

Literature and Postcolonial Capitalism

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Aimé Césaire once wrote that the postcolonial world is made up of “societies that were not only ante-capitalist, as has been said, but also *anti-capitalist*” (44; emphasis in original). Césaire’s rearticulation of a civilizational stigma as a political stance is difficult to reconcile with today’s reality: the major societies in some of the most significant capitalist narratives of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries were once marginalized by colonial-capitalist practices. Scholars such as Heonik Kwan observe that the former socialist bloc has become “a stronger believer in the assumptions about *Homo economicus* than the [Western capitalist bloc] is and a more militant advocate of outright market liberalization” (Kwon 47). A kindred claim, we argue, can be made about the postcolonial “bloc,” whether we look at India in the “Asian Century”; BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa); Singapore and the Trans-Pacific Partnership; or Kenya’s position in “Belt and Road” narratives. Since the long 1960s, as decolonization and nation-building have proceeded in tandem with global economic changes and geopolitical restructuring, postcolonial state discourses have increasingly valorized capitalist investments, alliances, competitions, and successes.¹

This special issue asks how literary writers are responding to such discourses and what their works diagnose about the discourses’ machinations and effects. We set out to think through the particularities of capitalism in postcolonial contexts using the critical framework of “postcolonial capitalism,” which we believe to be capacious and generative but underexplored. As a notoriously flexible term, “postcolonial” can at once operate as a geopolitical marker, a historical era, and a political stance. The term “capitalism” is capacious in another sense, insofar as it has stood for the universal, the Western, and the modern.² But are these terms as antithetical as Césaire proposes? The

formulation of postcolonial capitalism asks us to consider how postcolonial subjects, contexts, and discourses generate distinct forms of capitalist cultures and logics. It also incites us to examine how capitalist policies, histories, and cultures operate in postcolonial settings. The category of literature, like that of the postcolonial, has underwritten diverse and powerful modalities of anti-capitalist critique, even as it has helped normalize the systematic use of raw materials from particularized locales toward the production of aesthetic goods. This variability of the literary within capitalist lifeworlds is precisely what has made it so analytically valuable to postcolonial studies. No surprise, then, that literary forms, themes, translations, and institutions have become especially charged sites for investigating the changing relationship between the postcolonial and the capitalist. In the pages that follow, we sketch the contours of postcolonial capitalism and contemplate its critical purchase within postcolonial literary studies, a field that has been trying to engage with contemporary colonial-esque dynamics in the absence of formal colonialism.

Our contributors' essays all focus on novels. Yet not really. These essays show that generic instability provides one index of the changing relationship between postcolonial imaginaries and contemporary capitalism. That is, they suggest that postcolonial capitalism generates a literary tendency toward commercialized, popular (i.e., written to have mass appeal), and non-canonical texts. We argue that understanding postcolonial capitalism requires accounting for the turn from the traditionally understood "postcolonial novel" to low literary forms because such a turn registers shifting stances toward the problems of historical temporality and modernity. For example, folklore and orality help attune us to the postcolonial capitalist logics in works as geographically and historically disparate as Amos Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* (1954) and the eco-tourist publication *Highland Tales in the Heart of Borneo* (2015). The concept of postcolonial capitalism also allows us to bring together seemingly opposed figures such as the subaltern and the entrepreneur. In Aravind Adiga's *The White Tiger* (2008), for example, lower-caste protagonist Balram Halwai's seemingly heroic but morally suspect rags-to-riches success is narrated against a back-

drop of New India. Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's *Americanah* (2013), meanwhile, features an immigrant of the educated elite who writes politically charged blog posts on American race relations (which often position the black American as quasi-subaltern) from an "authentic," postcolonial, Nigerian perspective. Despite their different class positions and geographic locations, these protagonists' processes of self-actualization—surrealist in the former and realist in the latter—are articulated through their entrepreneurial acumen and success.

