature Does Not Exist," Rushdie, after confessing that the seductive environment provided by conferences and cultural forums on "commonwealth literature" might lead one to imagine such a subject actually exists, roundly berates the "new and badly made umbrella" under which disparate non-British literatures are forced to huddle without any regard for their differences. Rushdie concludes that non-Western literature is being ghettoized, contained, and relegated to the margins, in what might even be considered a racially segregationist move. Such naming, he argues, necessarily leads to the literature being read in nationalist terms, often exclusively so, and to a resurgence of exoticism in the guise of authenticity. Moreover, at the same time that the term erases the differences between the various "new" literatures, it confines similarity to the experience of occupation by a foreign nation. Nevertheless, you could call this chimeric creature into existence, he warns, "if you set up enough faculties, if you write enough books and appoint enough research students" (70). "Amen," we might say, as we observe the rapid development in the area of postcolonial studies.

In his rejoinder to Fredric Jameson's much-publicized 1986 essay, "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," which contends that inclusive heterogeneity should be the principle in organizing educational curricula in the West, and that an aesthetics of Third World literature must rest upon its being read as national allegory on the strength of this world being defined by its experience of colonialism and imperialism, Ahmad's remarks often are uncannily reminiscent of Rushdie's objections to the category "Commonwealth." Ahmad bemoans the "suppression of the multiplicity of significant differences among and within both the advanced capitalist countries on the one hand and the imperialized formations on the other" (285), an objection registered against all such terms that deploy simplistic binary bifurcations between colonizer/colonized by a diverse array of critics including Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, Sara Suleri, Diana Brydon, Homi Bhabha, Abdul JanMohamed, and Kumkum Sangari. Ahmad goes on to reject coherent theories that achieve their tenuous unity through obfuscatory and specious generalities. Ahmad's critique of the Three-Worlds theory in general and of Jameson in particular is a complex one and not particularly receptive to hasty paraphrase; suffice it to say that Ahmad alerts us to the limitations of theoretically unified categories and exhorts us to fix our eyes on the need for "greater clarity about the theoretical methods and political purposes of our reading" rather than on the need for more coherent narratives of textual production in this or that part of the world (285).

The use of the categories "Commonwealth" and "Third World" appears to be waning, although it is necessary to note a reconsideration of the utility of the term "Third World" by some critics.²⁰ The growing currency within the academy of the term "postcolonial" (hyphenated in early usages and some recent ones) was consolidated by the appearance in 1989 of *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures* by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin. The compound word, which first appeared in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1959, is used to indicate, as does the unhyphenated word in the *American Heritage Dictionary*, a period that follows colonization. In the introduction to their book, Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin use the term "post-

colonial” to “cover all the cultures affected by the imperial process from the moment of colonization to the present day” (2). They suggest this term is to be preferred over others “because it points a way towards a possible study of the effects of colonialism in and between writing in english [sic] and writing in indigenous languages . . . as well as writing in other language diasporas” (24). The term “Commonwealth” is rejected because it rests “purely on the fact of a shared history and the resulting political grouping,” while “Third World Literature” is seen as pejorative; “New Literatures in English” is considered Eurocentric and condescending towards the new in comparison with the old, even if it de-emphasizes the colonial past, a desirable feature for some (23). The term “Terranglia” is mentioned without comment, but it would seem to carry territorial and proprietary connotations, not to mention Anglocentric ones.²¹ Welcoming the term “post-colonial,” Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge advocate its use on the grounds that it “foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between centre and periphery” (399). They also laud its challenge to the canon. Having said this, however, they call into question the catechrestic reduction by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin of postcoloniality to no more than textuality, and the further diminution of textual gestures to either/or categories: the appropriation or abrogation of English. The exclusivist focus on English, and the insistence on reading culturally syncretic texts without attention to their culture-specific details, are also criticized as features of a post- or neo-orientalist version of critical exercise. *Plus ça change*, in other words, *plus c’est la même chose*. It is useful to recall here Ahmad’s caveat against unified theories that simply dismiss as inessential those parts that do not fit their schematic plan. In the matrix provided by Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin, the relegation of non-Western textual productions to a realm not so much peripheral as invisible—because, barring some translations, they are unavailable to the majority of Western scholars—is an astute strategy if one is going about the business of attempting a coherent theory, but the very presence of these productions poses the most potent threat to any theory from which they are absent. Ultimately, it is not simply that theory is gray, as Goethe

