

The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism

Author(s): Arif Dirlik

Source: *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Winter, 1994), pp. 328-356

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343914>

Accessed: 30-04-2019 19:39 UTC

## REFERENCES

Linked references are available on JSTOR for this article:

[https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343914?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references\\_tab\\_contents](https://www.jstor.org/stable/1343914?seq=1&cid=pdf-reference#references_tab_contents)

You may need to log in to JSTOR to access the linked references.

---

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

*The University of Chicago Press* is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Critical Inquiry*

# The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism

Arif Dirlik

“When exactly . . . does the ‘post-colonial’ begin?” queries Ella Shohat in a recent discussion of the subject.<sup>1</sup> Misreading the question deliberately,

My being (more or less) one of the Third World intellectuals in First World academe does not privilege the criticism of postcolonial intellectuals that I offer below, but it does call for some comment. It is not clear to me how important the views I discuss (or the intellectuals who promote them) are in their impact on contemporary intellectual life. *Post-colonial* has been entering the lexicon of academic programs in recent years, and over the last two years there have been a number of conferences and symposia inspired by related vocabulary (postcolonialism, “after Orientalism,” and so on), as well as special issues devoted to the subject in periodicals such as *Social Text* and *Public Culture*. But given the small number of intellectuals directly concerned with postcoloniality and the diffuseness in their use of the concept, it might make more sense to study the reception of the term *postcolonial*. Such a study is particularly important, I argue below, because the ideas associated with postcoloniality are significant and widespread as concerns, even if they predate the term *postcolonial* itself. It is not the importance of these ideas that I question, in other words, but their appropriation for postcoloniality. Otherwise, there is a Third World sensibility and mode of perception that has become increasingly visible in cultural discussions over the last decade. I myself share in the concerns (and even some of the viewpoints) of postcolonial intellectuals, though from a somewhat different perspective than those who describe themselves as such. For a recent example of this kind of work, see my “Post-socialism/Flexible Production: Marxism in Contemporary Radicalism,” *Polygraph*, no. 6/7 (1993):133–69.

While relieving them of any complicity in my views, I would like to thank Harry Harootunian, Masao Miyoshi, Roxann Prazniak, Rob Wilson, and Zhang Xudong for their comments and assistance with sources.

1. Ella Shohat, “Notes on the ‘Post-Colonial,’” *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 103; hereafter abbreviated “NP.”

*Critical Inquiry* 20 (Winter 1994)

© 1994 by The University of Chicago. 0093-1896/94/2002-0005\$01.00. All rights reserved.

I will supply here an answer that is only partially facetious: When Third World intellectuals have arrived in First World academe.

My goal in the discussion below is twofold: to review the term *postcolonial*, and the various intellectual and cultural positions associated with it, in the context of contemporary transformations in global relationships, and to examine the reconsiderations of problems of domination and hegemony as well as of received critical practices that these transformations require. *Postcolonial* is the most recent entrant to achieve prominent visibility in the ranks of those “post” marked words (seminal among them, *postmodernism*) that serve as signposts in(to) contemporary cultural criticism. Unlike other “post” marked words, *postcolonial* claims as its special provenance the terrain that in an earlier day used to go by the name of Third World. It is intended, therefore, to achieve an authentic globalization of cultural discourses by the extension globally of the intellectual concerns and orientations originating at the central sites of Euro-American cultural criticism and by the introduction into the latter of voices and subjectivities from the margins of earlier political and ideological colonialism that now demand a hearing at those very sites at the center. The goal, indeed, is no less than to abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other “binarisms” that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency. Although intellectuals who hail from one part of that terrain, India, have played a conspicuously prominent role in its formulation and dissemination, the appeals of postcoloniality seem to cut across national, regional, and even political boundaries, which on the surface at least seems to substantiate its claims to globalism.

My answer to Shohat’s question is only partially facetious because the popularity that the term *postcolonial* has achieved in the last few years has less to do with its rigorousness as a concept or with the new vistas it has opened up for critical inquiry than it does with the increased visibility of academic intellectuals of Third World origin as pacesetters in cultural criticism. I want to suggest that most of the critical themes that postcolonial criticism claims as its fountainhead predated the appearance, or at

---

**Arif Dirlik** is professor of history at Duke University. He is the author of, among other works, *Revolution and History: Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–37* (1978), *The Origins of Chinese Communism* (1989), and *Anarchism in the Chinese Revolution* (1991) and the editor of *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (1993). His most recent book, *Waking to Global Capitalism: Whither Socialism?* is forthcoming in 1994.

least the popular currency, of *postcolonial*. Whether there was a postcolonial consciousness (before it was so termed) that might have played a part in the production of those themes is a question to which I will return below. As far as it is possible to tell from the literature, however, it was only from the mid-1980s that the label *postcolonial* was attached to those themes with increasing frequency, and that in conjunction with the use of the label to describe academic intellectuals of Third World origin. From this time, these so-called postcolonial intellectuals seemed to acquire an academic respectability that they did not have before.<sup>2</sup> A description of a diffuse group of intellectuals and their concerns and orientations was to turn by the end of the decade into a description of a global condition, in which sense it has acquired the status of a new orthodoxy both in cultural criticism and in academic programs. Shohat's question above refers to this global condition; yet, given the ambiguity imbedded in the term *postcolonial*, it seems justifiable to redirect her question to the emergence of postcolonial intellectuals in order to put the horse back in front of the cart. This redirection is also intended to underline the First World origins (and situation) of the term.

My answer is also facetious, however, because merely pointing to the ascendant role that intellectuals of Third World origin have played in propagating *postcolonial* as a critical orientation within First World academia begs the question as to why they and their intellectual concerns and orientations have been accorded the respectability that they have. The themes that are now claimed for postcolonial criticism, both in what they repudiate of the past and in what they affirm for the present, I suggest, resonate with concerns and orientations that have their origins in a new world situation that has also become part of consciousness globally over the last decade. I am referring here to that world situation created by transformations within the capitalist world economy, by the emergence of what has been described variously as global capitalism, flexible production, late capitalism, and so on, terms that have disorganized earlier conceptualizations of global relations, especially relations comprehended earlier by such binaries as colonizer/colonized, First World/Third World, and the "West and the Rest," in all of which the nation-state was taken for granted as the global unit of political organization. It is no reflection on the abilities of postcolonial critics to suggest that they and the critical orientations that they represent have acquired a respectability dependent on the conceptual needs of the social, political, and cultural problems thrown up by this new world situation. It is, however, a reflection on the

2. In 1985, Gayatri Spivak insisted in an interview that she did not belong to the "top level of the United States academy" because she taught in the South and the Southwest whereas the "cultural elite in the United States inhabit the Northeastern seaboard or the West coast" (Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *The Post-Colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies, Dialogues*, ed. Sarah Harasym [New York, 1990], p. 114); hereafter abbreviated *PCC*. Since then Spivak has moved to Columbia University.

ideology of postcolonialism that, with rare exceptions (see *PCC*),<sup>3</sup> postcolonial critics have been silent on the relationship of the idea of postcolonialism to its context in contemporary capitalism; indeed, they have suppressed the necessity of considering such a possible relationship by repudiating a foundational role to capitalism in history.

To consider this relationship is my primary goal in the discussion below. I argue, first, that there is a parallel between the ascendancy in cultural criticism of the idea of postcoloniality and an emergent consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s and, second, that the appeals of the critical themes in postcolonial criticism have much to do with their resonance with the conceptual needs presented by transformations in global relationships caused by changes within the capitalist world economy. This also explains, I think, why a concept that is intended to achieve a radical revision in our comprehension of the world should appear to be complicitous in "the consecration of hegemony," as Shohat has put it ("NP," p. 110). If postcolonial as concept has not necessarily served as a fountainhead for the criticism of an earlier ideology of global relationships, it has nevertheless helped concentrate under one term what previously had been diffused among many. At the same time, however, postcolonial criticism has been silent about its own status as a possible ideological effect of a new world situation after colonialism. Postcolonial as a description of intellectuals of Third World origin needs to be distinguished, I suggest below, from postcolonial as a description of this world situation. In this latter usage, the term mystifies both politically and methodologically a situation that represents not the abolition but the reconfiguration of earlier forms of domination. The complicity of postcolonial in hegemony lies in postcolonialism's diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination, and in its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence, that is, to a global capitalism that, however fragmented in appearance, serves as the structuring principle of global relations.