Though the entrepreneur is arguably the paradigmatic figure of global capitalism, as Imre Szeman argues,³ authors such as Adiga and Adichie suggest that there is something distinctive about the *postcolonial* entrepreneur, who contends with legacies of imperialism in their languages, nations, social relations, and senses of self. Entrepreneurship allows individuals to "shape their own subjectivity with the greatest freedom imaginable" (Szeman 476), but surely imagining agency in postcolonial contexts shaped by racial, linguistic, and cultural difference operates unlike that of the neoliberal contexts that Szeman speaks of, even while agency formally appears the same. While we take the entrepreneur as a starting point, we intend for postcolonial capitalism to function as a paradigm rather than a prescription. This means that postcolonial capitalist fiction is not necessarily united by theme, attitude, politics, or location. As a paradigm, postcolonial capitalism allows us to read millennial literary works (such as *The White Tiger* and *Americanah*) and return to canonical ones (such as *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*) with an eye toward emergent manifestations of contemporary capitalism. If such manifestations seem especially pronounced in postcolonial contexts, they also are subject to especially illuminating critiques in postcolonial literatures. Some of the literary works explored in this special issue allow us to identify specific points of departure from prior iterations of postcolonial literature. Others allow us to track the historical life and contemporary effects of capitalism's speculative logic. We turn to literature, then, because it allows us to interrogate postcolonial capitalism. Who are the protagonists and antagonists of postcolonial capitalism? What are its geographies and temporalities? What forms, styles, genres, and concepts does it invite?

I. Postcolonial Literary Engagements with Contemporary Capitalism

The postcolonial embrace of capitalism might have once been viewed as evidence of capitalism's spread—or, in other words, as the United States' completion of Europe's colonial mission with its Cold War victory over communist, socialist, and non-aligned formations. Such a "triumph of the West, of the Western idea," Francis Fukuyama writes, is a sign of "the end of history as such: that is, the end point of mankind's ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government" (3–4). But as a novel like Tash Aw's *Five Star Billionaire* (2013) shows, viewing capitalism in the postcolonies or the former socialist bloc as evidence of Western hegemony or the completion of the colonial project misses the nuances of contemporary capitalism. Even as cultural, geopolitical, economic, and military forms of colonial and neocolonial domination persist, Aw's Chinese-Malaysian characters, in seeking their fortunes in Shanghai rather than London or New York, give credence to Anthony King's contention that "colonial cities can be viewed as *forerunners* of what the contemporary capitalist world city would eventually become" (38; emphasis in original).⁴ This disruption of modernity's spatial and temporal coordinates resonates with diverse thinkers, among them Aihwa Ong and Dipesh Chakrabarty, who have debunked the unitary notion of modernity as a Eurocentric fantasy. Such a fantasy dismisses the possibility that modernity—including capitalist modernity—might be multiple, plural, alternate, blended, or simply non-Western.

As postcolonial nation-states' policies and postcolonial subjects' everyday lives express their endorsement of capitalism, postcolonial literatures—once a premier venue for airing anticolonial and anti-capitalist politics—are experimenting with new forms, genres, characters, and themes to depict capitalism's changing culture, logics, and affects. For example, attentiveness to the local articulation of capitalism lends specificity to Balram's equation of freedom with capitalism in Adiga's *The White Tiger*, which takes on an extra layer of meaning when the local bondages from which Balram seeks escape are accounted for. Capitalism's allure lies not only in its anonymity—"The city was full of outsiders. No

one would notice me here” (Adiga 296)—but in its promise of liberty from caste. *White Tiger* both satirizes neoliberal entrepreneurship and explores the utopian release it offers from entrenched caste hierarchies. For Balram, the escape from caste justifies anything, including murder: “[I]t was all worthwhile to know, just for a day, just for an hour, just for a *minute*, what it means not to be a servant” (321; emphasis in original). Adiga’s novel reveals how anti-caste and anti-capital activism do not necessarily coincide or help forge alliances.

For some postcolonial heads of state, a fear of regression rationalizes capitalist development. In a speech exhorting population growth through neoliberal policies of human capital import, former Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong declared: “But if we now shut our doors to talent, we will soon become like any other Third World city of 3 million people. Then we will find life quite different. We will become a small fish—a guppy—in a small pond.” Ong writes that “Asian Tiger” countries like Singapore “would not consider their own engagements with global capitalism or metropolitan powers as postcolonial but seek rather to emphasize and claim emergent power, equality, and mutual respect on the global stage” (35). Though Ong asserts that these engagements are not postcolonial, we argue that the act of seeking power, equality, and mutual respect constitutes an attempt to critically account for imperial histories of economic, political, and social domination. One can see this sentiment even in the 1955 Bandung Conference, when Asian and African state leaders framed economic development (if not necessarily capitalism) as essential for decolonization and sovereignty. The pursuit of development as a defense of national sovereignty helped produce and, we argue, continues to motivate democratic state capitalism and forms of subaltern capitalism.

