

What Was Postcolonialism?*

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I. Introduction

WE WISH THIS WERE NOT A MATTER OF RETURN, of repetition, of the twice-told tale. We wish we were not witnessing a past moment by repeating it. And we wish the repetition didn't always come back to itself (which it does) as if, with Sigmund Freud (in Jacques Derrida's reading), we were always "haunted by something totally other," the "other" that always comes back, like the pleasure principle, "only as that which has not truly come back."¹ Yet things also do move on, and as we look again at the paradoxical situation of postcolonialism we are moved above all to insist on its *pastness*. We have not come to announce the "end of postcolonialism," as the ends of so many other movements have been announced, usually in vain. Still less do we want to deny the value of what Edward Said declared, in the 1994 afterword to his magisterial work *Orientalism*, was a "revolution in the consciousness of women, minorities, and marginals."² Although Said said nothing about postcolonialism in his original 1979 edition, the work nevertheless provided scholars with many registers with which to address and interpret both Orientalist, self-serving, colonial discourses (within which are embedded a European compulsion to confine the other) and the highly adventurous, indeed agonistic, discourses of anticolonial struggles. In the 1994 afterword, though, Said also located postcolonialism in the past (to a point) by approvingly quoting Ella Shohat's suggestion that postcolonialism concerns itself with "continuities and discontinuities . . . on the new modes and forms of the old colonialist practices" and not on a "beyond."³ Said noted, correctly let us add, the links between postmodernism and postcolonialism, but was quick to point out that in the hands of the early postcolonial scholars and artists (Chinua Achebe, C. L. R. James, and Frantz Fanon among them) the historical imperative, or a grand narrative of postcolonial regeneration and completion, is always present. History is not some contingent, endlessly deferred, and nonfoundational language game; it

* This paper is for our friend Stephen Slemon, postcolonial scholar.

has real, foundational value in the lives of the recently emancipated. The trouble is that the historical sense has been too sweepingly invoked even in postcolonial theory, where very often “pedagogical expediency” (after Masao Miyoshi) triumphs over localized and rigorous “political and economic scrutiny.”⁴ We argue that a recognition of the pastness of postcolonialism, present indeed in Said’s own project, releases energies that have been locked into an ever more onerous task, to maintain and extend its scope, in a present and future increasingly constituted in other terms.

The mode of interrogation, its discursive form, signaled in the title of our paper and implicit in Said, has an older history. When Immanuel Kant posed his famous question “what is Enlightenment?” his influential letter to the editor (“An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?”) established the generic register as well as the form that such an argument should take.⁵ Michel Foucault’s response to Kant’s proposal may be seen as our own point of departure.⁶

The key to Foucault’s response is the necessity of responding to “one’s own present.” Before discussing how Kant’s reflection on the present is different, Foucault summarizes how the present had been hitherto handled. First, the “present may be represented as belonging to a certain era of the world.” Second, “the present may be interrogated in an attempt to decipher in it the heralding signs of a forthcoming event.” Third, “the present may also be analysed as a point of transition toward the dawning of a new world.” “Now,” writes Foucault, “the way Kant poses the question of *Aufklärung* is entirely different: it is neither a world era to which one belongs, nor an event whose signs are perceived, nor the dawning of an accomplishment” (97). It is instead a departure, a release (“Enlightenment is man’s release . . .”), an exit, a way out, a way of considering the difference “today introduces with respect to yesterday.” Put in this fashion, the difference introduced may be deemed an attitude of modernity.

We take Kant’s essay and Foucault’s response together as a guide to redefine postcolonialism itself as an attitude of modernity. It implicitly introduces a difference with respect to yesterday, but ignores the premodern, and defines the modern attitude as a largely European historical event (which the Enlightenment itself was). Our affirmation of the pastness of postcolonialism incorporates also our sense of its more productive uses. Via Karl Marx (rather than Kant) we insist on the fresh examination of historical archives, those postcolonialism has opened and those to which it has been blind. We need from Marx a comprehensive framework in which forms of culture and consciousness of postcolonialism are always grounded in material life processes, while we also depart from Marx’s “materialist” legacy by finding ways in which

premodern life-worlds continue, challenging the closures of modernism, Marxism, and postcolonialism.

II. In the Beginning Was the Word

"Post(-)colonialism" (hereafter, including its other substantive forms, without a hyphen) is a slippery term, whether viewed up close, from within a field it names that is barely twenty-five years old, or from a distance. Within the field it is so omnipresent it seems to have existed forever, yet it is notoriously difficult to define, pivoting as it does around that potent hyphen.⁷ Indeed, Terry Eagleton frantically called for "a secret handbook for post-colonial critics," which he felt must surely exist somewhere in the gaudy supermarket.⁸ But for many theorists, the ambiguity we have outlined is crucial to the power of postcolonialism and locates it in a much larger field of critical thinking, to which the attitude of modernity is crucial. It is that attitude of modernity that leads Stuart Hall to declare, "So, *postcolonial* is not the end of colonisation. It is after a certain *kind* of colonialism, after a certain moment of high imperialism and colonial occupation—in the wake of it, in the shadow of it, inflected by it—it is what it is because something else has happened before, but it is also something new."⁹ And Simon Gikandi, too, in his highly intelligent reading of "Englishness," considers postcolonialism a "code for the state of undecidability in which the culture of colonialism continues to resonate in what was supposed to be its negation."¹⁰ As a mobile metaphor, postcolonialism is best summed up by Emily Apter, who discovers in it a "locomotive, portmanteau quality,"¹¹ with transnational value as a mode of cultural analysis singularly suited for the analysis of literary/cultural diversity, what John Erickson has called this "cultural *métissage*."¹² Yet it may be symptomatic that Apter's center is located in urgent issues in her present, for which postcolonialism provides a perspective and context, rather than being at the center of her attention. In our terms, the postcolonial survives into the present precisely because of its status as past.