### *Postcolonial Intellectuals and Postcolonial Criticism*

The term *postcolonial* in its various usages carries a multiplicity of meanings that need to be distinguished for analytical purposes. Three uses of the term seem to me to be especially prominent (and significant):

3. See also Arjun Appadurai, "Global Ethnoscapes: Notes and Queries for a Transnational Anthropology," in *Recapturing Anthropology: Working in the Present*, ed. Richard G. Fox (Santa Fe, N. Mex., 1991), pp. 191–210. Aijaz Ahmad, whom I do not include among the postcolonial critics here, does an excellent job of relating the problems of postcoloniality to contemporary capitalism, if only in passing and somewhat differently from the way I do below. See Aijaz Ahmad, "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory,'" *Social Text*, no. 17 (Fall 1987): 3–25 and *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London, 1992).

(a) as a literal description of conditions in formerly colonial societies, in which case the term has concrete referents, as in postcolonial societies or postcolonial intellectuals; (b) as a description of a global condition after the period of colonialism, in which case the usage is somewhat more abstract and less concrete in reference, comparable in its vagueness to the earlier term *Third World*, for which it is intended as a substitute; and (c) 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.

Even at its most concrete, the significance of *postcolonial* is not transparent because each of its meanings is overdetermined by the others. Postcolonial intellectuals are clearly the producers of a postcolonial discourse, but who exactly are the postcolonial intellectuals? Here the contrast between *postcolonial* and its predecessor term, *Third World*, may be revealing. The term *Third World*, postcolonial critics insist, was quite vague in encompassing within one uniform category vastly heterogeneous historical circumstances and in locking in fixed positions, structurally if not geographically, societies and populations that shifted with changing global relationships. Although this objection is quite valid, the fixing of societal locations, misleadingly or not, permitted the identification of, say, Third World intellectuals with the concreteness of places of origin. *Postcolonial* does not permit such identification. I wondered above whether there might have been a postcolonial consciousness, by which I mean the consciousness that postcolonial intellectuals claim as a hallmark of their intellectual endeavors, even before it was so labeled. Probably there was, although it was invisible because subsumed under the category Third World. Now that postcoloniality has been released from the fixity of Third World location, the identity of the postcolonial is no longer structural but discursive. Postcolonial in this perspective represents an attempt to regroup intellectuals of uncertain location under the banner of postcolonial discourse. Intellectuals in the flesh may produce the themes that constitute postcolonial discourse, but it is participation in the discourse that defines them as postcolonial intellectuals. Hence it is important to delineate the discourse so as to identify postcolonial intellectuals themselves.

Gyan Prakash frames concisely a question that, I think, provides the point of departure for postcolonial discourse: How does the Third World write "its own history?"<sup>4</sup> Like other postcolonial critics, such as Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, he finds the answer to his question in the model of historical writing provided by the work on Indian history of the *Subaltern*

4. Gyan Prakash, "Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 32 (Apr. 1990): 383; hereafter abbreviated "PH."

*Studies* group (see "PH," p. 399), which also provides, although it does not exhaust, the major themes in postcolonial discourse.<sup>5</sup>

These themes are enunciated cogently in a recent essay by Prakash, which, to my knowledge, offers the most condensed exposition of postcolonialism currently available. Prakash's introduction to his essay is worth quoting at some length:

One of the distinct effects of the recent emergence of postcolonial criticism has been to force a radical re-thinking and re-formulation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and western domination. For this reason, it has also created a ferment in the field of knowledge. This is not to say that colonialism and its legacies remained unquestioned until recently: nationalism and marxism come immediately to mind as powerful challenges to colonialism. But both of these operated with master-narratives that put Europe at its center. Thus, when nationalism, reversing Orientalist thought, attributed agency and history to the subjected nation, it also staked a claim to the order of Reason and Progress instituted by colonialism; and when marxists pilloried colonialism, their criticism was framed by a universalist mode-of-production narrative. Recent postcolonial criticism, on the other hand, seeks to undo the Eurocentrism produced by the institution of the west's trajectory, its appropriation of the other as History. It does so, however, with the acute realization that postcoloniality is not born and nurtured in a panoptic distance from history. The postcolonial exists as an aftermath, as an after—after being worked over by colonialism. Criticism formed in this process of the enunciation of discourses of domination occupies a space that is neither inside nor outside the history of western domination but in a tangential relation to it. This is what Homi Bhabha calls an in-between, hybrid position of practice and negotiation, or what Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak terms *catachresis*; "reversing, displacing, and seizing the apparatus of value-coding."<sup>6</sup>

5. See Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography," in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, ed. Ranajit Guha and Spivak (New York, 1988), pp. 3–32.

6. Prakash, "Postcolonial Criticism and Indian Historiography," *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 8; hereafter abbreviated "PC." I use Prakash's discussions of postcoloniality as my point of departure here because he has made the most systematic attempts at accounting for the concept and also because his discussions bring to the fore the implications of the concept for historical understanding. As this statement reveals, Prakash himself draws heavily on the characteristics of postcolonial consciousness delineated by others, especially Homi K. Bhabha, who has been responsible for the prominence in discussions of postcoloniality of the vocabulary of hybridity and so on. Bhabha's work, however, is responsible for more than the vocabulary of postcolonialism, as he has proven himself to be something of a master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation, of a reduction of social and political problems to psychological ones, and of the substitution of post-structuralist linguistic manipulation for historical and social explanation—all of which show up in much postcolonial writing, but rarely with the same virtuosity (and incomprehensibility) that he brings to it.

To elaborate on these themes, postcolonial criticism repudiates all master narratives, and since the most powerful current master narratives are the products of a post-Enlightenment European constitution of history and therefore Eurocentric, postcolonial criticism takes the critique of Eurocentrism as its central task. Foremost among these master narratives to be repudiated is the narrative of modernization, in both its bourgeois and its Marxist incarnations. Bourgeois modernization, or “developmentalism,” represents the renovation and redeployment of “colonial modernity . . . as economic development” (“PH,” p. 393). Marxism, while it rejects bourgeois modernization, nevertheless perpetuates the teleological assumptions of the latter by framing inquiry in a narrative of modes of production in which postcolonial history appears as a transition (or an aborted transition) to capitalism (see “PH,” p. 395).<sup>7</sup> The repudiation of the narrative of modes of production, I should add, does not mean the repudiation of Marxism; postcolonial criticism acknowledges a strong Marxist inspiration (see “PC,” pp. 14–15 and *PCC*).<sup>8</sup> Needless to say, Orientalism’s constitution of the colony as Europe’s Other, that is, as an essence without history, must be repudiated. But so must nationalism and its procedures of representation that, while challenging Orientalism, have perpetuated the essentialism of Orientalism by affirming a national essence in history (see “PH,” pp. 390–91). If it is necessary to repudiate master narratives, it also is necessary to resist all spatial homogenization and temporal teleology. This requires the repudiation of foundational historical writing. According to Prakash, a foundational view is one that assumes “that history is ultimately founded in and representable through some identity—individual, class, or structure—which resists further decomposition into heterogeneity” (“PH,” p. 397). The most significant conclusion to follow from the repudiation of foundational historiography is the rejection of capitalism as a foundational category on the grounds that “we cannot thematize Indian history in terms of the development of capitalism and simultaneously contest capitalism’s homogenization of the contemporary world” (“PC,” p. 13). (Obviously, given the logic of the ar-

---

For some of his more influential writings, see Homi K. Bhabha, “Of Mimicry and Man: The Ambivalence of Colonial Discourse,” *October*, no. 28 (Spring 1984): 125–33; “The Commitment to Theory,” in *Questions of Third World Cinema*, ed. Jim Pines and Paul Willemsen (London, 1989), pp. 111–32; “The Other Question: Difference, Discrimination and the Discourse of Colonialism,” in *Literature, Politics and Theory*, ed. Francis Barker, et al. (London, 1986), pp. 148–72; and “Introduction: Narrating the Nation” and “DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation,” in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha (London, 1990), pp. 1–7, 291–322. Bhabha is exemplary of the Third World intellectual who has been completely reworked by the language of First World cultural criticism.

7. See also Dipesh Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History: Who Speaks for ‘Indian’ Pasts?” *Representations*, no. 37 (Winter 1992): 4.