The concept of postcolonial capitalism allows us to disarticulate postcolonialism from anticolonialism and examine contemporary capitalism from a postcolonial perspective.⁵ Although conceptual frameworks such as Empire (as in the Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri variety), postmodernity, late capitalism, and neoliberalism afford different approaches to the global changes of the late twentieth century, we argue that these frameworks have not engaged seriously enough with the sig-

nificance of the postcolonial world. Our inquiry is consonant with efforts within postcolonial studies to undertake political critique while remaining aware of the impossibility of operating outside of capitalism or its institutions.⁶ How might we analyze the postcolonial embrace of capitalism from a materialist standpoint rather than dismiss this embrace as complicit or deluded?

We posit that the concept of postcolonial capitalism allows for an intensive yet open-minded engagement with the legacies of colonialism and the experiences of postcolonialism in today's so-called new capitalist formations. While our contemporary global order still bears evidence of Old World colonialisms, the essays we have assembled in this special issue show that postcolonial cultural production and political critique are not reducible to the single experience of colonialism. In short, we view postcolonial capitalism as neither an abrupt break from nor a seamless continuation of decolonization. Rather than using "postcolonial" as an inert term that simply demarcates a non-Euro-American status, we want to situate postcolonialism—its state leaders, multinational corporations, regional blocs, literary texts, and diasporic intellectuals—as an agent of capitalism. Doing so allows us to interrogate the new visibility of postcolonial capitalism without assuming a telos of increasing global economic integration. Not only is modernity co-produced, but the postcolonial periphery may offer insights into experiments in capitalist governance and capitalist survival that reset contemporary understandings of modernity.⁷ By not assuming the relationship between postcolonialism and capitalism as only politically oppositional, we are able to uncover postcolonialism's blindspots, bad subjects, and ambivalent politics.

II. The Shifting Terrain of Postcolonial Studies

Our understanding of postcolonial capitalism builds on the work of scholars who have also used the term (or its cognates) to challenge dominant understandings of capitalism based in Western contexts. For Sandro Mezzadra, the term "postcolonial" allows for the recognition of "diverse scales, places and histories" (166) and challenges any universal or unified notion of abstract or free labor that theories of capitalism are

built on.⁸ Mezzadra's project of postcolonial capitalism, in other words, pluralizes notions of capitalism, much in the way that postcolonial studies has for understandings of modernity. Economist Kalyan Sanyal uses postcolonial capitalism to reexamine development in the third world. For Sanyal, India is an exemplary case study of how "non-capitalism" (his rewording of "pre-capitalism") persists in a world in which capitalism seems totalizing. Sanyal understands "postcolonial" both as a method that reveals the invisible or illegible (i.e., non-capitalism) and as the geopolitical context he studies (i.e., India).

We believe that Anglophone literature provides an important arena in which to work out both the contradictions within postcolonial politics and the changing dynamics of contemporary capitalism. Other literary critics have also been keen to interrogate how capitalism's intensification impacts the postcolonial world and changes postcolonial studies. For example, Amitava Kumar wonders, "Can 'World Bank Literature' be a new name for postcolonial studies?" (xx). Kumar's provocation comes in the aftermath of turn-of-the-twenty-first-century protests against Bretton Woods institutions like the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Trade Organization.⁹ It is intended to orient postcolonial studies toward examining economic globalization from a simultaneously postcolonial and literary standpoint. The Warwick Research Collective (WReC) has also offered a new name for postcolonial literature—or rather, they reject the postcolonial in favor of a moniker that registers the unevenness of development: "We propose . . . to define 'world literature' as *the literature of the world-system*—of the modern capitalist world-system. . . . The protocol commits us to arguing for a *single* world-literary system, rather than for world-literary *systems*" (8; emphasis in original). The WReC warns against "substitut[ing] the civilisational category of 'the west' for the category of capitalist modernity," which would have "the inevitable effect of dematerialization" (29). The WReC's advocacy for a single world-system foregrounds the coevalness of these disparate spaces, but we believe that this integrative view deprioritizes texts such as vernacular or oral productions that are otherwise illegible to or actively excluded from capitalist circuits. Moreover, the WReC's equation of "peripherality" with "irrealist aesthetics" (68)

risks attenuating the effect of postcolonial capitalist formations and their literary expressions on contemporary world systems.