puts it, but that if it does not work in practice, it does not work in theory. Mishra and Hodge suggest that we might talk about not one but several postcolonialisms. The dropping of the hyphen would permit us to recognize one version of postcolonialism as implicit in colonial discourse, thus emphasizing continuity rather than rupture. They also exhort a greater distinction between settler and non-settler countries and a celebration of many small narratives of postcolonialisms, themselves configurations susceptible to change. Their careful consideration of the ramifications of terminological and definitional usage is a heartening effort to disrupt what is often a totalizing tendency in the paradiscourses of postcolonialism.

In more recent years, "postcolonial" has been deployed as an apposite adjective for "theory," "space," and "condition," a distinction not commonly accorded to "Commonwealth" or "Minority" discourse; it has also spawned other impressive neologisms: "postcoloniality" and "postcolonialism." Its evolution from its humble beginnings as a descriptor for literature into the status of theoretical apparatus and a disciplinary entity is a transmutation not unworthy of note. I will argue that among the many reasons for this are some that raise questions about our own complicity, the dubious stakes and standards of the academy itself, and the imbrication of both in our willingness to maintain a discourse system that is diffuse at times and conflicted at its worst.

The growth in the size and stature of postcolonial studies—its validation, in fact, as a disciplinary subject—is coeval with the growing interest in multiculturalism, itself a somewhat diffuse and embattled project. The claim to the label of "postcoloniality" by, or its conferral on, a horde of "multicultural others" recently has become more common. More on this later. The changing ethnic and racial demographics of Anglo-America (already evident for some years in the United Kingdom); the increasing numbers and influence of immigrant South Asians in general and in the academy in particular (postcolonial theories certainly have been furthered more by this group than any other); the development and reception of programs devoted to the study of

other ethnic groups, chief among them African Americans, as well as associated political and economic gains;²² and the increasing availability of texts in English by non-Western authors who are often resident in the West—all these are factors that have contributed to the development of postcolonial studies as a discipline. The concomitant growth of women's studies and the impetus to conceive of global feminisms also should be acknowledged as related and influential, as should the mounting theory in support of representation and identity affirmation. The twin bogies of essentialism and authenticity conjured by the latter have been under much discussion as unstable, performative, and often counter-productive, but a certain strategic essentialism, a "generalizing" of the self to engage a question of some importance while knowing that "one is not just one thing" is accepted by most postcolonial critics as a necessary stage in the developing discourse (Spivak, *Postcolonial* 60). The tenuous relationship of this position, however qualified and mediated, with other related movements of our times bears examination.

Perhaps one of the most significant reasons for the exponential expansion of postcolonial discourse is the host climate generated by the development of postmodern theory and the postmodern critic's suspicion of an objective historical consciousness (Ashcroft et al. 162). Ahmad suggests that the influence on Western thinkers of the colonial encounter and the disintegration of the empire produced an examination of their "place in the world" and much of the mistrust of the text as a hermetic construct; an incidental result of this, Ahmad contends, was that "[l]iterature was pressed to disclose the strategic complicities whereby it had traditionally represented races—and genders—and empires" (58). The postmodern method that ensued allowed a reopening of closed and demarcated territories. Sara Suleri's disarticulation of the Third World woman and denaturalization of the category of woman, the claim, indeed, that "[t]here are no women in the Third World," is a gesture very much in keeping with postmodern disavowal of essentialist productions of meaning (20), as is Chandra Talpade Mohanty's rejection of Western feminism's treatment of women as an "already constituted, coherent group" and of Third World woman as stereotypical

victim, which results in the “suppression — often violent — of the heterogeneity of the subject(s) in question” (333).