8. As the term *subaltern* would indicate, Antonio Gramsci’s inspiration is readily visible in the works of *Subaltern Studies* historians.

gument, any Third World country could be substituted here for India.) Postfoundational history, in its repudiation of essence and structure and simultaneous affirmation of heterogeneity, also repudiates any fixing of the Third World subject and, therefore, of the Third World as a category:

The rejection of those modes of thinking which configure the third world in such irreducible essences as religiosity, underdevelopment, poverty, nationhood, [and] non-Westernness . . . unsettle[s] the calm presence that the essentialist categories—east and west, first world and third world—inhabit in our thought. This disruption makes it possible to treat the third world as a variety of shifting positions which have been discursively articulated in history. Viewed in this manner, the Orientalist, nationalist, Marxist, and other historiographies become visible as discursive attempts to constitute their objects of knowledge, that is, the third world. As a result, rather than appearing as a fixed and essential object, the third world emerges as a series of historical positions, including those that enunciate essentialisms. ["PH," p. 384]

It is noteworthy here that with the repudiation of capitalism and structure as foundational categories there is no mention of a capitalist structuring of the world, however heterogeneous and discrepant the histories within it, as a constituting moment of history. Finally, postfoundational history approaches "third-world identities as relational rather than essential" ("PH," p. 399). Postfoundational history (which is also postcolonial history) shifts attention from national origin to subject-position. The consequence is the following:

The formation of third-world positions suggests engagement rather than insularity. It is difficult to overlook the fact that all of the third-world voices identified in this essay, speak within and to discourses familiar to the "West" instead of originating from some autonomous essence, which does not warrant the conclusion that the third-world historiography has always been enslaved, but that the careful maintenance and policing of East–West boundaries has never succeeded in stopping the flows across and against boundaries and that the self–other opposition has never quite been able to order all differences into binary opposites. The third world, far from being confined to its assigned space, has penetrated the inner sanctum of the first world in the process of being 'third-worlded'—arousing, inciting, and affiliating with the subordinated others in the first world. It has reached across boundaries and barriers to connect with the minority voices in the first world: socialists, radicals, feminists, minorities. ["PH," p. 403]

This statement is representative of postcolonialism's stance on contemporary global relations (and of its claims to transcending earlier conceptual-

izations of the world. So, attention needs to be shifted from national origin to subject-position; hence a politics of location takes precedence over politics informed by fixed categories (in this case the nation, though obviously other categories such as Third World and class are also implied). Also, although First and Third World positions may not be interchangeable, they are nevertheless quite fluid, which implies a need to qualify if not to repudiate binary oppositions in the articulation of their relationship. Hence local interactions take priority over global structures in the shaping of these relationships, which implies that they are better comprehended historically in their heterogeneity than structurally in their fixity. These conclusions follow from the hybridness or “in-betweenness” of the postcolonial subject that is not to be contained within fixed categories or binary oppositions. Since postcolonial criticism has focused on the postcolonial subject to the exclusion of an account of the world outside of the subject, the global condition implied by postcoloniality appears at best as a projection onto the world of postcolonial subjectivity and epistemology—a discursive constitution of the world, in other words, in accordance with the constitution of the postcolonial subject, much as it had been constituted earlier by the epistemologies that are the object of postcolonial criticism.

If postcolonial criticism as discourse is any guide to identifying postcolonial intellectuals, the literal sense of *postcolonial* is its least significant aspect, if it is not altogether misleading. Viewed in terms of the themes that I have outlined above, postcolonial, on the one hand, is broadly inclusive; as intellectual concerns these themes are by no means the monopoly of postcolonial criticism, and one does not have to be *postcolonial* in any strict sense of the term to share in them, for which the most eloquent evidence is that they were already central to cultural discussions before they were so labeled. Crucial premises of postcolonial criticism, such as the repudiation of post-Enlightenment metanarratives, were enunciated first in post-structuralist thinking and the various postmodernisms that it has informed.<sup>9</sup> Taking the term literally as *postcolonial*, some practitioners of postcolonial criticism describe former settler colonies—such as the United States and Australia—as postcolonial, regardless of their status as First World societies and colonizers themselves of their indigenous populations.<sup>10</sup> (Though to be fair, the latter could also be said of many Third World societies.) At the same time, the themes of postcolonial criticism have been prominent in the cultural discourses of Third World societies that were never, strictly speaking, colonies, or that conducted successful revolutions against Euro-American domination, or, like China, both. Nor

9. Indeed, Lyotard has defined *postmodern* as “incredulity toward metanarratives” (Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi [Minneapolis, 1984], p. xxiv).

10. See *The Empire Writes Back: Theory and Practice in Post-Colonial Literatures*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (London, 1989), p. 2.

are there clear temporal boundaries to the use of the term because the themes it encompasses are as old as the history of colonialism. To use the example of China again, such themes as the status of native history vis-à-vis Euro-American conceptualizations of history, national identity and its contested nature, national historical trajectory in the context of global modernization, and even questions of subjectivity created by a sense of in-betweenness are as old as the history of the Chinese encounter with the Euro-American West.<sup>11</sup> One might go so far as to suggest that, if a crisis in historical consciousness, with all its implications for national and individual identity, is a basic theme of postcoloniality, then the First World itself is postcolonial. To the extent that the Euro-American self-image was shaped by the experience of colonizing the world (since the constitution of the Other is at once also the constitution of the Self), the end of colonialism presents the colonizer as much as the colonized with a problem of identity. The crisis created by the commemoration of the 500th anniversary of Columbus's adventure comes to mind immediately.

On the other hand, the term *postcolonial*, understood in terms of its discursive thematics, excludes from its scope most of those who inhabit or hail from *postcolonial* societies. It does not account for the attractions of modernization and nationalism to vast numbers in Third World populations, let alone to those marginalized by national incorporation in the global economy. Prakash seems to acknowledge this when he observes that "outside the first world, in India itself, the power of western discourses operates through its authorization and deployment by the nation-state—the ideologies of modernization and instrumentalist science are so deeply sedimented in the national body politic that they neither manifest themselves nor function exclusively as forms of imperial power" ("PC," p. 10). It excludes the many ethnic groups in *postcolonial* societies (among others) that, obviously unaware of their hybridity, go on massacring one another. It also excludes radical postcolonials. Intellectuals in India have asked Gayatri Spivak to explain "questions that arise out of the way you perceive yourself ('The post-colonial diasporic Indian who seeks to decolonize the mind'), and the way you constitute us (for convenience, 'native' intellectuals)," to which Spivak's answer is: "your description of how I constitute you does not seem quite correct. I thought I constituted you, equally with the diasporic Indian, as the post-colonial intellectual!" The interrogators are not quite convinced: "Perhaps the relationship of distance and proximity between you and us is that what we

11. For discussions of similar problems in Chinese historiography, see Joseph R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley, 1968); Rey Chow, *Woman and Chinese Modernity: The Politics of Reading between West and East* (Minneapolis, 1991); Arif Dirlik, *Revolution and History: The Origins of Marxist Historiography in China, 1919–1937* (Berkeley, 1978); and Dirlik, "Marxism and Chinese History: The Globalization of Marxist Historical Discourse and the Problem of Hegemony in Marxism," *Journal of Third World Studies* 4 (Spring 1987): 151–64.

write and teach has political and other actual consequences for us that are in a sense different from the consequences, or lack of consequences, for you.” They express doubts in another sense as well: “What are the theories or explanations, the narratives of affiliation and disaffiliation that you bring to the politically contaminated and ambivalent function of the non-resident Indian (NRI) who comes back to India, however temporarily, upon the wings of progress?” (*PCC*, pp. 67–68). As phrased by Prakash, it is not clear that even the work of the *Subaltern Studies* collective, which serves as the inspiration of so much of the thematics of postcoloniality, may be included under postcolonial. I have no wish to impose an unwarranted uniformity on *Subaltern Studies* writers, but it seems that their more radical ideas, chief among them the idea of class, are somewhat watered down in the course of their representation in the enunciation of postcolonial criticism.<sup>12</sup> It is also misleading in my opinion to classify as postcolonial critics intellectuals as widely different politically as Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmad, Homi Bhabha, Gyan Prakash, Gayatri Spivak, and Lata Mani. In a literal sense, they may all share in postcoloniality and some of its themes. Said’s situation as a Palestinian intellectual does not permit him to cross the borders of Israel with the ease that his in-betweenness might suggest (which also raises the question for postcolonial critics of what borders are at issue). Ahmad, vehemently critical of the Three Worlds concept, nevertheless grounds his critique within the operations of capital, which is quite different from Prakash’s denial of a foundational status to capitalism.<sup>13</sup> Spivak and Mani, though quite cognizant of the different roles in different contexts that in-betweenness im-

12. This is at any rate a question that needs to be clarified. It seems to me that Prakash’s denial of foundational status to class goes beyond what is but a *historicization* of class in the work of *Subaltern Studies* historians similar to that found in, say, E. P. Thompson’s *The Making of the English Working Class* (London, 1963). For a note on the question of class, see Chakrabarty, “Invitation to a Dialogue,” *Subaltern Studies: Writings on South Asian History and Society*, ed. Ranajit Guha, 5 vols. (Oxford, 1982–87), 4:364–76. The procedure of generalization may also play a part in the deradicalization of *Subaltern Studies* ideas by removing them from their specific historiographical context where they *do* play an innovative, radical role. For instance, the qualification of the role of colonialism in Indian history is intended by these historians to bring to the fore the mystifications of the past in nationalist histories and hence is a radical act. Made into a general principle of postcolonialism, this qualification downplays the role of colonialism in history. For an acknowledgment of doubt concerning the success of *Subaltern Studies* historiography, see Chakrabarty, “Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History.”