We find it productive to position postcolonial capitalism as a conceptual counterpart to Jini Kim Watson and Gary Wilder's notion of "the postcolonial contemporary." Their coinage invites us to "reflect on the emphatically postcolonial character of the contemporary conjuncture as well as to inquire whether postcolonial criticism can adequately grasp it" (Watson and Wilder 1). Postcolonial criticism might be especially well-suited to investigating the contemporary, they suggest, because its "heterodox temporal implications" deter us from taking for granted the presentness of the contemporary or the pastness of history (10). Capitalism has been a central term for heterogeneous periodizations of the contemporary. It has also been central to rigid and mechanical periodizations of the postcolonial. With what we are calling postcolonial capitalism, we want to insert the postcolonial as an indispensable analytic for reassessing how capitalism enacts dramatic global changes. Moreover, we propose that emergent literary subgenres such as Asian wealth novels, Afropolitan and Afrofuturist writings, and global chick lit have provided some of the most critical and self-reflexive commentaries on economic growth across postcolonial spaces. The following section offers a brief meditation on the specifically literary stakes of postcolonial capitalism.

III. Genres of Postcolonial Capitalism

Giovanni Arrighi's theory of cycles of accumulation has been influential in terms of conceptualizing the relocation of economic hegemony from the US to Asia and, in particular, to China. Building on Arrighi, Jed Esty proposes that periods of imperial crisis and change tend to spawn "realism wars" in literature and criticism. The delinking of capitalist modernity from Western modernity has indeed produced a kind of realism war. Literary engagements with postcolonial capitalism grapple with systemic change on a global scale and raise questions about how the non-correspondence between capitalism and the West impacts the postcolonial as a social and literary form. The joining of postcolonialism with capitalism has put pressure on the relationship between the

postcolonial and the novel. Given the prestige of the postcolonial novel, perhaps it should not have been surprising that most of the submissions we received for this special issue focused on fiction writers. However, with the exception of Tutuola, the writers whose work is explored in the issue—including Aw, Ross Raisin, Tahmima Anam, Lawrence Chua, and Chetan Bhagat—are less renowned, canonical, cosmopolitan, and literary than many of the founding works of postcolonial literary studies. So on one hand, the novel, capaciously construed, continues to be a point of consistency for the set of authors and critics, both in this special issue and elsewhere, who write under the sign of the postcolonial. On the other, it is clear that “the novel . . . has changed irrevocably within an altered mediascape” (WReC 17)—whether this means that novels have become more heteroglossic in their incorporation of new forms and discourses (Ganguly), that they increasingly foreground literature’s aesthetic vocation (Brown), or that novels *qua* novels are worthy of serious attention only if we adopt a method of reading that makes the text itself disappear (Moretti).

Taking stock of our contributors’ essays within the grander scheme of literary production, we have found it useful to position postcolonial capitalist fictions within an ongoing conversation about genre and late capitalism.¹⁰ Their essays have led us to view the genre of “the postcolonial novel” as overlapping almost entirely with postcolonial genre fiction and postcolonial capitalist fiction. These overlaps suggest that with the turn to genre fiction and low literary forms, the postcolonial novel has lost its high literariness and, more significantly, its realist criticality.¹¹ Andrew Hoberek writes, “It is almost as though the realist novel, so closely tied to a particular form of capitalism and the kinds of social mobility it enabled, must turn to genre fiction to represent forms outside of it” (47).¹² In *Reading Capitalist Realism*, Leigh Clare La Berge and Alison Shonkwiler imply that this “turn to genre fiction,” which is also a turn to genre, indicates a limit point of critical realism—that is, an increased difficulty in “represent[ing] forms of global capital indexically” (13). These critics draw out the paradox of genre fiction and show that its putatively formulaic conventionality does not so much banish criticality as it exposes criticism’s limits. Correspondingly, postcolonial capitalism’s

predisposition toward genre fiction does not indicate an abandonment of political critique. Rather, postcolonial capitalist literature often uses genre fiction's conventionality and belatedness to introduce questions about how to represent capitalism in light of its unimaginable scales and intensities. Moreover, its instrumentalization of genre fiction puts pressure on notions of a postcolonial canon that has been made possible by the field's institutionalization (particularly in North American academies)—ironic, when we consider postcolonialism's project of undoing the Eurocentricity of English literature.