We illustrate the way the set of terms around "postcolonial(ism)" functions in current critical discourse from a typical text, a book on exilic and diasporic filmmaking by Iranian-American film critic Hamid Naficy.¹³ It has the following entries in the index: postcolonial and identity filmmakers, postcolonial cinema, postcolonial countries, postcolonial displacement, postcolonial filmmakers (not to be confused with postcolonial *and* identity filmmakers), postcolonialism, postcolonial strategy, postcolonial theory. We went back to the text to follow up these terms and establish a corpus. On this basis we make two observations,

which would apply to many other texts in this field. First, the term “postcolonial(ism)” is rarely used on its own. It normally is one of two or more terms that overlap and support each other: most commonly “postcolonial” and “third world” or “postmodern” (establishing a loose equivalence). Second, the term itself is losing its force through semantic dependency (the need to collocate it with another word); it is weakened, marginalized, and as a theoretical formation used only one-tenth as often as the adjective.

“Postcolonialism” is a neologism that grew out of older elements to capture a seemingly unique moment in world history, a configuration of experiences and insights, hopes and dreams arising from a hitherto silenced part of the world, taking advantage of new conditions to “search for alternatives to the discourses of the colonial era,”¹⁴ creating an altogether different vantage point from which to review the past and the future. That situation—what Apter (after James Clifford) has termed “a transnational fact of interdisciplinary everyday life”¹⁵—demanded a name. The name it claimed was “postcolonial,” and hence “postcolonialism.” Embedded in it is of course the “culture” of “colonialism” itself, which we argue may be recovered from the root words themselves, here the word “colony.”

“Colony” comes via French from the Latin *colonia* and *colonus*, farmer, from *colere*, to cultivate, dwell. Webster’s 1905 dictionary defined it as “A company of people transplanted from their mother country to a remote province or country, remaining subject to the jurisdiction of the parent state: as, the *colonies* of America.”¹⁶

The ideology embedded in the entry is unsurprising, given the date and source, and too obvious to need comment. Less obvious is the strangeness of the etymology. As Webster notes, “colony” comes from a rich and important root, *colo*, which, surprisingly, is also the source of “culture.” How could all this hang together in the modern meanings of “colony”? For an answer we turn to White and Riddle’s Latin dictionary (1876). They report that it is akin to the Sanskrit root *kshi* (class 2 and 6 Parasmaipada: *ksheti*, *kshiyati*), “to dwell,” its base meaning also in Latin: “to abide, dwell, stay (in a place), to inhabit it.”¹⁷ From this meaning it developed a set of related meanings: to work (the earth), to cultivate it and hence metaphorically to work the mind or soul, and to worship the gods. These are diverse meanings for a modern mindset, but in the premodern world, in which these terms were formed, there is an intrinsic connection between living in a place, working the land, and honoring its gods, the spirits of the land.

Colonus, one who is the subject of *col*, derived from this complex, so its primary meaning was an inhabitant or farmer. From this usage it drifted to refer to a settler in a foreign place, a “colonist” in the modern sense.

Yet this drift was not innocent, and in the Latin the other meanings are still active, part of the ideological work it did to justify and legitimate different modalities of invasion: living in (and dominating) a new land, “improving” it by work, and bringing new gods—all strategies that European powers employed in the five hundred years of European colonization.

This contradictory legacy then underwent over the course of fifteen hundred years an amnesiac shift in the stock of words of modern European languages. “Colony” came to refer primarily to invasive settlements, not to a neutral “dwelling.” It also lost its deep roots in premodern ways of life, especially religion. We will argue that all these elements are still present in contemporary forms of colonization, in both its classic (colonial), and postmodern (postcolonial) forms. The realities have not changed, but meaning has slowly seeped out of the term over two millennia. It is now less rich, less adequate to the complexities of the present as well as the past, missing surprising connections and contradictions that are still current.

“Postcolonialism” emerges from this complex history with two potent affixes attached in front and behind to an adjectival form in “-al”. The prefix “post-” is relatively easy to understand, though still with complex effects. In all its compounds it gestures toward a time just after some main event that defines its existence, of which it is the shadow. But how long and strong is that shadow, whose form and meaning is only guaranteed by the now-past originary form? “Post” has marginality and obsolescence built in. “Postcolonialism” is not immune to this fate.

“-Ism” is harder to track. The three suffixes “-ism,” “-ist,” and “-ize” all derive from the Greek *-izein*, which is added to a noun or adjective to make it a verb, describing a related action. The trouble is that this very productive set of morphemes have been applied over two thousand years to form a bewildering variety of words in many languages, Greek and Latin as well as modern European languages. In this heterogeneous set of words, “-ist” usually refers to a kind of agent who makes whatever it is happen. But it matters what kind of thing is made to happen: a thing (like a colony) or an adjective (like colonial). So “colonists” make a colony happen by what they do, whereas “colonialists” reflect the qualities of a colony, the attributes and attitudes associated with one.

“-Ism” still has a reference, obvious or latent, to actions or behaviors, habitual actions performed in relation to its headword. As with “-ist,” its meaning depends on qualities of the headword. In modern English there are two strands of meaning of “-ism” relevant to “postcolonialism.” One takes “postcolonial” in a general sense, referring to the kinds of things typically done in a postcolonial situation. The other strand has a long tradition, attested at least as early as 1680 in the OED, in which the

headword refers to a doctrine, theory, or practice. From its first appearance this usage always had a negative sense.

These two strands coexist, their differences unstated and in tension, in contemporary usages of "postcolonialism," creating ambivalence and confusion around the word. Does it refer to the inexhaustibly open and rich set of possible actions and states that can flourish in the shadow of (after) colonialism? Or is it the militant tendency stemming from "postcolonial (theory)," an "-ism" as in "dogmatism," notable more for energy than subtlety or originality, a rhetoric calling for action (real or imagined) on behalf of a cause whose tenets are not to be questioned? "Postcolonialism" in this sense is postcolonial thought without the thought, following postcolonial theory not as theory but as dogma, looking at its object through dangerous blinkers.

III. The Marginalization of "Postcolonialism"

The past fifty years, the scene of the triumph of "postcolonialism," also show signs of the marginalization and semantic seepage which is its present condition. To track this we begin with the OED, arguably the finest dictionary for any language in the world, produced at the high point of imperialism under the editorship of the formidable Sir James Murray.¹⁸ This text exemplifies better than any other the imperialist logic of instrumental reason (evident in the subtext of many citations), with participants who seem well aware of the link between language and the imperialist project.