13. Note not just the ideas but the tone in the following statement by Ahmad:

But one could start with a radically different premise, namely the proposition that we live not in three worlds but in one; that this world includes the experience of colonialism and imperialism on both sides of Jameson’s global divide . . . ; that societies in formations of backward capitalism are as much constituted by the division of classes as are societies in the advanced capitalist countries; that socialism is not restricted to something called the second world but is simply the name of a resistance that saturates the globe today, as capitalism itself does; that the different parts of the capitalist system are to be known not in terms of binary opposition but as a contradictory unity, with differ-

poses upon them, nevertheless ground their politics firmly in feminism (and, in the case of Spivak, Marxism).<sup>14</sup>

Finally, Kwame Anthony Appiah, examining the notion of postcoloniality in Africa, points to another pitfall in the literal use of *postcolonial*, this time a temporal one. Appiah shares in the understanding of postcolonial as postmodernization, post-Third World, and postnationalist and points out that while the first generation of African writers after the end of colonialism were nationalists, the second generation has rejected nationalism.<sup>15</sup> In a recent discussion (a response to the controversy provoked by his criticism of postcolonial sub-Saharan Africa), Achille Mbembe suggests why this should be the case when he states that “the younger generation of Africans have no direct or immediate experience” of colonization, whatever role it may have played as a foundational event in African history.<sup>16</sup> Postcolonial, in other words, is applicable not to all of the *postcolonial* period but only to that period after colonialism when, among other things, a forgetting of its effects has begun to set in.

What then may be the value of a term that includes so much beyond and excludes so much of its own postulated premise, the colonial? What it leaves us with is what I have already hinted at: postcolonial, rather than a description of anything, is a discourse that seeks to constitute the world in the self-image of intellectuals who view themselves (or have come to view themselves) as postcolonial intellectuals. That is, to recall my initial statement concerning Third World intellectuals who have arrived in First World academe, postcolonial discourse is an expression not so much of agony over identity, as it often appears, but of newfound power. Two further questions need to be addressed before I elaborate further on this proposition: one concerns the role intellectuals from India have played in the enunciation of postcolonial discourse; the other concerns the language of this discourse.

Spivak comments (in passing) in an interview that, “in India, people who can think of the three-worlds explanation are totally pissed off by not being recognized as the centre of the non-aligned nations, rather than a ‘Third-World’ country” (*PCC*, p. 91). Indian intellectuals (and others in India) are not the only ones “pissed off” at being categorized as

---

ences, yes, but also with profound overlaps. [Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness and the ‘National Allegory,’” p. 9]

14. See Spivak, “Can the Subaltern Speak?” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana, Ill., 1988), pp. 271–313, and Lata Mani, “Multiple Mediations: Feminist Scholarship in the Age of Multinational Reception,” in *Travelling Theories: Travelling Theorists*, ed. James Clifford and Vivek Dhareshwar (Santa Cruz, Calif., 1989), pp. 1–23.

15. See Kwame Anthony Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” *Critical Inquiry* 17 (Winter 1991): 353.

16. Achille Mbembe, “Prosaics of Servitude and Authoritarian Civilities,” trans. Janet Roitman, *Public Culture* 5 (Fall 1992): 137.

just another Third World people; such can be found in any Third World country (my country of origin, Turkey, and the country I study, China, come to mind immediately), which speaks to the sorry state of Third World consciousness, if there is one. It is also impossible to say whether or not Indian intellectuals' anger at such categorization has anything to do with the themes that appear in postcolonial discourse, particularly with the repudiation of Third World as a category. Nevertheless, intellectuals from India, as I noted above, have been prominent in identifying themselves as postcolonial intellectuals as well as in enunciating postcolonial criticism. There is nothing wrong with this, of course, except a certain confusion has been introduced into the discourse. Specific problems in Indian historiography and general problems of a global condition described as postcolonial get confused with the projection globally of subjectivities that are (on the basis of the disagreements among Indian intellectuals to which I alluded above) representative of very few intellectuals in India. Most of the generalizations that appear in the discourse of postcolonial intellectuals from India may appear novel in the historiography of India but are not discoveries from broader perspectives. It is no reflection on the historical writing of *Subaltern Studies* historians that their qualifications of class in Indian history, their views on the nation as contested category, and their injunction that the history of capitalism be understood in terms of the fracturing consequences of local and national resistance to it as well as its triumphant, homogenizing effects, however well taken, do not represent earth-shattering conceptual innovations; as Said notes in his foreword to *Selected Subaltern Studies*, these approaches represent the application in Indian historiography of trends in historical writing that were quite widespread by the 1970s, under the impact of social historians such as E. P. Thompson, Eric Hobsbawm, and a whole host of others.<sup>17</sup> All this indicates is that historians of India were participants in the transformations in historical thinking in all areas, transformations in which Third World sensibilities were just one among a number of events that also included post-structuralism, new ways of thinking about Marxism, and the entry into history of feminism. To be sure, I think it very important that Third World sensibilities be brought into play repeatedly in order to counteract the tendency toward cultural imperialism of First World thinkers and historians who apply concepts of First World derivation globally without giving a second thought to the social differences that must qualify those concepts historically and contextually, but this is no reason to inflate a postcolonial sensibility, especially one that is itself bound by national and local experiences, indefinitely. And yet such a tendency (for which *Subaltern Studies* writers may themselves not be responsible at all) is plainly visible in the exposition of postcoloniality by someone

17. See Edward W. Said, foreword, in *Selected Subaltern Studies*, pp. v-x.

like Prakash, who, writing of Indian historiography in one sentence, projects his observations globally in the very next one.

These observations are not intended to single out postcolonial intellectuals from India, which would be misleading not only about Indian intellectuals in general but also about postcolonial intellectuals in general. The appeals of postcoloniality are not restricted to intellectuals of any one national origin, and the problems to which I pointed above are problems of a general nature, born out of a contradiction between an insistence on heterogeneity, difference, and historicity and a tendency to generalize from the local to the global while denying that there are global forces at work that may condition the local in the first place. What my observations point to is a new assertiveness on the part of Third World intellectuals that makes this procedure possible. Another example may be found among Chinese intellectuals, in the so-called Confucian revival in recent years. These writers obviously do not describe themselves as postcolonial, for their point of departure is the newfound power of Chinese societies within global capitalism that, if anything, shows in their efforts to suppress memories of an earlier day when China, too, suffered from Euro-American hegemony (though not colonialism). In their case, the effort takes the form of articulating to the values of capitalism a Confucianism that in an earlier day was deemed to be inconsistent with capitalist modernization. Hence Confucianism has been rendered into a prime mover of capitalist development and has also found quite a sympathetic ear among First World ideologues who now look to a Confucian ethic to relieve the crisis of capitalism.<sup>18</sup> Although Confucianism in its urge to become part of a hegemonic ideology of capitalism differs from postcoloniality, it nevertheless shares with postcoloniality the counterhegemonic self-assertiveness of a group of formerly Third World intellectuals. And it may not be a coincidence that Chinese intellectuals in First World academia have played a major part in the enunciation of this Confucian revival, although it is by no means restricted to them.

The second question that needs to be considered concerns the language of postcolonial discourse, which is the language of First World post-structuralism, as postcolonial critics themselves readily concede, although they do not dwell too long on its implications. Prakash indicates this problem in his statement that "all of the third-world voices identified in 'Writing Post-Orientalist Histories' speak within and to discourses familiar to the 'West,'" but he goes on to conceal its implications in his conclusion that this discursive fluency proves only that the "maintenance and policing of East-West boundaries has never succeeded in stopping

18. For a sampling of essays, see *Confucianism and Modernization: A Symposium*, ed. Joseph P. L. Jiang (Taipei, 1987). Scholars such as Tu Wei-ming and Yu Ying-shih have played a major part in efforts to revive Confucianism, while the quasi-fascist regime of Singapore (especially under Lee Kuan Yew) also has been a major promoter of the idea.

the flows across and against boundaries,” as if the flows in the two directions have been equal in their potency (“PH,” p. 403). More important, Prakash’s obfuscation enables us to place temporally a postcoloniality that otherwise may stretch across the entire history of colonialism. Here, once again, a comparison with China may be instructive, this time over the issue of Marxism. Postcolonial critics insist that they are Marxists, but Marxists who reject the “nineteenth-century heritage” of Marxism with its universalistic pretensions that ignored historical differences (“PC,” p. 15). Chinese Marxist revolutionaries in the 1930s faced and addressed the problem of articulating Marxism to Chinese conditions (and vice versa). Their answer was that Marxism must be translated into a Chinese vernacular not just in a national but, more importantly, in a local sense: the language of the peasantry. The result was what is commonly called the Sinification of Marxism, embodied in so-called Mao Zedong Thought.<sup>19</sup> The approach of postcolonial critics to a similar problem is not to translate Marxism into a national (which is rejected) or local (which is affirmed) vernacular but to rephrase it in the language of post-structuralism, in which Marxism is deconstructed, decentered, and so on. In other words, a critique that starts off with a repudiation of the universalistic pretensions of Marxist language ends up not with its dispersion into local vernaculars but with a return to another First World language with universalistic epistemological pretensions. It enables us, at least, to locate postcolonial criticism in the contemporary First World.

