

is clear also to anyone who has seen the PBS documentary called "Deshi" in which Prashad figures prominently and which deals with South Asian immigrants in New York City. No matter what minor criticism the production offers of American life and manners, its primary business is to make the newcomers admit in front of the camera that they could not have found a more exciting and promising haven than the unique and diversity-embracing city of New York. One wonders, then, what spin Vijay Prashad might put on the award of this year's Pulitzer prize for fiction to the hitherto unknown Indian-America author Jhumpa Lahiri.

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Anuradha Dingwaney Needham. *Using the Master's Tools: Resistance and the Literature of the African and South-Asian Diaspora*. New York: St. Martin's, 2000. Pp. 176. \$45.00.

This slim monograph endeavours, with some success, to examine the varied ways "resistance" may be conceptualised in the work of five writers. Despite the broad sweep of its subtitle, the book's primary focus is quite specific: two texts each by C. L. R. James (*Beyond a Boundary* and *The Black Jacobins*), Salman Rushdie (*Midnight's Children* and *Shame*), Ama Ata Aidoo (*Our Sister Killjoy* and *No Sweetness Here*), Michelle Cliff (*Abeng* and *No Telephone to Heaven*), and Hanif Kureishi (*The Buddha of Suburbia* and *The Black Album*). Needham begins with a rather unconvincing rationale for this selection: she has taught and consequently come to know these books well. However, by the end, her idiosyncratic choice has been validated by the wide range of national affiliations, political stances, and forms of belonging in these writers' work.

Needham's approach to the concept of "resistance," which has a substantial tradition in postcolonial writing and theory, is paradoxically both narrow and broad. It is narrow in its restriction to writers with "Third-World" origins who dwell in the "First World," and whose modes of counter-hegemonic resistance-writing are seen to be direct functions of their location in "the metropole." It is broad in its articulation of the diverse literary and political responses that result and the spectrum of resistant positions from which these authors speak: from James's immersion in metropolitan culture to Aidoo's aggressive hostility towards it.

For Needham, although the gendering here seems accidental, the three male writers in different ways can be seen "inhabiting the dominant or hegemonic forms of belonging" (17) in order to offer "insider" critiques of Britain, Englishness, (neo)colonialism, racism and, in the case of Rushdie, India and Pakistan. (Her avoidance of Rushdie's representation of Britain in *The Satanic Verses* seems odd, however, given her interests.) Needham's female authors, by contrast,

exemplify more appositional and (in the case of Aidoo) essentialist forms of identity associated with “anti-colonial (cultural) nationalism” and a much stricter division of coloniser and colonized (17).

Specifically, Needham argues that while James seeks to restore subjectivity to the colonised by appropriating and extending the realm of hegemonic power to include those oppressed by it, Rushdie subversively and parodically “re-plays” a variety of colonial and post-independence representations of India and Pakistan, occupying a space “at once within and outside hegemonic formations” (52). Unlike James and Rushdie, who are characterized in a section heading as “*In, But Not of, the West*” (25), the British-born Kureishi is “*In and of the (Imperial) Metropole*” (109); he articulates new ways of being British that recognize intermixture and hybridity, oppose racism and ethnically exclusive nationalisms without being starkly oppositional, and acknowledge “the complexities and messiness of lived experience and reality” (113). Needham links Aidoo’s work, by contrast, to the Manichean world view of Frantz Fanon; unlike the liminal positions of the male writers, Aidoo draws on anti-colonial nationalism and feminism to critique European dominants from the outside, “uncontaminated” subject position of an African woman. But while Aidoo, according to Needham, takes the embrace of “Blackness” and an angry, revolutionary consciousness as givens, Cliff narrates the process by which a hybrid, transnational subject might move gradually towards such a stance.

Needham’s outline of these diverse resistances is conceptually supple and quite astute; the strength of the book is its deployment of theoretical, biographical, and textual sources to articulate a very specific model of “resistance” for each writer. “Resistance,” she makes clear, is not a one-size-fits-all concept, it must be tailored to fit each author’s self-positioning and textual practices. It should be noted, moreover, that her analyses are unfailingly sympathetic; while some of these writers have been severely attacked for their textual politics, Needham does not join those who see Kureishi as apolitical, Rushdie as neo-orientalizing, or Aidoo as crudely oppositional. Rather, she explicitly states her desire to take the lead from the authors themselves; since, whatever others may say, they all see themselves as engaged in counter-hegemonic writing. Needham aims to demonstrate how, exactly, this is true. Indeed, she hopes we “will be persuaded . . . that these readings could have been intended . . . by the writers themselves” (17).

Given this ambitious goal, then, it is surprising that the readings of primary texts are mostly so partial; a huge book like *Midnight’s Children*, after some intriguing remarks about intertexts, is reduced to a few scenes that support Needham’s thesis and buttress her defence of Rushdie against specific strands of criticism. The much shorter *Our*

*Sister Killjoy* is more fully treated, but Needham frustrates her readers by promising an analysis of “the heady mix of genres and registers through which Aidoo achieves her effects” (79) that she never performs. *The Black Album* gets only a single paragraph, which examines its protagonists’ response to fundamentalism as a version of Kureishi’s own beliefs. Moreover, Needham seems not to have read huge swaths of secondary criticism on these books. With a few exceptions, *Using the Master’s Tools* is not a place to go looking for compelling new readings of its primary texts. I learned considerably more about *Midnight’s Children* and *The Buddha of Suburbia* from my graduate students this term than I did from this book.

I would also prefer to read their often elegant writing to the prose here, which even by the standards of humanities scholarship is bloated and abstract. In striving for nuance and an exacting inclusiveness, Needham develops habits of over-explanation, over-qualification, and repetition that quickly become irritating. The book is strewn with parentheses, hyphens, “and/or” constructions (and slashes in general); readers trip over non-words like “account(ing)s” (23) and “identi(ty)fication” (75, 107), condescending glosses — “beyond (that is, outside). . . the boundaries (that is, limits)” (42-43); “implicated in (not conceived as outside or the opposite of) the dominant” (70) — and unhelpful supplements: “Salman Rushdie’s Method(s) of Critique”; “James scrupulously inscribes and attends to (an)other and different mode of resistance” (42). Syntactic challenges like the following are not uncommon: “Cliff’s delineation of Clare’s (and her own, for that matter) access to the revolutionary identity Blackness represents as an access acquired through conscious choice and affiliation, and, therefore, as a willed process of politicization has important implications for any discussion of identity as primordial or simply given, and for discussions of resistance/resistant positions that depend on such notions of a pre-given, even biologically determined, identity” (105-06).

All of this makes the book a chore to read, and will discourage many readers from getting to Needham’s always interesting analyses of authorial strategies and the intermittently rewarding readings of their texts. Certainly this is not a book/monograph I will hasten (that is, rush) to recommend to my (graduate and/or undergraduate) students; ex-posing them (and their (e)merging voices) to this style/mode of scholarly analysis could inf(ect)orm their (and, for that matter, my own) literary-critical work(s).

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