At one time, the novel proved especially useful for postcolonial articulations of a decolonial politics and an imagined community staked in nationalism.¹³ The seeming evolution of high literature into more commercialized forms of genre fiction—or, phrased differently, of the postcolonial novel into postcolonial capitalism—has led to an alternate idiom for imagining communities and politics. John Marx writes that “[i]nstead of organizing a community of citizens on behalf of the nation, genre fiction makes sense of city life through its relationship to other media” (413). Notably, Marx derives this formulation from Nnedi Okorafor's *Lagoon* (2014), a novel that exemplifies the synonymy of postcolonial novel, genre fiction, and postcolonial capitalist fiction. Throughout *Lagoon*, expressions of wonderment about an alien invasion taking place in Lagos (rather than an imperial center such as New York, Tokyo, or London) allegorize the equally wondrous arrival of advanced technologies and science fiction as a genre devoted to the technological imagination (64). Okorafor's question “[i]s Africa ready for science fiction?” (qtd. in Adejunmobi 265) finds a postcolonial capitalist and Afrofuturist answer in *Lagoon*'s depiction of an urban environment that has the requisite technological infrastructure for aliens to beam their messages onto personal devices and public screens.

Fredric Jameson proposes that one distinguishing feature of genre fiction might be its displacement of forms with media (67). Although Jameson is largely pessimistic about the status of genre criticism in the media-saturated age and therefore about the possibility of thinking historically at all, it turns out that some of the most innovative work on genre has come from scholars who, for all their wide-ranging differ-

ences, use genre to test out forms of “alternative historicism” (Martin 7).¹⁴ For Theodore Martin, the potential blind spot of a too-close and always-changing present finds a partial remedy not in stabilizing genre but in registering its drag. The historical drag of genre has particular resonance in a postcolonial context, which bears the stigma of lateness. When writing about late capitalism, Chakrabarty suggests that “the word ‘late’ has very different connotations when applied to the developed countries and to those seen as still ‘developing’” (7). Literature and literariness, of course, have been benchmarks for placing postcolonial sites on the timeline of modernity.¹⁵ As a result, it would be fallacious to undertake the task of thinking historically about postcolonial capitalism by using literature as evidence that allows one to draw a causal line from past to present.

The postcolonial novel disguised as genre fiction reconfigures lag as drag. This reconfiguration also permits us to follow queer theorists who plumb drag for multiplicity and asynchrony. As Travis Sands implies in his essay for this issue, queer studies and postcolonial studies hold compatible political positions on the problem of historical temporality. If postcolonial critics have taken issue with sequence and the assignment of lateness, queer critics challenge a similar idea of time-as-line, but for them the central concern is history being too straight, leading only to reproductive futurity.¹⁶ This problem of futurity enhances the pleasure of anachronism.¹⁷ It is with heteronormativity as the determinant for “chrononormativity” that Elizabeth Freeman defines “temporal drag” as “retrogression, delay, and the pull of the past on the present” (62). Certainly, grappling with the past in the present is a prevalent issue in postcolonial studies. Robert Young argues that the postcolonial is about “unfinished business, the continuing projection of past conflicts into the experience of the present, the persistence of the afterimages of historical memory that drive the desire to transform the present” (21). Similarly, Ann Laura Stoler offers the term “imperial debris” as a way of registering the constructed, unexpected, and sometimes invisible “psychic weight of colonial processes” (x). But drag—rather than “projection” or “psychic weight”—connotes a forceful, sometimes difficult movement that picks up dirt and maybe even injures or damages the thing that

is dragged along. In Sands' reading of Chua's *Gold by the Inch* (1998), the past exerts this historical pull. Other literary texts explored in our special issue, however, amplify the more negative connotations of the term drag. For them, drag inspires a categorical and at times blind pivot to futurity, as if to insist that history is over, that colonialism is not just dead but deadweight. The unfolding present drags because history *is* a drag, an anchor that moors the glorious future for just a little longer. As a chapter title of Aw's self-help novel advises, "[f]orget the past, look only to the future" (47).