It would be entirely appropriate to contend that postcolonial discourse has profited enormously from “the politics of post-structuralism [which] forces the recognition that all knowledge may be variously contaminated” (Young 11). Arif Dirlik has gone so far as to say that “crucial premises of postcolonial criticism, such as the repudiation of post-Enlightenment metanarratives, were enunciated first in post-structuralist thinking and the various postmodernisms it has informed” (336). Postcolonialism’s truck with postmodernism, however, demonstrates a strategic mobilization of some of its principles and a conscious abjuration of others. Drawing upon Linda Hutcheon’s notion of intertextual parody in postmodernist discourse, Stephen Slemon argues that “a ‘parodic’ repetition of imperial ‘textuality’” that “sets itself specifically in opposition to the interpellative power of colonialism” is the “key beginning point” of postcolonial criticism (7). But, according to Slemon, “an *interested* post-colonial critical practice” differs from postmodernist criticism in that it would want to allow for “the positive production of oppositional truth-claims.” In his words, this

referential assumption would appear to make . . . a post-colonial criticism radically fractured and contradictory, for such a criticism would draw on post-structuralism’s suspension of the referent in order to read the social “text” of colonialist power and at the same time would reinstall the referent in the service of colonized and post-colonial societies. (9)

Much of the postcolonial critique of postmodernism, in fact, quarrels with its denial of subjectivity, a luxury not available to cultures still contending for some modicum of expression. Moreover, as Kumkum Sangari puts it, “the postmodern preoccupation with the crisis of meaning is not everyone’s crisis,” nor is postmodern skepticism conducive to culturally grounded modes of de-essentialization; worse yet, it “denies to all the truth of or the desire of totalizing narratives” (243). Nevertheless, metropolitan postcolonial theory is replete with poststructuralist methods and the writings of Foucault, Derrida, and Deleuze and Guattari because deconstruction allows for the critique of what

Spivak refers to as “founded political programs” (*Outside* 121). The serviceability of poststructuralism for postcolonial criticism aside, the connection between the two, one might speculate, is partly responsible for the latter’s status in the academy, a completely indigenous “postcolonial” discourse being either considered or rendered an impossibility for various reasons: the lingering influence of colonial texts in Third World curricula and universities, the continuing need for legitimation of the marginal by the central, and the persistent disregard for any productions that might be de-linked from the metropole or Western modular constructs of postcoloniality.²³

The preceding discussion details one symptomatic instance of two interrelated problems: first, that postcolonial discourse betrays its inability to free itself from the colonial in the same way that the postcolonial nation is unavoidably, and often counterproductively, tethered to its founding “parent”; second, while an incipient discourse may be permitted some conceptual licence and flexibility in using conflicting models, sooner or later, the failure to theorize its own contradictions may limit considerably its potential for useful discussion.²⁴

In light of the comment above, I ask the reader to observe that also significant in the march of “postcoloniality” through Western universities is the mobilization of the term “postcolonial” in the service of displacing, and perhaps erasing, various other unmentionables. A range of critics have articulated their uneasiness about this misuse of the term and the field. Ella Shohat comments on the relief evidenced in a multicultural international studies committee, of which she was a member at CUNY, at the sight of the term “postcolonial” in place of such threatening terms as “imperialism” and “neocolonialism.” It has thus become a “safer bet,” yet another word to name the margin and a way of managing and containing what might be too explosive and incendiary by another name; as Spivak explains, “when a cultural identity is thrust upon one because the center wants an identifiable margin, claims for marginality assure validation from the center” (*Outside* 55). This validation works as a surprisingly efficient clamp on the subversive potential of a marginal movement. Gauri Viswanathan suggests that

the co-optation of certain literature can in some ways diffuse the oppositional nature of the literature. Another negative might be the recent spate of positions in postcolonial literature in the academy in the absence of discussion about what the term means—this could be a way of neutralizing this other presence by including it. A bigger danger—when one speaks about postcolonial literature, one has to be very clear about what it means—is that the term becomes a kind of replacement for other literatures, like Asian [or] African American, without really dealing with the political challenges imposed by the other constituencies or other literatures.