This is not a particularly telling point. Postcolonial critics recognize that the “critical gaze” their studies “direct at the archeology of knowledge enshrined in the west arises from the fact that most of them are being written in the first-world academy” (“PC,” p. 10). In drawing attention to the language of postcolonial discourse, I seek, however, to deconstruct postcolonial intellectuals’ professions of hybridity and in-betweenness. The hybridity to which postcolonial criticism refers is uniformly between the *postcolonial* and the First World, never, to my knowledge, between one *postcolonial* intellectual and another. But hybridity and in-betweenness are not very revealing concepts in the former case either. Whereas postcolonial criticism quite validly points to the overdetermination of concepts and subjectivities (and I am quite sure that postcolonial subjectivity is overdetermined, while less sure that it is more so than any other), it conveniently ignores the part location in ideological and institutional structures plays in the resolution of contradictions presented by hybridity—and the consequences of location in generating vast differences in power.<sup>20</sup> If the language of postcolonial discourse is any

19. For a discussion of this problem in detail, see Dirlik, “Mao Zedong and ‘Chinese Marxism,’” *Encyclopedia of Asian Philosophy* (forthcoming).

20. Althusser recognized this problem with specific reference to Mao Zedong Thought. See Louis Althusser, “Contradiction and Overdetermination,” *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (New York, 1970), pp. 87–128. For the molding of ideology, see his “Ideology and

guide to its ideological direction, in this case the contradictions presented by hybridity would seem to be given direction by the location of postcolonial intellectuals in the academic institutions of the First World. However much postcolonial intellectuals may insist on hybridity and the transposability of locations, not all positions are equal in power, as Spivak's interrogators in India seem to recognize in their reference to the "wings of progress" that brought her to India. To insist on hybridity against one's own language, it seems to me, is to disguise not only ideological location but also the differences of power that go with different locations. Postcolonial intellectuals in their First World institutional location are ensconced in positions of power not only vis-à-vis the "native" intellectuals back at home but also vis-à-vis their First World neighbors here. My neighbors in Farmville, Virginia, are no match in power for the highly paid, highly prestigious postcolonial intellectuals at Columbia, Princeton, or Duke; some of them might even be willing to swap positions and take the anguish that comes with hybridity so long as it brings with it the power and the prestige it seems to command.

"Postcoloniality," Appiah writes, "has become . . . a condition of pessimism,"<sup>21</sup> and there is much to be pessimistic about the world situation of which postcoloniality is an expression. This is not the message of postcolonialism, however, as it acquires respectability and gains admission in United States academic institutions. Whereas this discourse shares in the same themes as postcolonial discourses everywhere, it rearranges these themes into a celebration of the end of colonialism, as if the only tasks left for the present were to abolish its ideological and cultural legacy. Although this approach may sound convincing, by fixing its gaze on the past it in fact avoids confronting the present. The current global condition appears in the discourse only as a projection of the subjectivities and epistemologies of First World intellectuals of Third World origin; the dis-

---

Ideological State Apparatuses," *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Brewster (New York, 1971), pp. 127–86. Mani gives a good (personal) account of the contextual formation of ideology in Mani, "Multiple Mediations." The risk in contextual ideological formation, of course, is that a problem may be transformed into a celebration—or game playing. This is evident in Spivak's "playfulness" throughout *The Post-Colonial Critic* as well as in, say, James Clifford's approach to the question of ethnography and culture. For a brief example of the latter see, among his many works, Clifford, "Notes on Theory and Travel," *Travelling Theory: Travelling Theorists*, pp. 177–88. My objection here is not to the importance of immediate context in the formation of ideology (and the variability and transposability of roles that it implies) but to the way such emphasis on the local mystifies the larger contexts that differentiate power relations and that suggest more stable and directed positions. No matter how much the ethnographer may strive to change places with the native, in the end the ethnographer returns to the First World academy and the native back to the wilds. This is the problem with postcoloniality and is evident in the tendency of so much postcolonial criticism to start off with a sociology of power relationships only to take refuge in aesthetic phraseology.

21. Appiah, "Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?" p. 353.

course constitutes the world in the self-image of these intellectuals, which makes it an expression not of powerlessness but of newfound power. Postcolonial intellectuals have arrived in the First World academy not only because they have broken new intellectual ground (although they *have* rephrased older themes) but also because intellectual orientations that earlier were regarded as marginal or subversive have acquired a new respectability. Postcoloniality, it has been noted, has found favor even among academic conservatives who prefer it to a less tractable vocabulary that insists on keeping in the foreground contemporary problems of political division and oppression.<sup>22</sup>

Postcoloniality already has been the subject of some telling criticism. Critics have noted that, in spite of its insistence on historicity and difference, postcoloniality mimics in its deployment the “ahistorical and universalizing” tendencies in colonialist thinking (“NP,” p. 99). “If the theory promises a decentering of history in hybridity, syncretism, multi-dimensional time, and so forth,” Anne McClintock writes, “the *singularity* of the term effects a re-centering of global history around the single rubric of European time. Colonialism returns at the moment of its disappearance.”<sup>23</sup> In a world situation in which severe inequalities persist in older colonial forms or in their neocolonial reconfigurations, moreover, “the unified temporality of ‘postcoloniality’ risks reproducing the colonial discourse of an allochronic other, living in another time, still lagging behind us, the genuine postcolonials” (“NP,” p. 104). The spatial homogenization that accompanies a “unified temporality” not only fails to discriminate between vastly different social and political situations but also, to the extent that it “fails to discriminate between the diverse modalities of hybridity,” may end up in “the consecration of hegemony” (“NP,” p. 110). Failing to make such discriminations and lacking a sense of totality, postcoloniality, as Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook observe, also ends up mimicking methodologically the colonialist epistemology that it sets out to repudiate:

The solutions it offers—methodological individualism, the depoliticising insulation of social from material domains, a view of social relations that is in practice extremely voluntaristic, the refusal of any kind of programmatic politics—do not seem to us radical, subversive, or emancipatory. They are on the contrary conservative and implicitly authoritarian, as they were indeed when recommended more overtly in the heyday of Britain’s own imperial power.<sup>24</sup>

22. See the example Shohat gives of her experiences at CUNY (“NP,” p. 99).

23. Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress: Pitfalls of the Term ‘Post-Colonialism,’” *Social Text*, no. 31/32 (1992): 86.

24. Rosalind O’Hanlon and David Washbrook, “After Orientalism: Culture, Criticism, and Politics in the Third World,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 34 (Jan. 1992): 166; hereafter abbreviated “AO.”

Postcolonialism's repudiation of structure and totality in the name of history ironically ends up not in an affirmation of historicity but in a self-referential, universalizing historicism that reintroduces through the back door an unexamined totality; it projects globally what are but local experiences. The problem here may be the problem of all historicism without a sense of structure. Without a web of translocal relationships, it is impossible to determine what is different, heterogeneous, and local. In his critique of "essentializing" procedures (of India, of the Third World), Prakash offers as a substitute an understanding of these categories in terms of "relationships" but does not elaborate on what these relationships might be. The critique of an essentialist fixing of the Third World is not novel; Carl E. Pletsch's eloquent critique of three worlds theory (without the aid of postcoloniality), published a decade ago, enunciated clearly the problem of ideological essentializing in modernization theory.<sup>25</sup> Nor is Prakash's conceptual "innovation"—relationships—truly new. Pletsch himself pointed to global relationships as part of the conceptual underpinnings of modernization theory as well as to their importance in understanding problems of development, and an understanding of modern global history in terms of relationships, needless to say, is the crucial thesis of world-system analysis.