Although the condition of postcoloniality has always been imbricated in globalized capitalist flows, the subjects and literatures of postcolonial capitalism present a significantly revised attitude toward what Lauren Berlant terms "the good life's traditional fantasy" (*Cruel Optimism* 7). In Berlant's account, late capitalism spins fantasies of the good life not squarely within but vaguely near the political. The protagonists of postcolonial capitalism likewise occupy a "juxtapolitical" space conditioned by market forces (Berlant, *Female Complaint* 29). These figures include the pink-collared (and loose-collared) women in works by Wei Wei, Shobhaa De, Aw, and Linh Dinh; diasporic returnees overwhelmed by reverse culture shock in the novels of Adichie, Okey Ndibe, and R. Zamora Linmark; master manipulators of informal economies as imagined by Mohsin Hamid, Adiga, and Chua; and expert pliers of the underground tourist trade in the works of Cathy Park Hong, Viet Thanh Nguyen, and Indra Sinha. Such characters lead us to understand the genre of postcolonial capitalism as not just the novel in drag but the fiction of sheer aspiration. In other words, drag transforms lateness into can't-wait-ness. If Aijaz Ahmad once had just cause to worry that Jameson was reducing "third world literature" to potted nationalist allegories sprung from the totalizing experience of Western colonialism and animated by the sole cause of an anti-imperial politics, then the literatures of postcolonial capitalism seem to snub both Ahmad and Jameson by entertaining the interplay between mass politics and mass consumerism, political agency and economic mobility. In this issue, Lily Cho's essay on self-help novels and Ragini Tharoor Srinivasan's investigation of the telephonic call-center voice are instructive because they show how

temporal drag (lateness) and genre drag (self-help) take on the cultural form of the derivative. In both of their accounts, lateness, imitation, and mimicry—those canonically postcolonial burdens—paradoxically contribute to the allure of postcolonial capitalism. As Cho puts it, “Aw plays with the genre in order to exploit the possibilities of fakes and counterfeits as generators of wealth.” As a result, she writes, “[p]eak desirability is wrought by peak illegality.”

If we are committed to retaining the postcolonial, postcolonial capitalism raises the question of what the postcolonial consists of. In our current academic climate, weakness has come into critical repute. The weakening of theory, genre, affect, politics, and method has been affiliated with the foreclosure of futurity and an attentiveness to the status quo.¹⁸ One may wonder why postcolonial critics have yet to embrace weakness. A revealing contrast to postcolonial studies is modernism, or if you'd like, global modernism. With respect to modernism's shift from gatekeeping to globalizing, Paul Saint-Amour argues that “[m]odernist studies has become a strong field—populous, varied, generative, self-reflexive—in proportion as its immanent theory of modernism has weakened and become less axiomatic, more conjectural, more conjunctural” (41). Perhaps it is because modernism's increasing field strength has come from its expansion into the postcolonial that the foundering field of postcolonial studies has felt compelled to double down on defining its *raison d'être*. This ongoing project of self-definition has also been fueled by anxieties surrounding postcolonial literature's absorption into the global Anglophone, planetary, and other world literature formations.¹⁹ Theories of disciplinary identity—certainly not exclusive to our contemporary moment—have inspired Peter Hitchcock to posit “postcoloniality as genre.” He writes: “The ‘is’ of postcoloniality is a chimerica, a shorthand for often rancorous but ultimately dubious debates about identity . . . that fails in its sweep to understand the *longue durée* of postcoloniality as (classification) struggle” (301). For our purposes, accounting for genre has not been about nailing the “is” of postcolonial, although our conceptualization of postcolonial capitalism implicitly extends Hitchcock's suggestion that “a history of classification” is also a “history of class” (308). Our objective is not necessarily to insist upon

the distinctiveness of postcolonial literature, the critical realism of the postcolonial novel, or the novelty of postcolonial capitalism—although we happen to believe in these, too. But we hope to join the essays in this special issue in contemplating what histories might be newly traceable, what forms of drag displace lag, and, most of all, what it means to live by the slippery post of the colonial during this particular instantiation of capitalism.