We cite here parts of the OED's definitions of "colonial" and "colonialism," noting the use of qualifications such as "frequently" and "alleged." Colonial: "Of, or belonging to, or relating to a colony, or (*spec.*) British colonies. . . . Now freq. derogatory." Colonialism: "The colonial system or principle. Now freq. used in the derogatory sense of an alleged policy of exploitation of backward or weak peoples by a large power." (As if to underline the hostility on the part of the colonized backward classes the OED cites, "1957 *Listener* 1 Aug. 159/1: 'Colonialism' is the commonest term of abuse nowadays throughout more than half the world.")

An ideology of instrumental reason continues to govern these definitions, but at least the two terms get defined. No such luck with "postcolonialism," which does not appear in the second edition of the OED (1989). To locate it without the "-ism" you need to go to the prefix "post-," as the word does not occur as a headword! Even so you need to go to B1.b (after A1.a), where the definition of this class of hyphenated word is given as follows: "With adj. Or formed from post + a L. or Gr. sb.

with an adjectival ending. Many of these are self-explaining, esp. those formed for personal names [examples follow]. Also . . . [examples given]; and many others with obvious meaning, as post-colonial." That is all you get by way of definition, because the meaning is "obvious." To find citations of the first occurrences of words with the prefix "post" (under the headword "post-") requires advanced research skills. You need to go through the examples given under B1.d (which gives textual citations of all the words given under B1.a, b, and c) to find citations that form the basis of the OED's definition. It is here that we get the following: "1934 WEBSTER *Post-colonial. 1959 *Daily Tel.* 12 Dec 6/2. 'It was probably inevitable that India, in the first flush of postcolonial sensitivity, should fear that association with the America of that period might involve her unnecessarily in troubles which were little to do with Asia.' 1969 *Times* (Uganda Suppl.) 15 Sept p. i/5 'Behind the imposing physical presence is a mind that has been described as one of the shrewdest in post-colonial Africa.' 1974 'G. Black' *Golden Cockatrice* iii.57: 'If there's one thing worse than . . . rampant colonialism . . . it's post-colonial dictatorship.'" Somewhat flippantly, this last entry reminds us of the Peter Cook/Dudley Moore sketch:

DUD. I like the sort of woman who throws herself on you and tears your clothes off with rancid sensuality.

PETE. Yes, they're quite good, aren't they? I think you're referring to "rampant sensuality."

DUD. Either one will do. Of course, the important thing is that they tear your clothes off.¹⁹

Like Dud, G. Black knows what he doesn't like, and all differences between "colonialism" and "post-colonial" collapse under this certainty. Behind this is the sign of an interesting process, whereby the two terms have been handed over to the colonized, as "their" words, not "ours." The colonizers no longer accept this pair of terms for themselves. They already (by 1974) describe someone else's history, about some no-longer-recognizable or nameable colonial power. The OED registers the semantic tide going out from under "postcolonial" at the metropolitan center. "Postcolonialism" (by 1989 at any rate) never made it even that far.

It may seem perverse for us to track this word at the colonial center, and neglect other sources (as our friend Stephen Slemon pointed out to us, adding that there are 228,000 Google hits for "postcolonial").²⁰ However, this postmodern reference has only 27,900 hits for "postcolonialism," ten percent of the hits for "postmodernism," at 274,000. Both of these are dwarfed by "globalization," at 2,650,000 hits. Hits on Google and citations from the OED are crude indicators, but,

drawing on other evidence, we feel that the picture they give is basically sound. "Postcolonialism" has not disappeared, but lags well behind its dominant partner, "postmodernism." "Postcolonial," the humble adjective on which it is based, has far more currency. But none of them competes with "globalization" as the cover term for both areas. Outside the imperial pages of the OED, in new media like the Internet, words flourish in profusion, and in this sea of words "postcolonial" still circulates, still has meaning, but "postcolonialism" is withering. "Postcolonial" is still useable, still part (though small) of a common set of "goods to think with." "Postcolonialism" has already nearly gone, and hardly anyone notices it.

IV. The Specter of "Hybridity"

Rather than stay with words in lexicons we want to move on to complexes of words and ideas as they function in texts, in what we will call the contemporary postcolonial archive. Our discussion will focus on a small number of texts from this archive, sufficiently diverse to do some justice to the diversity of the field, sufficiently important to use as signs of their times, our times. We begin with Homi Bhabha (already present in the critical discourses of Hall, Gikandi, Apter, and Robert Young), because his work is central to an understanding of current idioms of postcolonialism.

The semantic slippage of "postcolonialism" is far advanced in Bhabha's writings, where it has drifted into the sphere of "postmodernism." Far from this being a productive alliance, the relationship has come to repeat the old relation between colonizers and colonized, in which "postcolonialism" is appropriated and exploited to legitimate the metropolitan term and its metropolitan theorists. "Postcolonial thought is the last refuge of postmodernism," Alex Callinicos says, from his Marxist standpoint in a critique focused on Bhabha's work.²¹ We would not dismiss either Bhabha or all forms of postmodernism as severely as Callinicos does, yet we feel that in current theory a trinity of "posts" has effectively colonized and enclosed the open space of "afterness," each morphing into the others in an endless play of almost sameness, closing around a single theme and a single version of history in the name of plurality.