The difference between world-system analysis and Prakash's post-foundational understanding of relationships is Prakash's rejection of foundational categories, chief among them, capitalism. What O'Hanlon and Washbrook say on this issue is worth quoting at some length:

What [Prakash's] position leaves quite obscure is what status exactly this category of "capitalist modernity" occupies for him. If our strategy should be to "refuse" it in favour of marginal histories, of multiple and heterogeneous identities, this suggests that capitalist modernity is nothing more than a potentially disposable fiction, held in place simply by our acceptance of its cognitive categories and values. Indeed, Prakash is particularly disparaging of Marxist and social historians' concern with capitalism as a "system" of political economy and coercive instrumentalities. Yet in other moments Prakash tells us that history's proper task is to challenge precisely this "homogenization of the world by contemporary capitalism." If this is so, and there is indeed a graspable logic to the way in which modern capitalism has spread itself globally, how are we to go about the central task of comprehending this logic in the terms that Prakash suggests? ["AO," p. 147]

Prakash's answer to his critics simply evades the issues raised in this passage (while coming close to granting a central role to capitalism) be-

25. See Carl E. Pletsch, "The Three Worlds, or the Division of Social Scientific Labor, circa 1950–1975," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 23 (Oct. 1981): 565–90.

cause to recognize them would make his postfoundational history untenable (see "PC," pp. 13–14). Fernando Coronil outlines the political consequences of the postcolonialist repudiation of metanarratives in his observation that such opposition "produces disjointed mininarratives which reinforce dominant worldviews; reacting against determinisms, it presents free-floating events; refusing to fix identity in structural categories, it essentializes identity through difference; resisting the location of power in structures or institutions, it diffuses it throughout society and ultimately dissolves it."<sup>26</sup> It also relieves "self-defined minority or subaltern critics," O'Hanlon and Washbrook note, of the necessity of "doing what they constantly demand of others, which is to historicise the conditions of their own emergence as authoritative voices—conditions which could hardly be described without reference of some kind to material and class relations" ("AO," pp. 165–66).

Finally, the postcolonial repudiation of the Third World is intimately linked with the repudiation of capitalism's structuring of the modern world. Once again, essentialism serves as a straw man, diverting attention from radical conceptualizations of the Third World that are not essentialist but relational, as in world-system approaches. Rather than fixing it ahistorically, as Prakash would have it, the world-system approach comprehends the Third World as a structural position within a capitalist world order, a position that changes with changing structural relationships. To be sure, world-system analysis, like one based on modernization, locates the Third World discursively, but, as I have argued above, so does postcolonialist analysis. The question then becomes how well competing discourses account for historical changes in global relationships and the oppositional practices to which they point. I will say more on the former below. As for oppositional practices, postcoloniality by its very logic permits little beyond local struggles and, since it makes no reference to structure or totality, directionless ones at that. For all its contradictions, Shohat writes, "'Third World' usefully evokes structural commonalities of struggles. The invocation of the 'Third World' implies a belief that the shared history of neocolonialism and internal racism form sufficient common ground for alliances among . . . diverse peoples. If one does not believe or envision such commonalities, then indeed the term 'Third World' should be discarded" ("NP," p. 111).

The denial of capitalism's foundational status also reveals a culturalism in the postcolonialist argument that has important ideological consequences. This involves the issue of Eurocentrism. Without capitalism as the foundation for European power and the motive force of its globalization, Eurocentrism would have been just another ethnocentrism (comparable to any other ethnocentrism from the Chinese and the Indian to

26. See Fernando Coronil, "Can Postcoloniality Be Decolonized? Imperial Banality and Postcolonial Power," *Public Culture* 5 (Fall 1992): 99–100.

the most trivial tribal solipsism). An exclusive focus on Eurocentrism as a cultural or ideological problem that blurs the power relationships that dynamized it and endowed it with hegemonic persuasiveness fails to explain why, in contrast to regional or local ethnocentrism, this particular ethnocentrism was able to define modern global history and itself as the universal aspiration and end of that history. By throwing the cover of culture over material relationships, as if the one had little to do with the other, such a focus diverts criticism of capitalism to the criticism of Eurocentric ideology, which not only helps postcolonialism disguise its own ideological limitation but also, ironically, provides an alibi for inequality, exploitation, and oppression in their modern guises under capitalist relationships. The postcolonialist argument projects upon the past the same mystification of the relationship between power and culture that is characteristic of the ideology of global capitalism of which it is a product.

These criticisms, however vehement on occasion, do not necessarily indicate that postcolonialism's critics deny it all value; indeed, critics such as Coronil, McClintock, and Shohat explicitly acknowledge some value to the issues raised by postcolonialism and postcolonial intellectuals. There is no denying that postcolonialism expresses not only a crisis in the ideology of linear progress but also a crisis in the modes of comprehending the world associated with such concepts as Third World and nation-state. Nor is it to be denied that as the global situation has become blurred with the disappearance of socialist states, with the emergence of important differences economically and politically among so-called Third World societies, and with the diasporic motions of populations across national and regional boundaries, fragmentation of the global into the local has emerged into the foreground of historical and political consciousness. Crossing national, cultural, class, gender, and ethnic boundaries, moreover, with its promise of a genuine cosmopolitanism, is appealing in its own right.

Within the institutional site of the First World academy, fragmentation of earlier metanarratives appears benign (except to hidebound conservatives) for its promise of more democratic, multicultural, and cosmopolitan epistemologies. In the world outside the academy, however, it shows in murderous ethnic conflict, continued inequalities among societies, classes, and genders, and the absence of oppositional possibilities that, always lacking in coherence, are rendered even more impotent than earlier by the fetishization of difference, fragmentation, and so on.

The confounding of ideological metanarratives with actualities of power renders the predicament more serious. To mistake fragmentation in one realm with fragmentation in the other ignores the possibility that ideological fragmentation may represent not the dissolution of power but its further concentration. It is necessary, to account for this possibility, to retain a sense of structure and totality in the confrontation of fragmentation and locality, the alternative to which may be complicity in the consoli-

dation of hegemony in the very process of questioning it. Although post-coloniality represents an effort to adjust to a changing global situation, it appears for that very reason as an exemplary illustration of this predicament. Critics have hinted at its possible relationship to a new situation in the capitalist transformation of the world. Without examining this relationship at length, I would like to look at this relationship more closely.

### *Global Capitalism and the Condition of Postcoloniality*

David Harvey and Fredric Jameson, among others, perceive a relationship between postmodernism and a new phase in the development of capitalism that has been described variously as late capitalism, flexible production or accumulation, disorganized capitalism, and global capitalism.<sup>27</sup> As a child of postmodernism, postcolonialism too is expressive of the logic of this phase of capitalism, but on Third World terrain.

Fundamental to the structure of the new global capitalism (the term I prefer) is what Folker Fröbel and others have described as “a new international division of labor,” that is, the transnationalization of production where, through subcontracting, the process of production (of even the same commodity) is globalized.<sup>28</sup> The international division of labor in production may not be entirely novel, but new technologies have increased spatial extension as well as speed of production to an unprecedented level. These same technologies have endowed capital and production with novel mobility; seeking maximum advantage for capital against labor as well as freedom from social and political interference, production seems to be constantly changing its location—hence flexible production. For these reasons, analysts perceive in global capitalism a qualita-

27. See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford, 1989), and Fredric Jameson, “Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism,” *New Left Review* 146 (July/Aug. 1984): 53–92.

28. Folker Fröbel, Jürgen Heinrichs, and Otto Kreye, *The New International Division of Labour: Structural Unemployment in Industrialised Countries and Industrialisation in Developing Countries*, trans. Pete Burgess (Cambridge, 1980). “Disorganized capitalism” comes from Claus Offe, *Disorganized Capitalism: Contemporary Transformations of Work and Politics*, ed. John Keane (Cambridge, Mass., 1985), while *global capitalism* is the term used by Robert J. S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte, *Global Capitalism: The New Leviathan* (Albany, N.Y., 1990). Other noteworthy books on the subject are Leslie Sklair, *Sociology of the Global System* (Baltimore, 1991), which spells out the implications of global capitalism for the Third World, and, especially in light of what I say below, of the new presidency of the United States, Robert B. Reich, *The Work of Nations: Preparing Ourselves for Twenty-First Century Capitalism* (New York, 1991). Reich’s book incorporates his contributions to the *Harvard Business Review*, that have such suggestive titles (in the present context) as “Who is US?” and “Who is Them?” For “subcontracting,” see Gary Gereffi, “Global Sourcing and Regional Divisions of Labor in the Pacific Rim,” *What Is in a Rim? Critical Perspectives on the Pacific Region Idea* (forthcoming).

tive difference from past, similar practices—indeed, a new phase of capitalism.