The suppression of these literatures and the recruitment of metropolitan imports from the elite ranks of erstwhile colonies—intrinsically sanctioned and approved by their British education—in the name of affirmative hiring should be matters of greater concern than they seem to be. The hiring and promotion of these individuals in “postcolonial studies” as alibis for real social change circumvent the need to acknowledge the marginalization and exploitation that continues unheeded while the academy produces “highly commodified distinguished professors” such as Spivak and racks up points on the score-card of cultural diversity. The erasure of considerations of class or the realities of the disenfranchisement of native Americans or second- and third-generation African Americans and Asian Americans are masked by academic gestures of acceptance of the visible difference presented by displaced Third World postcolonials.

Lest these characterizations of the reception of “postcoloniality” in the academy seem to smack of paranoia and sinister conspiracy, let us also acknowledge what might be *more* benevolent, if no less questionable, reasons for its acceptance. Julia V. Emberley suggests that

[p]ostcolonial is neither another stage in the developmental logic of colonial history nor part of an evolutionary model signalling the demise of the historical effects of colonialism. Postcolonialism is a contemporary configuration which implies a new direction in the analysis of ideological relations which constitute the ‘First World’s’ symbolic debt to the so-called ‘Third World.’ (5)

In this context, one might say that “postcolonialism” has flowered under the pressure on the West to be understood and forgiven, thus assuaging, at least symbolically, real or imagined

guilt provoked by such texts as Said's *Orientalism* and embraced within the framework of evolutionary and moral progress. Emberley reminds us that the readership for this work, which "circulates as a consuming virus, feeding off ills perpetuated by the epistemic violence . . . of imperialism in an effort to heal the dislocation and alienation that has ruptured the ties between a 'homeland' and academic privilege," is primarily, if not exclusively, North American and British (5).

Effectively, then, we are faced with a *market* for postcolonial wares in this part of the world; I do not use the economic term lightly, for herein might lie another clue to its ambiguous but deceptively welcome usage.²⁵ I mentioned earlier the partially shared origins of "postcolonial" and "multicultural" studies. While it is true that the American education system is now servicing an increasingly diverse student body, the promotion of these fields in an era of globalization must also be acknowledged and reported. The role of the "multicultural" text in this economy is not only ostensibly to instil tolerance and acceptance for diversity but also, one might speculate, to develop a student body mobilized for a global economy, the latter being a role entirely commensurate with a multinationalist corporate perspective (see, for example, Connelly, and also "Shifting Demographics Make Diversity Training Boom"). Success in both areas is yet to be proven or demonstrated; in fact, these texts, while they may legitimately provoke interest in "marginal" cultures for some students, have the potential to further reinforce stereotypical attitudes and may function as rationalizations for a lack of genuine investigation into other cultures. Spivak would argue that "liberal multiculturalism is interested, basically, in bottom line national origin validation" ("Transnationality"); this, in turn, conceivably could have the highly deleterious effect of fostering rather than erasing divisions. It would be pointless to repeat here the argument fleshed out in Arif Dirlik's "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," explaining the currency of the postcolonial in an age of late capitalism, characterized by simultaneous globalization and fragmentation, except to add that it would be misleading, however, to conflate the "postcolonial" with the "multicultural." The "postcolonial,"