Callinicos takes the work of Bhabha as emblematic of this move, with good reason we feel, given Bhabha's hallowed position in the dominant (postmodern) school of postcolonialism. Bhabha rejects foundationalist historiographies on the grounds that the postcolonial present (with its global flows and hybrid identity politics) finds them attenuating. In the

new historiography fashioned by Bhabha, anticolonial nationalist practice repeats, with a difference, an original metropolitan nationalism. Theorists of bourgeois anticolonial struggle would agree this often happens. For Bhabha it seems this is the only model of nationalist struggle in the domain of anticolonialism: a metropolitan nationalism repeated with a difference (an ambivalence) but within a space that is semiotically the same, since it is invested with the same bureaucratic and juridical systems. This is a little uncanny, as Bhabha says, because it is a kind of return of the repressed, a compulsive repetition but one to which one desires to return to participate in the (il)logic of having been there before. The colonized subject is thus bound to mimic (the narrative of the struggle presupposes a prior metropolitan grand narrative) and can only exist in a condition of ambivalent hybridity. But in doing so it undermines, in Neil Lazarus's words, the "colonialist script" itself.²²

This move is fundamentally textualist, in that Bhabha's style of postcolonialism deprives colonial *discourse* of its singularity and power and, hence, suggestively undercuts its dominance by demonstrating, indeed parodically (sly mimicry is what he calls it), the colonized's equal proficiency in its various registers: when asked what he thought of Western civilization the Mahatma is reputed to have replied, "I think it would be a very good idea." At the level of the aesthetic the decisive writer was of course V. S. Naipaul, whose early social comedies discursively mimicked metropolitan English stylists. Bhabha's subjects are the colonial elites who function around the edges of the colonial frame of domination and whose current avatars are the people of the diaspora, exiles and migrants who are at once here and elsewhere and whose presence disrupts received definitions of the nation. For Bhabha, then, the hybrid, mobile subject of diaspora—"the transnational as the translational"²³—is the exemplary postcolonial who stands ambivalently against atavistic nationalism. Writes Bhabha: "At this point I must give way to the *vox populi*: to a relatively unspoken tradition of the people of the pagus—colonials, postcolonials, migrants, minorities—wandering peoples who will not be contained within the *Heim* of the national culture and its unisonant discourse, but are themselves the marks of a shifting boundary that alienates the frontiers of the modern nation."²⁴ Bhabha's term "hybrid" has become the mantra of much recent postcolonial theory, where it functions as an archeseme, a redemptive sign that affirms the agency of the postcolonial subject, without need of further exemplification, nowhere more so than in those nation states where the postcolonial is also a diasporic subject. It is strange this word has conquered the field so effortlessly, since in biology hybrids are sterile.

Bhabha's postcolonial as migrant (ideally the migrant of color), dispossessed, schizophrenic, exilic, often profoundly unhappy and exploited under capitalism, gets transformed into a powerful subject of (post)modernity. His history of "cultural displacement [whether it is] the 'middle passage' of slavery and indenture, the 'voyage out' of the civilizing mission," becomes the substance of "contemporary postcolonial discourses." However, this experience, which Bhabha declares signifies the transnationality of culture, is also "translational," because it complicates the definition of culture itself.²⁵ Our difficulty with these propositions (often used uncritically in postcolonial theory) is that the transformation takes place only inside discourse, a particular specialist discourse at that. The illusion of power (in a new translational cultural episteme) is achieved by a radical separation from power as it operates in a wide range of discourses and practices, leaving the postcolonial theorist in the end as sole beneficiary. In effect Bhabha's argument is often mounted from the "sign of postcoloniality," so that it is not divergent historical experiences that require narration in postcolonialism but a particular epistemological stance (although he shifts the "subject of culture from an epistemological function to an enunciative practice"²⁶) that arises out of the initial project of bourgeois anticolonial nationalism.

Lazarus's references to the materiality of historical memory offer a further critical corrective to Bhabha. Historical experiences (the Marxist understanding of "consciousness as bearing social effects"²⁷) are materially constitutive of postcolonial sociality. This is not a matter of relating life-worlds in terms of lived experiences, but of seeing life-worlds as being part of a systemic process of imperialist domination and exclusion. It therefore becomes important for postcolonialism to bear witness to the distinctions between imperialist and anti-imperialist movements so that one can see, with Fanon, that bourgeois anticolonial nationalism invariably effected "neocolonial class consolidation" (78). A proper, nonbourgeois anticolonialism that leads to decolonization in fact "brings the future of *capitalism* radically into question" (79), because, as for Fanon, the postcolonial *national* project is one that is built around a "social(ist)" demand for a "fundamental transformation rather than a mere restructuring of the prevailing social order" (79). It is on this point that Bhabha's own widely circulated essay "Remembering Fanon" disavows Fanon's revolutionary commitment to a radically altered postcolonial world order, in favor of a reading that locates him as a theorist of the "subversive slippage of identity and authority," because for Fanon, as Bhabha (mis)reads him, the "'social' is always an unresolved ensemble of antagonistic interlocations between positions of power and poverty, knowledge and oppression, history and fantasy, surveillance and subversion."²⁸ What Bhabha's intense textualism misses

is Fanon's understanding of decolonization as a process that heralds a new nation state, in which the past may be redeemed through a new scansion of literary history seen in the tales of the postcolonial storytellers (inheritors of the age-old oral tradition) where the "present is no longer turned in upon itself but spread out for all to see."²⁹ It is clear that Bhabha's theorization cannot address the uneven and discrepant histories of colonial struggle in many parts of the world, and certainly not the struggles of First Nation peoples.

V. Recovering the "Postcolonial Subject"

Our first substantive text of the archive, Gayatri Spivak's *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*,³⁰ develops themes ranging from the subaltern and diaspora to the new multinational world order. The work isolates the "foreclosed [woman] native informant" as the absolutely silenced figure in the master philosophical texts of Europe and in colonial discourses as well. She does this through a deconstructive reading, which to her has great merit in being "unaccusing, unexcusing, attentive, situationally productive through dismantling" (81), and of value in delivering meanings otherwise foreclosed.³¹

For our argument Spivak's book has value in that it locates its thesis in the heart of the project of the Enlightenment itself and critiques that legacy (as the presencing of a difference) from a postcolonial perspective. Against the bourgeois male subject of instrumental reason (the subject of imperialism) she advances the native informant as the subaltern woman subject, foreclosed by/in history. Insofar as the native informant has been rejected (the ideology of imperialism was based on this fact of rejection, or at least arrived at the idea of rejection not long after colonization had set in: the move from Indophilia to Indophobia, for instance, is well documented³²), he/she remains the untheorized subject of postcolonialism. Spivak hopes to graft the native woman on to the occluded sign of the foreclosed (native) informant.