IV. Our Contributors

Our issue opens with Ewa Macura-Nnamdi's examination of Tutuola's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, a series of modernist Yoruba tales published six years before Nigerian independence. Macura-Nnamdi undoes the dyad of the colonial and the postcolonial by showing how finance capitalism's production of value arises from the eighteenth-century slave trade. Drawing on Ian Baucom and Achille Mbembe, Macura-Nnamdi coins the term "mouthwork" to redefine consumption as production. While the slave trade remains in the background of *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts*, the work of the mouth, depicted prominently and grotesquely, attunes readers to capitalism's ability to turn destruction and loss into profit. This logic of abstract value production, Macura-Nnamdi argues, allows us to contemplate the resource extraction of laboring bodies, palm, and petroleum within the same framework.

Cho's essay on Aw's *Five Star Billionaire* likewise offers a theory of value but turns to a more contemporary and less familiar context of postcolonialism. Cho analogizes the flow of counterfeit goods, persons, and personalities to the "counter movement" of Malaysian migrants to China, the world's top producer of counterfeit goods. Rather than condemning fakes and counterfeits, Cho interprets derivative value as a critique of Western capitalism. This interpretation moves beyond a moral binary of real versus fake. In Cho's reading, *Five Star Billionaire* conceives of fakes as "sites of potential transformation and ascendance" that confront "a global economic order wherein counterfeits pose a threat."

Srinivasan continues this examination of the unoriginal by framing "call center English" as the dominant vernacular of New India. Srinivasan tracks the call center agent across a wide range of materials—

novels, journalism, ethnography, and photography. Reworking ideas of global subjectivity, she locates a precedent for the call center agent in the expatriate writer. The call center agent and the expatriate writer are linked by their relationships to diasporic mobility and linguistic performance. Call center agents, Srinivasan writes, are the “symbolic heirs” of cosmopolitan authors such as Salman Rushdie, Amit Chaudhuri, Anita Desai, Amitav Ghosh, and Rohinton Mistry: “[W]hile the writers are migrants, the call center agents are virtual migrants; the former pursue the past and the latter embody the future; the former use high literary English and the latter speak a global “call center English.” Srinivasan devotes particular attention to the status of English, illustrating how the visibility of the call center agent and Indian expatriate writer depend on their respective articulations of a recognizably Indian English.

Srinivasan’s essay ponders the significance of virtual presence vis-à-vis the call center agent’s voiced global presence. Sands, meanwhile, offers an alternate account of virtuality through his analysis of Chua’s *Gold by the Inch*. Sands reads Chua’s novel as a queer diasporic critique of multiculturalism, a form of governance that frames sexual, racial, gender, and ethno-national difference as endlessly mutable. In the context of Southeast Asia and the post-1997 Asian financial crisis, multicultural recognition helps us understand floating currencies that structure, and are structured by, shifting encounters between heterogeneous forms of difference.

While the circulation of goods and people is often referenced in the abstract, Arthur Rose foregrounds the physical ships that carry them. His essay traces the lifecycle of the ship—a symbol of global capitalism’s movements—through the Global North and South. Drawing on Raisin’s *Waterline* (2011) and Anam’s *The Bones of Grace* (2016), Rose’s macro analysis recalls the world-systems frameworks that have influenced postcolonial methodologies. But rather than study a world organized by capitalist flows, Rose explores how shipbuilding and ship-breaking industries create health risks that unevenly affect subjects in the Global North and Global South. These two sites differ in class as well as health precarity. Specifically, Rose’s reading thinks through the effects of asbestos. In this context, privilege means “that workers in the

Global North are more attuned to the mineral's 'slow violence' of asbestos exposure than their counterparts in the Global South (Nixon 2), where experiences of risk are often more immediate." Indeed, Anam's novel does not mention asbestos at all. In this sense, Rose's method is classically postcolonial in that it "makes the invisible visible" (Young 23). His essay frames health as an important layer of complexity necessary to think through the contrasting, if not conflicting, temporalities of postcolonialism and capitalism.

Sheela Jane Menon examines *Highland Tales in the Heart of Borneo*, a mixed media collection of photos, oral histories, and mythologies compiled collaboratively by community members and leaders of the Orang Asal, an indigenous group in Malaysia. The collection "records and preserves the significance of Indigenous lands alongside the histories and mythologies of the Orang Asal," yet it is also used to market state-sponsored ecotourism initiatives. In other words, the politics of the Orang Asal's "survivance" is not anticolonial in any pure sense, given its engagement with—if not dependence on—exploitative state agencies. Menon also demonstrates how *Highland Tales* performs an indigenous critique of Malaysian state multiculturalism, which is a tool of postcolonial capitalist governance. By thinking through the oppressive politics and agential possibilities of postcolonial capitalism, Menon's essay demonstrates the difficulty of assuming an anti-capitalist politics within an anticolonial stance in our current economic moment.