as it turns out, can be used as a sanitized “multicultural” text that is located outside the immediate frame of reference and therefore poses a limited threat, if any, while still meeting the requirements of cultural diversity. In coming months it will be interesting to take stock of the respective losses and gains on the multicultural and postcolonial “sides.” With the advent of the “angry white male”—a construct that conceals similar anger among many non-white groups—on the scene of the culture wars in Anglo-America, one might speculate that the more abstract and less politically grounded metropolitan postcolonial discourse is more likely to survive if one believes, as Dirlik does, that “postcoloniality . . . is appealing because it disguises the power relations that shape a seemingly shapeless world and contributes to a conceptualization of that world that both consolidates and subverts possibilities of resistance” (356).

Meanwhile, in programmatic terms, the selection and teaching of both multicultural and postcolonial texts are also areas of some concern. The issue, on the one hand, is one of representation; on the other, it is one of a *particular type of representation*. The contract is a fairly simple one: a) minoritized subjects are encouraged to represent themselves and their communities, in art, literature, etc., and; b) their productions are to be accepted and disseminated, usually by “multiculturals” and primarily through educational institutions, in a spirit of learning, tolerance, and respect. Neither is inherently damaging. The problem is that such subjects are to speak *as minorities*; they are to *represent* their communities and the victimization suffered by them in individual voices; and their texts are to be used, often solo, to “inform” students. The burden on such subjects is great indeed. Moreover, regardless of their own socio-economic status, they are to assume the persona of victim in proxy for the truly silenced others who do not have access to the means for cultural production. So great is the confusion that ensues from such assumptions that hapless students who read Bharati Mukherjee’s *Jasmine* as a realistic novel ask if the author is an illegal immigrant who is a fugitive under the law for murdering her rapist and wonder how she has escaped the immigration authorities thus far. While the students make these naive correlations between author and character,

fiction and reality, one might ask what the academy is about when it encourages students to learn about the world, often exclusively, from token fictional texts. The odd anthologized short story by Amy Tan or Mukherjee's paperback novel, we are to assume, will educate our students in other cultures. The assumption being made is that fiction can do the job that history, geography, economics, sociology, etc., are supposed to. None of this suggests that students *cannot* learn from literary genres, but that this sort of emphasis on representative and proxy status is not demanded from or imposed on texts in the more traditional canon. Meanwhile, while it is not necessary to read the novel as *only* novel, a poem *only* as poem, it is certainly important to *also* read it as a novel, a poem, and so on. One might then read it for its aesthetic as well as "socially responsible" messages *and* use it to raise questions that should be central to the multiculturalist project, among them representation and the benevolent tokenization that replaces previous erasure.²⁶ I would ask that the basic assumption that there is a need for representation of previous unknowns be prefaced by or attached to an explanation of why there is a need, who demands this of us, to whom are we representing, and why is it that some representations are okay and some are not. Here I will spare readers a tedious catalogue of reviews in the popular press that claim such texts will make Americans "better acquainted" with the various Others represented within (see, for example, Johnson). The danger is that the external Other thus produced is always subject to the observer's deadening gaze: "In framing more and more images of the hitherto under-represented other, contemporary culture finds a way to name and thus to arrest and fix the image of the other" (Phelan 2). To collude in such a project without reflection is to wish for paternalism and infantilization—the problem is that one may get exactly what one wishes for.

Another pedagogic issue, this time a curricular one, pertains to the selection of materials for such courses: the choice of metropolitan texts that capitalize on the status of postcoloniality and neglect other candidates (postcolonial as a label is too often used for the "highbrow" migrant, the successful professional) or of "national" texts that will match the composite profile neces-