She defines the native informant as "that mark of expulsion from the name of Man—a mark crossing out the impossibility of the ethical relation" (6). There are significant compressions at work here. First, "Man" is also the Enlightenment/imperial subject, and the native (as potential Man) is the transformed or transformable universal subject who could then enter history, though only in the terms laid down by this narrative. Second, "the impossibility of ethical relation" also presupposes a number of things: the impossibility of justice (on the natives' own terms), the absence of foundational absolutes that underpin justice, the absence of social institutions through which "property" relations can be defined, and so on. Third, the "native informant" is a discursive

construct no less in supposedly emancipatory narratives than in classic colonialist forms.

From this she goes on to argue that in the foundational texts of the West—Kant, G. W. F. Hegel, and Marx, “the last Three Wise Men of the Continental (European) tradition” (111)—the foreclosed native informant is necessary for the construction of the European norm: “In Kant he [the native informant] is needed as the example for the heteronomy [presence of different law] of the determinant, to set off the autonomy of the reflexive judgment, which allows freedom for the rational will; in Hegel as evidence of the spirit’s movement from the unconscious to consciousness; in Marx as that which bestows normativity upon the narrative of the modes of production” (6). The moves thus summarized are not simply a matter of historical periodization; they inhabit the modern and shadow the new divisions of labor that distinguish the North and the South. And the figure of the poorest woman of the South is the “typecase of the foreclosed native informant today” (6).

The implicit necessity of the native Other in Kant signifies as well the exclusion of her from the category of the sublime, which is a figurative trope that draws us to the fundamental laws of reason and morality, indeed to justice. The sublime does not come to people who are “naturally alien to it.” Kant writes: “Without *development* of moral ideas, that which we, prepared by culture, call sublime presents itself to man in the raw [*dem rohen Menschen*] merely as terrible” (Spivak 12–13). This is an exceptionally astute postcolonial reading of Kant, the recognition of which (that is, the “raw man”) leads Spivak to isolate an important anthropological moment in Kant, which, because it surfaces only as a trace, had been considered unimportant by Kantian scholars. After Kant’s rhetorical question “why it is necessary that men should exist” we get a parenthesis: “(a question which is not easy to answer if we cast our thoughts by chance on the New Hollanders or the inhabitants of Tierra del Fuego)” (26). These examples of absolute rawness, the irredeemable native Others, are presented as figures who cannot be the subject of speech or judgment in the third *Critique*. Being outside culture they are outside sublime experience and cannot think the final purpose.³³ The exclusion of the raw man from the sublime has enormous consequences. Since the raw man is not “man,” he is not the subject of morality and hence cannot understand legislation and purposes (33); he is outside also of John Rawls’s theory of justice (Rawls is remarkably Kantian) and invites Europe “to be global legislator.”

Spivak’s analysis here shows deconstructive criticism doing what it does best: interrupting, intervening, opening up the discourses of the dominant, restoring plurality and tension. If in her reading of Kant the native informant is foreclosed as a subject outside of culture and the law

of reason, her reading of Hegel sees the native informant already marginalized in his own canonical texts. Working from the great text of Hindu high culture, the *Bhagavadgita*, and Hegel's reading of it, Spivak exposes an act of complicity between the two, that is, between the class presumptions of the Sanskrit classic and Hegel's own reading of it. The complicity is best seen in an Indian nationalist ethos that writes its grand narratives in the shadow of Hegelian history and in so doing excludes the native subaltern informant quite as dramatically as the colonizer had done. Hegel had reserved the sublime specifically for those cultures that had moved away from the mystical overcodings of fantastic symbolism. As the underdeveloped Spirit, the native informant again becomes the absent Other for the essential Occident/Orient binary.

In Spivak's account the native informant is simultaneously crucial but foreclosed in Western thought. Yet this part of the exposition does not simply grow out of the deconstruction. Spivak uses this discursive move to lay claim to this Other, who is her own creation. She presents the native informant as the diasporic subject, the marginalized migrant or indeed the postcolonial. Writes Spivak: "Let me point beyond the argument here to suggest that an unquestioning privileging of the migrant may also turn out to be a figure of the effacement of the native informant" (18). The "native informant" in all her singularity remains outside space and time, hovering in Hegelian space and time, waiting to connect with a new moment of the *Geist*. Postmodern ethnography has critiqued the idea of the anthropologist as mediator and decoder of cultures, exposing it as a ruse, a "cover story" that does not change fundamental power relations. Spivak has skillfully folded back one part of the dominant colonialist discourse—the "native informant" of anthropology—into another part, its foundational philosophical texts, to disrupt both. But the move remains internal to dominant discourses. It does not go outside them to discover or connect with an excluded reality. In Spivak's celebration, this "postcolonial subject" (rethought as the colonized [female] "native informant") and her history are actors on a stage of world history as grand as in Hegel, and just as specious. A tactic that seemingly aimed to disrupt the power of the Fathers becomes a trick to appropriate it.

VI. The Ambiguous Legacy of Marx

Marx, the third European philosopher Spivak tackles, has a very different relationship to postcolonialism. He is global and political in a way the others were not. He has been used so extensively by anticolonial revolutionaries that processes of decolonization cannot be read apart

from Marxist thinking. It has been said that in idealist philosophy all commentaries are footnotes to Plato: in the same way, in postcolonialism all commentaries, even the bad ones, can be seen as footnotes to Marx. Yet it is also the case that Marxism has found it extremely difficult to account centrally for postcolonial processes as they have unfolded over the last 150 years. Marx himself was remarkably Hegelian in his reading of history and believed in the need for colonized peoples to be “awakened by the force of [bourgeois] history.”³⁴ Conversely, postcolonialism has evolved along lines that make a connection or reconnection with Marxism (or, in Derrida’s terms, the specters of Marx³⁵) ever more difficult. We believe that this paradox and dilemma are crucial issues for both Marxism and postcolonial theory. Our concern in this essay is with postcolonialism, about which we offer the proposition that *unless postcolonialism can reestablish vital links with Marxism it will not survive nor deserve to survive long into the twenty-first century.*

The divisions in Marx’s legacy should not be underestimated. On the crucial matter of the native informant, for instance, Marx celebrates him and makes him into a revolutionary. Yet the necessity for capital to move, for cultures to transform from feudal to capitalist, before the native can become revolutionary in a larger program of class struggle led Marx to write about the Asiatic Mode of Production. There is a Hegelian narrative at work here that Spivak summarizes as follows: “Capitalism creates class difference, which must be sublated through class-struggle on its way to universal self-determination” (80). “It produces the possibility of the operation of the dialectic that will produce socialism, but left to its own resources it is also that which blocks that operation” (83).