Also important to this new phase is the decentering of capitalism nationally. In other words, it is increasingly difficult to point to any nation or region as the center of global capitalism. More than one analyst (in a position of power) has found an analogue to the emerging organization of production in the northern European Hanseatic League of the early modern period (that is, the period before the emergence of nation-states); in other words, a network of urban formations, without a clearly definable center, whose links to one another are far stronger than their relationships to their immediate hinterlands.<sup>29</sup>

The medium linking the contemporary global capitalist network together is the transnational corporation, which has taken over from national markets as the locus of economic activity not as a passive medium for the transmission of capital, commodities, and production but as a determinant of that transmission and its direction. Whereas the analogy with the Hanseatic League suggests decentralization, production under global capitalism is in fact heavily concentrated in the corporation. With power lodged in transnational corporations, which by definition transcend nations in their organization and loyalties, the power of the nation-state to regulate the economy internally is constricted, while global regulation (and defense) of the economic order emerges as a major task. This is manifested not only in the proliferation of global organizations but also in efforts to organize extranational regional organizations to give coherence to the functioning of the economy.<sup>30</sup>

The transnationalization of production is the source at once of unprecedented global unity and of unprecedented fragmentation in the history of capitalism. The homogenization of the globe economically, socially, and culturally is such that Marx's predictions finally seem to be on the point of vindication. At the same time, however, there is a parallel process of fragmentation at work; globally, in the disappearance of a center to capitalism, locally, in the fragmentation of the production process into subnational regions and localities. As supranational regional organizations such as the European Economic Community, the Pacific Basin Economic Community, and the North American Free Trade Zone (to mention some that have been realized or are the objects of intense organizational activity) manifest this fragmentation at the global level, localities within a single nation competing with one another to place themselves in

29. See Riccardo Petrella, "World City-States of the Future," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 24 (Fall 1991): 59–64. See also William E. Schmidt, "A New Hanseatic League? In a Post-Cold War Era, Scandinavia Rethinks Itself," *New York Times*, 23 Feb. 1992, p. E3.

30. See Kenichi Ohmae, "Beyond Friction to Fact: The Borderless Economy," *New Perspectives Quarterly* 23 (Spring 1990): 21. See also Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (Summer 1993): 726–51.

the pathways of transnational capital represent it at the most basic local level. Nations themselves, it is arguable, historically represented attempts to contain fragmentation, but under attack from the outside (transnational organization) and the inside (subnational economic regions and localities), it is not quite clear how this new fragmentation is to be contained.<sup>31</sup>

Yet perhaps the most important consequence of the transnationalization of capital is that, for the first time in the history of capitalism, the capitalist mode of production, divorced from its historically specific origins in Europe, appears as an authentically global abstraction. The narrative of capitalism is no longer a narrative of the history of Europe; non-European capitalist societies now make their own claims on the history of capitalism. Corresponding to economic fragmentation, in other words, is cultural fragmentation, or, to put it in its positive guise, multiculturalism. The most dramatic instance of this new cultural situation may be the effort over the last decade to reconcile capitalism with the so-called Confucian values of East Asian societies, which is a reversal of a long-standing conviction (in Europe and East Asia) that Confucianism was historically an obstacle to capitalism. I think it is arguable that the end of Eurocentrism is an illusion because capitalist culture as it has taken shape has Eurocentrism built into the very structure of its narrative, which may explain why, even as Europe and the United States lose their domination of the capitalist world economy, European and American cultural values retain their domination. It is noteworthy that what makes something like the East Asian Confucian revival plausible is not its offer of alternative values to those of Euro-American origin but its articulation of native culture into a capitalist narrative. Having said this, it is important to reiterate nevertheless that the question of world culture has become much more complex than in earlier phases of capitalism.

The fragmentation of space and its consequences for Eurocentrism also imply a fragmentation of the temporality of capitalism; the challenge to Eurocentrism, in other words, means that it is possible to conceive of the future in ways other than those of Euro-American political and social models. Here, once again, it is difficult to distinguish reality from illusion, but the complexity is undeniable.

Finally, the transnationalization of production calls into question earlier divisions of the world into First, Second, and Third Worlds. The Second World, the world of socialism, is for all practical purposes of the past. But the new global configuration also calls into question the distinctions between the First and Third Worlds. Parts of the earlier Third World are today on the pathways of transnational capital and belong in the "developed" sector of the world economy. Likewise, parts of the First World marginalized in the new global economy are hardly distinguishable in

31. This phenomenon is addressed in most of the works cited above in footnote 28.

way of life from what used to be viewed as the Third World. It may not be fortuitous that the North-South distinction has gradually taken over from the earlier division of the globe into three worlds, unless we remember that the references of North and South are not merely to concrete geographic locations but are also metaphorical. North connotes the pathways of transnational capital, and South, the marginalized populations of the world, regardless of their location—which is where postcoloniality comes in.

Ideologues of global capital have described this condition as “global regionalism” or “global localism,” adding quickly, however, that global localism is 80 percent global and only 20 percent local.<sup>32</sup> They have also appropriated for capital the radical ecological slogan, “Think global, act local.”<sup>33</sup>

The situation created by global capitalism helps explain certain phenomena that have become apparent over the last two or three decades, but especially since the eighties: global motions of peoples (and, therefore, cultures), the weakening of boundaries (among societies, as well as among social categories), the replications in societies internally of inequalities and discrepancies once associated with colonial differences, simultaneous homogenization and fragmentation within and across societies, the interpenetration of the global and the local, and the disorganization of a world conceived in terms of three worlds or nation-states. Some of these phenomena have also contributed to an appearance of equalization of differences within and across societies, as well as of democratization within and among societies. What is ironic is that the managers of this world situation themselves concede that they (or their organizations) now have the power to appropriate the local for the global, to admit different cultures into the realm of capital (only to break them down and remake them in accordance with the requirements of production and consumption), and even to reconstitute subjectivities across national boundaries to create producers and consumers more responsive to the operations of capital. Those who do not respond, or the “basket cases” that are not essential to those operations—four-fifths of the global population by the managers’ count—need not be colonized; they are simply marginalized. What the new flexible production has made possible is that it is no longer necessary to utilize explicit coercion against labor at home or in colonies abroad. Those peoples or places that are not responsive to the needs (or demands) of capital, or are too far gone to respond “efficiently,” simply find themselves out of its pathways. And it is easier even than in the heyday of colonialism or modernization theory to say convincingly: It is their own fault.

32. See Ohmae, “Beyond Friction to Fact.” See also James Gardner, “Global Regionalism,” *New Perspectives Quarterly* 25 (Winter 1992): 58–59.

33. William Taylor, “The Logic of Global Business: An Interview with ABB’s Percy Barnevik,” *Harvard Business Review* 69 (Mar.–Apr. 1991): 91.

If I may now return to Shohat's question with which I began this essay—"When exactly . . . does the 'post-colonial' begin?"—and give it a less facetious answer consistent with her intention, the answer is, with the emergence of global capitalism, not in the sense of an exact coincidence in time but in the sense that the one is a condition for the other. There is little that is remarkable about this conclusion, which is but an extension to postcolonialism of the relationship that Harvey and Jameson have established between postmodernism and developments within capitalism. If postcolonialism is a progeny of postmodernism, then these developments within capitalism are also directly or indirectly pertinent to understanding postcolonialism. Postcolonial critics readily concede the debt they owe to postmodernist and post-structuralist thinking; indeed, their most original contribution would seem to lie in their rephrasing of older problems in the study of the Third World in the language of post-structuralism. What is truly remarkable, therefore, is that a consideration of the relationship between postcolonialism and global capitalism should be absent from the writings of postcolonial intellectuals, an absence all the more remarkable because this relationship, which pertains not only to cultural and epistemological but also to social and political formations, is arguably less abstract and more direct than any relationship between global capitalism and postmodernism.

Postcoloniality represents a response to a genuine need, the need to overcome a crisis of understanding produced by the inability of old categories to account for the world. The metanarrative of progress that underlies two centuries of thinking is in deep crisis. Not only have we lost faith in progress but also progress has had actual disintegrative effects. More important, over the last decade in particular our sense of a clear progression of time and events has been jumbled. During these years, conservatism has become revolutionary (the Reagan revolution); revolutionaries have turned first into conservatives and then into reactionaries (as in formerly socialist countries such as the Soviet Union and China); religious millenarianisms long thought to be castaways from Enlightenment have made a comeback into politics, sometimes, as in the United States, allied to high-tech revolutions; and fascism has been reborn out of the ashes of Communist regimes. The crisis of progress has brought in its wake a crisis of modernization, more in its Marxist than in its bourgeois guise, and called into question the structure of the globe as conceived by modernizationalists and radicals alike in the decades after World War II, that is, as three worlds. Whether they be fixed geographically or structurally, in bourgeois or in Marxist social theory, the three worlds are indeed no longer tenable. The globe has become as jumbled up spatially as the ideology of progress has temporally. Third Worlds have appeared in the First World and First Worlds in the Third. New diasporas have relocated the Self there and the Other here, and consequently borders and boundaries have been confounded. And the flow of culture has been at once

homogenizing and heterogenizing; some groups share in a common global culture regardless of location even as they are alienated from the culture of their hinterlands while others are driven back into cultural legacies long thought to be residual to take refuge in cultural havens that are as far apart from one another as they were at the origins of modernity—even though they may be watching the same TV shows.