sary to maintain the self/other model. On the one hand, one can only welcome the inclusion of “newer” literature, even if only in English; on the other, it might be prudent to remember that: a) often a precondition for inclusion into the postcolonial curricula is accessibility in the colonizer’s language; thus any text picked is “marked” by the colonial encounter, even if only by language; b) it is careless to describe and include texts written in English as *representatively* “postcolonial” at the expense of rich and perhaps more telling tales in the vernacular, which may or may not deal with “colonialism” as such; and c) what may be selected for “translation” into the metropolitan academy might be chosen for similarly limited considerations. If the purpose of postcolonial studies professedly and explicitly were to study the impact of European colonization on certain cultures, most of the preceding observations would be superfluous; but, in the first place, this field has ranged beyond such parameters—including, for instance, the consideration of ancient texts such as *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata*, albeit often in the context of their technologized transmission in contemporary India. Moreover, it is purposefully blind to read experience in terms of selective stimuli and causes and impossible to study the present without *all of the past* that precedes it.

Of perhaps even greater concern is the fact that such texts have been introduced into the curriculum on the basis of a forged link—that of a colonial past—which certainly may be a starting point, but there is little effort in the classroom to then examine and problematize that link. Such an approach precludes “a serious study of the specific histories of these other societies: all postcolonial societies, be they of India, Africa, or the Caribbean, are assumed to have a parallel history” (Viswanathan). While difference thus can be reduced to sameness, however, any commonalities with dominant cultural texts can be ignored in favour of difference by ghettoizing these texts and segregating them in their enclosed space. Both would appear to be deficient reading strategies. The opposite of reading only in terms of difference is not necessarily reading in terms of homogenization; good reading should always be about noting the particular—problems arise only when difference is produced as a

totalizing framework. The quest for “sameness,” in fact, might offer surprisingly rich yields. For instance, Gauri Viswanathan recommends as a strategy the advancement of a “postcolonial” method of reading that might productively be employed in the reading of canonical texts: “to really try out something like a postcolonial reading of canonical texts so that what appear to be exclusive concerns to the postcolonial situation—fundamentalism, sectarianism etc.—could be read in relation to nineteenth-century novels—*Barnaby Rudge* for instance.” This could make us

rethink the problems of the Third World, and to consider that these difficulties have become part of an international, global history. . . . Postcolonialism as a method of reading would be a healthy way to counterbalance the ahistorical functions that postcolonial literatures have acquired over the past years.

Viswanathan’s “Tao” of postcolonialism is a useful response to an already-growing trend within the field to subsume other “minority” experiences or to analogize them, although its adoption alone does not obviate the messiness of terminology itself, or absolve us of the need to reconceptualize the bases of our discipline.

In seeking to explore the ambiguities and dissonances that plague “postcoloniality,” I have succeeded only at producing a further list of problems and suggesting that the “postcolonial” turns out to be both in excess of and less than “postcolonial.” The irritable quibbling with definition and usage, theory and practice, that I have asked the reader to endure has been written in the hope that acknowledgment of discrepancies in these areas might prompt a reconsideration of our slippery uses of the term “postcolonial,” in theoretic, pedagogic, and material terms—a project already initiated by critics such as Spivak, McClintock, and Shohat, among others.

The many issues and questions raised here might be seen as springboards for reflection, as well as a useful reminder: if circumstances are complex, let us not be tempted to simplify them for a facile coherence. One might force closure (even deconstruction allows us this academic luxury) to this discussion with the rhetorical and postmodern gesture of placing “postcolonial” under erasure and by concluding that when a postcolonial looks