Marx’s Asiatic Mode of Production (AMP) functions in the service of global capitalism, reconfirming the older imperial narrative of otherness detected in Kant and Hegel, because in the absence of a class struggle as Marx had in mind, the AMP can justify the economic exploitation of the South, especially by United States. In this respect, globalization can be seen as a means by which a residual AMP may be removed in favor of a boundaryless economic order under the sign of world capitalism. In Spivak the AMP is “a stasis that must be interrupted in its own interest” (97).

But the spirit of Marx, we would add, is also elsewhere. It surely makes us conscious of the complicity between ruling classes in both North and South. It sees the native informant (Marx’s revolutionary) take up the struggle of demonstrating against the Narmada dam project in India or against the pollution of rivers by toxic waste produced in sweat shops run by multinationals. With Spivak we can ask: could globalization shock the nation-state and thus produce precisely the resistances from within that a true postcolonial order must work towards? In this resistance are

embedded the tensions of the local and the global, the multifaceted and the linear, the native and the nationalist, minor narratives and a grand narrative, dialogism and monologism.

VII. The Imperative of Marxism

The imperative of Marxism holds the key to the question—"what is postcolonialism?"—that Spivak ultimately addresses. She locates the question in the past and answers it in exactly the same way that Foucault felt Kant did when he answered the question "what is Enlightenment?": she teases over the matter of the difference that "today introduces in respect to yesterday," but not without acknowledging the specters of Marx.

A thoroughgoing claim for the importance of Marx is made with uncommon assurance in the next text (and a text which has already informed our critique of Bhabha) from our archive, Neil Lazarus's scholarly and engaging *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World*. Referring to the serious absence of Marxist theory in postcolonial studies, Lazarus writes: "The fact that postcolonial studies should have constituted itself as an arena of scholarly production within which Marxism occupies a very marginal status obviously poses a special problem for Marxist readers and writers, whose specific investments and stockpiles of knowledge tend to remain unrecognised and undervalued in the field" (13). We believe Lazarus is right that postcolonialism, here called postcolonial studies, suffers because it lacks a systematic theory of this kind. Lazarus's book declares the end of postcolonial theory because the theory has aestheticized struggle and emptied both struggle and the aesthetic itself as formations from which ideology is challenged, invoked, or altered. Perhaps only in the essays of Benita Parry,³⁶ and others like her, attuned to questions of class, do we get the kinds of engagement with and respect for systematic theory that Lazarus declares is essential in what are currently seen as cognate fields, such as multicultural, postcolonial, and diaspora studies, but which surely deal with aspects of a single complex social, political, and cultural whole.

Lazarus stresses the need for a return to historical memory: a people without a sense of the past cannot redeem their present. To gain access to historical memory one needs to know one's past, one's tradition, well enough to be able to (after Adorno) hate it properly and to "mobilize its own protocols, procedures, and interior logic against it" (7). This past requires intellectual investment of an order often missing from postcolonialism because of its "idealist and dehistoricizing scholarship" (1).

A central issue for both Marxism and postcolonialism as Lazarus reads them is modernity. The belated arrival of the tradition of modernity to

the noncapitalist, non-Western (third) world needs to be acknowledged, and also disavowed, for the right reasons.³⁷ Both acknowledgement and proper disavowal are crucial for a postcolonial program, and both are “unthinkable outside of the universe of modernity” (4). It is important, though, to prise modernity out of the resolutely Euro-American bias of classic Marxism, to break Adorno’s identity between modernity and a specifically European subjectivity, so that for postcolonialism the central category of imperialism may be invoked as a common experience for both Western and non-Western selves. Referring to foundational postcolonial theorists such as Fanon and Aimé Césaire and writers such as Achebe and Salman Rushdie, Lazarus writes: “What is striking about the cultural and critical practice of such writers and intellectuals as these is their simultaneous commitment to the ‘philosophical discourse of modernity’ and to its unique critique, their extraordinary command of and respect for the European humanist (or bourgeois) canon existing alongside an equally extraordinary knowledge (and critical endorsement) of other cultural works, social projects, and historical experiences, the necessary consideration of which cannot be accomplished on the provincial soil of the European (or bourgeois) canon” (8). For Lazarus there is a double challenge. Marxism challenges postcolonialism, but Marxists should not reject postcolonialism outright (as Aijaz Ahmad has done³⁸), but rather engage with it on its own grounds for the first time since the field of postcolonialism was instituted in the early 1980s. Lazarus wants to stop rendering modernity and capitalism as purely Western ideas, to delink modernity from Westernization and simultaneously declare that since capitalism is universally systemic and characterized by unevenness, we are “all modern subjects, which is not to say that we are all ‘modernist’ or ‘Western’ ones” (25).

Lazarus uses Ranajit Guha (who read universal capital not simply as an inevitable process of expansion but as predicated upon limitations that capital itself could not overcome) to break Marx (and modernity) away from its European locale both as a circumscribed nineteenth-century Western phenomenon (Foucault) and as a hyperreal sign of an epistemopolitical imperative designated “Europe” (Dipesh Chakrabarty), to make his own complex case for “Marx’s paradigmatic insistence on the globality of capitalism as an historical formation” (29). Against the proclamations of globalization (Marx in the *Grundrisse* had referred to the idea of a “world market” as internal to capitalism) he critiques the idea that the “drive towards universalization is ultimately incapable of realizing itself on its own terms” (44). In his view the current discourse of postmodernism (and by extension the utopian discourses of postcolonialism predicated upon a romanticized hybridity) simply

misrecognizes the complex mode of operation of the global and justifies a social order that capitalism continues to create in its own interest.