Politically speaking, the Second and Third Worlds have been the major casualties of this crisis. The Second World, the world of socialist states, is already, to put it bluntly, history. What has happened to the Third World (the immediate subject of postcoloniality) may be less apparent but no less significant. We may note here that the two major crises of the early nineties that are global in implication are the crises occasioned by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the current situation in Somalia. In the Gulf crisis, a Third World country appeared as the imperialist culprit against a socially and politically reactionary but economically powerful neighbor and had to be driven back by the combined armies of the First, Second, and Third Worlds, led by an imperial power now turned into a paradigm of righteousness. The "invasion"—I borrow the word from a TV report—of Somalia, if anything, is more revealing. If in the case of the Gulf crisis one Third World country had to be saved from another, in Somalia we have a Third World country that has to be saved from itself. The Third World, viewed by radicals only two decades ago as a hope for the future, now has to be saved from itself. The crisis could not get much deeper.

Postcoloniality addresses this situation of crisis that eludes understanding in terms of older conceptualizations,<sup>34</sup> which may explain why it created immediate ferment in intellectual circles. But this still begs the question, why now?—and why has it taken the intellectual direction it has? After all, there is more than one conceptual way out of a crisis, and we must inquire why this particular way has acquired immediate popularity—in First World institutions. To put it bluntly, postcoloniality is designed to *avoid* making sense of the current crisis and, in the process, to cover up the origins of postcolonial intellectuals in a global capitalism of which they are not so much victims as beneficiaries.

Postcoloniality resonates with the problems thrown up by global capitalism. As the crisis of the Third World has become inescapably apparent during the decade of the eighties, so have the effects of global capitalism. The Reagan (and Thatcher) revolution was not so much a revolution heralding a new beginning as a revolution aimed at reorganizing the globe politically so as to give free reign to a global capitalism that strained against the harness of political restrictions. The overthrow of socialist states was one part of the program. Another was taming the Third World,

34. See Mbembe, "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarly in the Postcolony," trans. Roitman, *Public Culture* 4 (Spring 1992): 1–30; previously published as "Provisional Notes on the Postcolony," *Africa* 62, no. 1 (1992): 3–37. See also the discussion provoked by this essay in *Public Culture* 5 (Fall 1992): 47–145.

if necessary by invasion, preferably by encirclement with economic sanctions or with Patriot missiles. But these are at best tactics of last resort. By far the best option is control from the inside through the creation of classes amenable to incorporation into or alliance with global capital.

I use the word *control* here advisedly; under conditions of global capitalism, control is not to be imposed, it has to be negotiated. Transnational capital is no longer just Euro-American, and neither is modernity. The complicated social and cultural composition of transnational capitalism makes it difficult to sustain a simple equation between capitalist modernity and Eurocentric (and patriarchal) cultural values and political forms. Others who have achieved success within the capitalist world system demand a voice for their values within the culture of transnational capital; the East Asian Confucian revival to which I referred above is exemplary of the phenomenon. Eurocentrism, as the very condition for the emergence of these alternative voices, retains its cultural hegemony; but it is more evident than ever before that, for this hegemony to be sustained, its boundaries must be rendered more porous in order to absorb alternative cultural possibilities that might otherwise serve as sources of destructive oppositions. (The mutual bashing between Japan and the United States in recent years, which revives racist and Orientalist vocabulary, attests to the dangers of conflict within the very ranks of transnational capital.) And who knows, in the end, what values are most functional to the needs of a changing capital? Commentator after commentator has remarked in recent years that the communitarian values of Confucianism may be more suitable to a contemporary managerial capitalism than the individualistic values of the entrepreneurial capitalism of an earlier day. What is clear is that global capitalism is (and must be) much more fluid culturally than a Eurocentric capitalism.

This is also the condition of postcoloniality and the cultural moves associated with it. Knuckleheaded conservatives, anxious to explain away cultural problems by substituting worries about the machinations of subversives for systemic analysis, attribute the cultural problems that became apparent in the eighties (most recently, multiculturalism) to the invasion of academic institutions and politics in general by Marxists, feminists, ethnics, and so on. What they ignore is the possible relationship between the Reagan economic revolution and these cultural developments. That is, in their very globalism, the cultural requirements of transnational corporations can no longer afford the cultural parochialism of an earlier day. Focusing on liberal arts institutions, some conservative intellectuals overlook how much headway multiculturalism has made with business school administrators and the managers of transnational corporations, who are eager all of a sudden to learn the secrets of East Asian economic success in "oriental" philosophies, who cannibalize cultures all over the world in order to better market their commodities, and who have suddenly become aware of a need to internationalize academic institutions (which

often takes the form not of promoting scholarship in a conventional sense but of “importing” and “exporting” students and faculty). While in an earlier day it might have been Marxist and feminist radicals, with the aid of a few ethnics, who spearheaded multiculturalism, by now the initiative has passed into the hands of “enlightened” administrators and trustees who are quite aware of the “manpower” needs of the new economic situation. No longer so much a conflict between conservatives and radicals (although that dimension, too, is obviously there), the conflict shapes up now as a conflict between an older elite, comprised in part of a small business interest now threatened by domestic and foreign competition, and the elite vanguard of international business. Among the foremost and earliest of United States advocates of transnationalism and multiculturalism is the *Harvard Business Review*.

The Reaganites may have been misled by the visions, which have not materialized, of Dinesh D’Souza and his imitators. Their failure to grasp the social and political consequences of economic victory for the transnationalism that they engineered became apparent during the recent elections when, against the calls from right-wingers for a return to such traditional American values as Eurocentrism, patriarchalism, and racism, George Bush often looked befuddled, possibly because he grasped much better than men like Pat Buchanan the dilemmas presented by the victory of transnationalism over all its competitors in the Second and Third Worlds. The result has been the victory of high-tech yuppies, who are much better attuned to the new world situation and to the difficulties it presents. It is no coincidence that Robert Reich, frequent contributor to the *Harvard Business Review*, keen analyst of developments within the capitalist world economy, and an advocate of the borderless economy is a close confidant of President Clinton.

This is, I think, also the context for the emergence of postcoloniality and for its rapid success in academic institutions as a substitute for earlier conceptualizations of the world. Postcoloniality, in the particular direction it has taken as a discourse, also resonates with the problems of the contemporary world. It addresses issues that may have been present all along in global studies but are now rephrased to attune to issues in global capitalism: Eurocentrism and its relationship to capitalism; the kind of modernity that is relevant to a postmodern, postsocialist, post-Third World situation; the place of the nation in development; the relationship between the local and the global; the place of borders and boundaries in a world where capital, production, and peoples are in constant motion; the status of structures in a world that more than ever seems to be without recognizable structure; interpenetrations and reversals between the different worlds; borderlands subjectivities and epistemologies (hybridity); homogeneity versus heterogeneity; and so forth.

Postcoloniality, however, is also 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. Postcolonial critics have engaged in valid criticism of past forms of ideological hegemony but have had little to say about its contemporary figurations. Indeed, in their simultaneous repudiation of structure and affirmation of the local in problems of oppression and liberation, they have mystified the ways in which totalizing structures persist in the midst of apparent disintegration and fluidity. They have rendered into problems of subjectivity and epistemology concrete and material problems of the everyday world. While capital in its motions continues to structure the world, refusing it foundational status renders impossible the cognitive mapping that must be the point of departure for any practice of resistance and leaves such mapping as there is in the domain of those who manage the capitalist world economy.<sup>35</sup> Indeed, in the projection of the current state of conceptual disorganization upon the colonial past, postcolonial critics have also deprived colonialism of any but local logic, so that the historical legacy of colonialism (in Iraq, or Somalia, or, for that matter, any Third World society) appears irrelevant to the present. Thus the burden of persistent problems is shifted onto the victims themselves.

“Postcoloniality,” Appiah writes, “is the condition of what we might ungenerously call a *comprador* intelligentsia.”<sup>36</sup> I think this is missing the point because the world situation that justified the term *comprador* no longer exists. I would suggest instead that postcoloniality is the condition of the intelligentsia of global capitalism. The question, then, is not whether this global intelligentsia can (or should) return to national loyalties but whether, in recognition of its own class-position in global capitalism, it can generate a thoroughgoing criticism of its own ideology and formulate practices of resistance against the system of which it is a product.

35. See Jameson, “Cognitive Mapping,” in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, pp. 347–57. Jameson has been a forceful advocate of the necessity of retaining a sense of totality and structure in a socialist politics. His own totalization of the global structure has come under severe criticism. See Ahmad, “Jameson’s Rhetoric of Otherness.” I should stress here that it is not necessary to agree with his particular mode of totalization to recognize the validity of his argument.

36. Appiah, “Is the Post- in Postmodernism the Post- in Postcolonial?” p. 348.