in the mirror s/he sees the ultimate postmodern construct without referent, but it might be more productive to investigate the systematicity of this discursively produced category and to be alert to the incipient formation of another, "global studies," within the larger framework of what remain abiding but still useful, and certainly responsible, questions: What is the impact, in popular and populist as well as material terms, of generating academic formations that rely on static binaries? How can we teach our students the contradictions and conflicts inherent in our curricular programs? How can we discuss marginalization—certainly it exists—without reducing these experiences in managed and misleading categories? How can we prevent discussions of oppression and colonization from absolving individuals and groups of responsibility? Can we acknowledge that academic "speaking for" minoritized subjects may not only often be a criminal usurpation but an effective smoke screen that diverts attention from more pertinent issues? That we are complicitous in the same exploitative modes of production we are so privileged as to be able to academically criticize? That a certain sort of academic "postcolonial" has prospered by assuming, catachrestically, the identity of "postcolonials," disenfranchised lower-class immigrants and those in our countries of origin who will never be able to escape their material conditions? That ultimately our concerns with terminology and theory may be but need not be idle indulgences if we are able to acknowledge and accommodate the materiality of the world in which they arise? If this list is as tedious as some others I have used, it is to give due credit to the enormity and complexity of the tasks that await us. It is too early to be satisfied with the condition of postcolonial studies and too late to dismiss its impact.

NOTES

- ¹ I am grateful to Mary Vasudeva for stimulating comments and conversation during the planning stages of this essay and many valuable suggestions while it was being written. A revised and collaborative version of this paper appears in our collection of interviews, "Between the Lines: South Asians on Postcolonial Identity and Culture," forthcoming from Temple UP. Thanks are also due to Joseph Petraglia-Bahri. Without his careful and sensitive reading of several drafts and many useful suggestions, this essay would have been completed in half the time.

- 2 Consider, in "Notes on the Post-Colonial," Ella Shohat's injunctions for using the term:
- the concept of the "post-colonial" must be interrogated and contextualized historically, geographically, and culturally. My argument is not necessarily that one conceptual frame is "wrong" and the other is "right," but that each frame illuminates only partial aspects of systemic modes of domination, of overlapping collective identities, and of contemporary global relations. (111-12)
- 3 See Spivak in "Neocolonialism and the Secret Agent of Knowledge": "I find the word postcolonialism totally bogus" (224). In "Notes on the Post-Colonial," Ella Shohat calls for a systematic interrogation of the term because of its susceptibility "to a blurring of perspectives" (110). See also Graham Huggan's "Postcolonialism and its Discontents."
- 4 I follow John Tomlinson in defining "colonializing" as "the invasion of an indigenous culture by a foreign one" (23). Tomlinson addresses this issue in some depth in his introduction to *Cultural Imperialism*.
- 5 For a fuller discussion of the "radically different" nature of modern European imperialism in comparison to earlier forms of overseas domination, see Edward Said's "Yeats and Decolonization."
- 6 Though not Marxist, Ernest Gellner, in *Nations and Nationalism*, proposed economic reasons for the rise of nationalism, that is, the development of industrialist society that took place in certain parts of Europe in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and in the twentieth century in other parts of the world. Particular forms of polity and culture, he suggests, are necessary for industrial economic growth, thus illustrating the nexus between nationalism and industrialization. With industrialization, old states had to change cultural life and social structure to maximize advantages and profits. Gellner does not believe that it happened because European thinkers invented it, but since it was appropriate to the needs of the time. In *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson explores the psychic and economic dimensions of nationalism. He cites print-capitalism as the principal material condition that spreads the idea of nation and the ideology of nationalism, not only within one nation, but throughout the world. Printing standardizes language and aids the development of capitalism and the centralized state. Scientific discoveries and exploration of the world also contribute to this process. Anderson also explores the emotional appeal of nationalism contained in the belief of some sort of perpetuity through membership of a continuing nation.
- 7 "A nation," wrote Rabindranath Tagore, "in the sense of the political and economic union of a people is that aspect which a whole population assumes when organized for a mechanical purpose" (19).
- 8 A 1986 survey in Scotland, for instance, found that 53 per cent of the people questioned expressed a degree of dual nationality (Kellas 19). The proliferation of terms such as Asian-American, African-American, etc., in the United States, and factionalist moves in many other parts of the world indicate the crisis of the national construct.
- 9 Vandana Shiva suggests that, in the Indian context, "fundamentalists fail to relate the current erosion of freedom and autonomy to the Indian state's subservience to global capitalism" ("Masculinization" 110).
- 10 Chamberlain suggests that while the colonizers needed to keep the colonies reasonably prosperous for economic and moral reasons, "multinational companies have no such automatic check upon their operations. In some areas, at least, it would seem that neo-colonialism has proved worse than colonialism" (77).