We can agree with most of Lazarus's critique of postcolonialism on this theme while remaining unconvinced that a return to any immediately recognizable form of Marxism provides an easy solution. Both traditions are challenged by the diversity and unpredictability of what David Harvey calls the "postmodern condition."³⁹ This is the third term, not reducible to the other two, which is needed to break the impasse between a colonizing Marxism and an overelaborated postcolonialism. Lazarus's phobia of poststructuralism and postmodernism (he uses them interchangeably) leads him to create an absolute binary between the project of the Enlightenment (and the incomplete project of modernity) and the radical rereading of histories found in contemporary poststructuralist thought. Both Derrida and Jean-François Lyotard, for instance, are mentioned once each, but only in passing.

The Marxist critique of postcolonialism and the new global order needs to be even more subtle and systematic than it is in the hands of Lazarus. To resist the term "postmodern" (in Harvey's sense) in favor of "late modernity" is to resolve issues "in words" only. Yet Lazarus is right that postcolonialism cannot even understand its own object if it disparages nationalist discourses of resistance and, in so doing, denies the relevance of the anticolonial heroic past.⁴⁰ That denial has its ground: bourgeois and liberationist struggles were both elitist and therefore not susceptible to analysis that would make the marginalized subaltern relevant.⁴¹ But, as Lazarus insists, true liberationist struggle is to colonialism what Marxism is in the "historical context of capitalist modernity" (124). To dispense with history in favor of a postcolonial present marked by global flows and hybrid identity politics is to miss the fundamental lesson of Marxist historiography: the past can be redeemed only through a radical consciousness of it.

That radical consciousness is not to be found by adherence to the current narratives of either postcolonialism or Marxism. It will emerge only out of a struggle in which postcolonialism cannot be concerned solely with preserving doctrines, maintaining orthodoxy, establishing difference. Only by contemplating itself in the past tense may postcolonialism still continue into the future. The past it needs to accommodate includes a serious engagement with those premodern (and countermodern) tendencies that colonial instrumentalism systematically excised under the sign of the rational "man" (whose Other was *der rohe Mensch*, colonized peoples). Into the Marxism we believe is foundational to an understanding of postcolonialism we need also to factor those life-worlds of spirits, myths, religions, indeed of poetry, that cannot be explained in totally modern terms, but which are nevertheless

(as sites of a contramodernity) so essential for a proper postcolonial reconstruction.

VIII. The Challenge of Premodernity

Religion is a key lived experience, arguably one that touches more than most, especially those forms of religion by which subjects define their identity. A book that examines this with remarkable salience and scholarly verve is the next text in our archive, Gauri Viswanathan's *Outside the Fold*.⁴² Awareness of life-worlds, modes of self-expression that are essentially premodern, permeates her book. Religion has been referred to as an instance of the pathological in culture and hence not a critical practice. Cultural theory, as Viswanathan declares early in her book, finds it difficult to engage with religion because of cultural theory's investment in the secular and materialist (xiv). Even subaltern studies, which has questioned the primacy given to the colonial and the modern, has on the whole failed to consider belief systems as legitimate modes of cultural self-empowerment and political intervention.

The difficulty in bringing religion back into culture lies in the enlightened state's separation of the secular and the religious, where the latter is seen as a primarily personal affair, while the great passions of modernity are played out in the secular domain. Where once religion was a "knowledge-producing activity" and very much in the vanguard of social and political change, it is now a transcendental absolute with little value beyond serving, in the public sphere, the needs of the poor through Meals on Wheels and homes of shelter.

Although Viswanathan does not make the claim, we want to suggest that her book locates religion (especially its symbolic forms) as an essential component of the incomplete project of modernity. Viswanathan isolates a key symbolic aspect of religion, conversion, to show its worldly social and political function. Seen primarily as acts of incorporation into centers of power (converts to Christianity or Islam, for instance), conversion is often read as an aberration in postcolonial societies. The hidden agenda of most fundamentalist movements has been to "reconvert" converts into an earlier religion. Such moves once again locate religion in the realm of collective and uncritical communal systems of belief, defining it, as the state itself would have it, as a transcendental form. What these moves fail to address is the degree to which voluntary conversions (at the level of the individual, but more importantly at the level of a movement) were and are intentional acts aimed at correcting, or symbolically gesturing towards, inequities of class, race, and sex in culture. This shift (away from forced conversions or conversions for the

sake of material advancement, true as it was) forces us to recall not the “statistic” but the underlying social and political resonances of the act. Viswanathan historicizes conversion “not only as a spiritual but also a political activity” (xvii), a conscious subversion of secular power (3), in a reading of precise historical moments and effects of the act.

The colonial (instrumental enlightenment) project, aimed at creating citizens who were non-Muslim Muslims or non-Hindu Hindus (5) or even perhaps non-animist animists, was never an achievable goal, because unlike in Britain, where religious minorities were incorporated into the state, in India such a process of absorption did not take place in spite of the nation’s democratic institutions. It raises the questions such as why religion has not been a matter to be debated and why its role in the nation has not been examined more critically.

We want to take up Viswanathan’s reading of a singular case, the conversion to Buddhism of the *dalit* Indian politician Bhimrao Ramji Ambedkar, father of the Indian constitution. Viswanathan argues, persuasively we think, that Ambedkar’s conversion to Buddhism bears strong resemblance to the conversion to the earlier religion (Catholicism) by John Henry Newman in 1845. In much the same way that Newman turned to pre-Reformation Catholicism to recover the foundational structure of Englishness, Ambedkar turned to an originating moment in Indian history—the spread of Buddhism—to reclaim a redemptive cultural identity, not only for dalits but for all Indians (232). The dalits (the untouchables or harijans) are so anomalous that they defy any logical explanation. Most cultures work from principles of social exclusion, but the dalit case is exceptional. They are Hindus, yet outside the four *varnas* that make up the legitimate children of the gods; they worship Hindu gods, yet cannot enter Hindu temples; they are Indian citizens with equal voting rights, yet are kept separate even when they gain high office; they contaminate the Hindu body upon contact; as abject souls they have no hope of salvation and never move out of the karmic cycle. Other castes too marry among their own kind and live among themselves socially. But they have mobility; entrepreneurial skills can take them to the top of the Indian commercial hierarchy. The dalits, scheduled castes as they are called, remain at the bottom, condemned to be carriers of the dead and cleaners of latrines. They are the monstrous Other of the Hindu self, the latter’s own “filthy image,” reminding him of his own disgraceful past and present.