We hope that the essays gathered in this special issue reflect the literary, geopolitical, historical, and theoretical range that a framework like postcolonial capitalism can provide. Our focus is on Anglophone literary production—itself a force within postcolonial capitalism. To further draw out the transnational implications and linguistic variations of postcolonial capitalism, we hope this special issue will encourage comparative approaches as well as discussions of non-English literature in future projects on postcolonial capitalism. We were, unfortunately, unable to attract contributors working in Latin American contexts despite the relevance of a number of postcolonial capitalist developments: the legacies of developmentalism, the growth of tourist industries, the impact of free trade zones, and increasing competition from Chinese state capitalism,

to name but a few examples.²⁰ We hope that future projects can take the limits of this collection as a departure point.

Notes

- 1 The 1960s mark the decade in which state capitalism began in Asia (in the nations later described as “miracle economies”) and Latin America (Brazil).
- 2 See, for example, Ong’s critique that Harvey’s *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* depicts neoliberalism as emanating from the North Atlantic states and problematically treats China as the exception to such claims.
- 3 See Szeman.
- 4 On China as a colonial power, see Shih’s “The Concept of the Sinophone.”
- 5 Scholars such as Scott gently note the limitations of postcolonial studies when focused only on the political project of anticolonialism: “[T]he conception of colonialism that postcolonialism has constructed and made the target of its analytical focus has continued to bear the distinctive trace of anticolonialism’s conceptual preoccupations” (6).
- 6 We are especially sympathetic to critics who have taken Marxist and sociological approaches. See, for instance, Dirlik’s “The Postcolonial Aura,” Brouillette’s *Postcolonial Writers in The Global Literary Marketplace*, and Dalleo’s edited collection *Bourdieu and Postcolonial Studies*.
- 7 Gluck writes that “our sensitivity to the flaws of the one-size-fits-all Western-based conceit of modernity should not obscure the appeal of the modern to the peoples around the world who co-produced it” (677).
- 8 A similar line of thinking can be detected in Ong’s differentiation between “Neoliberalism” and “neoliberalism” (3) as well in the work of Gibson-Graham, who argues for the need to recognize capitalism as a dominant discourse that obscures a “rich diversity of capitalist and noncapitalist activities” (xli).
- 9 See also Benjamin’s *Invested Interests* and Bose and Lyons’ anthology *Cultural Critique and the Global Corporation*.
- 10 On the usefulness of genre for analyzing late capitalism, see Carroll and McClanahan; La Berge and Shonkwiler; Elliott and Harkins; and Huehls and Smith.
- 11 One can observe similar turns in ethnic American literature.
- 12 Hoberek also writes about the post-postmodernist intermixing of genre fiction and literary fiction in “Introduction: After Postmodernism.”
- 13 Though Anderson theorizes “imagined communities” as a phenomena of print capitalism, he sees the newspaper as “novelistic” in the way it can organize homogenous, empty time (33). See Culler for further discussion of Anderson’s understanding of the novel.
- 14 In addition to Martin, see Berlant’s *Cruel Optimism* and Dimock’s “Genre as World System” in *Through Other Continents*.

- 15 One need only note the regularity with which postcolonial critics cite Macaulay's "Minute on Indian Education."
- 16 See, for example, Edelman, Luciano, and Freeman.
- 17 See, for example, p. 191 of Berlant's "Structures of Unfeeling," p. 190 of Dinshaw et al.'s "Theorizing Queer Temporalities," and Chapter Two of Freeman's *Time Binds*.
- 18 Dimock's "weak theory" and Berlant's "waning of genre" are both premised on the uncertainty of the future and turn adjustment, partiality, and adjacency into strategies for managing the morass of the present.
- 19 For a recent discussion of postcolonial literature's move into global Anglophone literature, see *Interventions'* special issue "From Postcolonial to World Anglophone: South Asia as Test Case," edited by Srinivasan.
- 20 As Prado's *Strategic Occidentalism* demonstrates, important work in this vein is already being done. See Ashcroft for a synopsis of the debate around Latin America and postcolonialism.
- 21 See Ashcroft for a synopsis of the debate around Latin America and postcolonialism.

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