- 11 The distinction between "ancient" and "modern" is seldom noted in use of the term "colonialism."
- 12 "Last" would be seen by many postcolonial critics as a debatable adjective in the context of ongoing and new colonialisms in many parts of the world.
- 13 O. Mannoni suggests in *Prospero and Caliban: The Psychology of Colonization* that "European civilization and its best representatives are not, for instance, responsible for colonial racialism; that is the work of petty officials, small traders, and colonials who have toiled much without great success" (24).
- 14 Ashis Nandy argues in *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* that colonization emphasized dehumanization of people, institutionalized violence, and social Darwinism both in India and in England; it created a false sense of homogeneity in Britain, which froze any quest for social change; it reinforced Britain's view of itself as benevolent Christian entity, and finally, it reinforced the misguided belief in its omnipotence.
- 15 "Imperialism after all is a cooperative venture. Both the master and the slave participate in it" (Said 74).
- 16 As Gayatri Spivak explains in "Transnationality and Multiculturalist Ideology," in the context of Calcuttan middle class or upper-middle class backgrounds, I've heard young Calcuttan women, anthropologists, talking about how, as advantaged people, they should "relate" to, let's say, for example, the women in the tea gardens. And I asked the particular young woman the question, how do you deal with servants in your house in Calcutta? Why doesn't that question arise? What is the construction, constitution, political feelings, history, relationship to the female servants in our households? I think that's the most important question, autobiographical if you like, we can ask ourselves. . . . You see what I'm saying—that's a post-colonial topic. Simple, but completely undealt with.
- 17 The failure of Indian and Pakistani critics to theorize the embarrassing events of the Partition, for instance, might be cited as a symptom of such blindness.
- 18 See Mies's and Shiva's *Ecofeminism* for a serious discussion on the ethical and ecological impact of MNC-dominated economics.
- 19 See, for instance, the catalog of peasant, tribal, and other resistance movements in Claude Alvares's *Science, Development, and Violence: The Revolt against Modernity* or discussion of powerful grass-roots ecofeminism in Vandana Shiva's *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology, and Survival in India*.
- 20 Ella Shohat, for instance, suggests that "the term 'Third World' does still retain heuristic value as a convenient label for the imperialized formations, including those within the First World" (111). Others have commented on its power when used subversively by those usually described by it.
- 21 As Helen Tiffin notes in "Commonwealth Literature: Comparison and Judgment," the term "connotes an English proprietorship over land and would make all post-colonial Commonwealth nations a little uncomfortable" (23).
- 22 See Ahmad for an extensive discussion on the conditions in which Third World literature as a field has been shaped, and on the role of black studies in its inception and development.
- 23 As Spivak remarks, "the work that is being done on Indian linguistic theory, Indian ethical theory, that stuff is not given any acknowledgement because that is being done in the bosom of Sanskrit departments" ("Neocolonialism" 237).
- 24 Of course, it can be quickly, and accurately, noted that this essay is prone to many of the limitations it seeks to identify.
- 25 I am indebted to Spivak for pointing out this connection in an interview in November 1994 and for thus stimulating the ensuing reflections. Arif Dirlik's

essay, "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," which I encountered as I was revising this essay, has also seemed to me an interesting engagement, however debatable, with the useful question, "Why is now the Postcolonial moment?" It is a question that Mary Vasudeva and I posed to several interviewees for our collection, and one that Spivak, in turn, asked us.

- ²⁶ The question of aesthetics is a good bit more complex than my off-hand remark would suggest. In the interest of containing this already-unwieldy essay, I will defer further discussion.

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