Ambedkar, a dalit, converted not to Islam or Christianity (more common options) but to Buddhism. In doing so he returned his corporeal self to an earlier religion of the dalits (and Hindus) from before Brahmanism reestablished itself. Working toward his conversion (he converted just before his death, after some twenty years of critical

writing and thinking about Buddhism: the conversion itself was a collective act, as thousands of dalits converted on the day with him), Ambedkar managed to add important Buddhist (and hence some would argue dalit) motifs into India's key postcolonial icons: the Buddhist dharma *cakra* on the Indian flag, the use of the lions on the Ashokan pillar at Sarnath as the national emblem, and so on.

Viswanathan asks: what is the political payoff here? This is Viswanathan's take: "I shall argue that . . . his conversion was less a rejection of political solutions than a rewriting of religious and cultural change into a form of political intervention. Such an intervention was important not simply in demographic terms [a new constituency distinct from Hinduism] but more so in terms of creating a new mythology around which the political identity of dalits could be mobilized" (212). For Gandhi (to whom Ambedkar had said in 1931, "Mahatmaji, I have no country" [219]) the dalit solution lay in their effortless absorption into a seamless Hinduism. Ambedkar found in Buddhism (an Indian religion of antiquity) the middle (*madhyamaka*) path between these two, so that dalits would be simultaneously Indian (Christianity and Islam, he felt, were non-Indian religions) but not Hindu. Conversion thus offered "an alternative epistemological and ethical foundation for a national community" (213). This was a performative act that underlined the importance of the religious act as a mode of postcolonial intervention. The incomplete project of modernity is therefore not simply a matter of working within emancipatory protocols (legislative, juridical, economic, and so on) but also an intentional return to the felt-life forms of the subject as constituted by premodern modes of belief. It is the failure of "secular ideologies to extend full political rights" (215) that is at the heart of Viswanathan's thesis and Ambedkar's own return to religion.

Wisely, Ambedkar recognized what postcolonialism in general has not: the enduring force of religion in culture and its value as a mode through which moral laws are transformed into political rights. His decision encoded a historical awareness (in 1956) that the postcolonial project remains incomplete. This complex instance sustains Viswanathan's thesis: the culture of modernity should unlock a critical discourse of belief. Just as we now speak of critical multiculturalism or postcolonialism, there should be critical belief that is not opposed to liberal cultural practice but exemplifies a cultural persistence at the level of lived experience.

IX. The Incomplete Project of Modernity

In our attempt to relocate postcolonialism as a matter already present to us in the past tense, we find the idea of an incomplete project

valuable. Echoing Jürgen Habermas's reading of modernity as an "Unfinished Project,"⁴³ we want to introduce an alternative space in the discourses of the project of modernity in which to place the postcolonialist project. We use the word "alternative" here not in opposition to, but as a deferral of, a trace within or a supplement to reason and modernity. Postcolonialism has been a proactive and radically anticolonial theory of and from margins, an articulation from the position of silence and exclusion, and we do not put that in question as we take it back in the analytic matrix out of which grew the great discourses of social and political justice. The pastness of postcolonialism has to be located in a radical rewrite of the project of (Enlightenment) modernity.

A key text with which we wish to explore this theme is the final text in our archive, Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe*.⁴⁴ For Chakrabarty postcolonialism necessitates the rehistoricizing of historicism ("the secular-institutional logic of the political" [12]) to blast asunder the grounds of a (received) historicism, and let newer, generally subaltern, postcolonial historicities surface, replete with those life-practices or forms, collected under the performative against the pedagogic,⁴⁵ that had hitherto been consigned to what we may call a nonrational nativism. In this argument a subaltern political consciousness, albeit modern (since it came with colonization), would nevertheless manifest features that echo a contramodernity, since it cannot be explained by the prior logic that inheres in (European) historicism. A modernity that does not cleanse itself of the world of demons, spirits, and gods, that seems not to accept the incommensurability of the rational and the mystical, requires us to think through historical processes hitherto silenced by (colonial) historicism.

If we look at the Pacific island state of Fiji we find a historical process of colonization that affected races rather differently and that indeed produced not generalist but discrepant narratives. In this multiracial nation Indians (Fiji Indians) appropriated Western historicism and the idea of the transcendental modern subject, but native Fijians defined postcolonial reason (even of the instrumental variety) in very different terms. Any history of Fiji will have to address the varying (and exclusive) modes of the reception of colonial ideology by these two races. We can follow this with reference to the not uncommon way of settling disputes (or seeking forgiveness) among indigenous Fijians. In an early study the Fijian anthropologist R. R. Nayacakalou cited an argument in the correspondence columns of the Fijian weekly *Volagauna* (literally, "the times written down") in 1957–58, in which a man who had absconded with a large sum of money belonging to the Fiji Stevedores Union avoided being charged because he presented a *tabua* (a whale's tooth, which when ritualistically presented symbolizes a plea for forgiveness, and much else besides) to the general meeting "and asked for forgive-

ness.⁴⁶ The presentation of the *tabua* is discussed at some length in Nayacakalou's book on Fijian leadership largely because he wished to link traditional Fijian practices with Fijian encounters with modernity. Although the book carries the ethnographic methods of Raymond Firth and Bronislaw Malinowski and eschews dialogic narrative in favor of the single point of view of the anthropologist, there are many moments in the text when the writer as native informant dominates the writer as academic. In one of these moments the installation of a chief and the centrality of the *tabua* ceremony are discussed in great detail. In both instances—the case of embezzlement of money and the description of the installation of a chief—premodern practices insinuating a differentiated political reason permeate modern colonial culture. And, again, this is part of a critical postcolonialism that would see the ritual of *tabua* as a modern political mode of empowerment (or expression) and would not dismiss it for being prepolitical (and hence antimodern). In Chakrabarty's argument a new historicism (which we read as part of the postcolonial attempt to rethink the incomplete project of modernity) should be able to accommodate this seeming contradiction, even if it means accepting an incommensurable fracture between the pedagogic and the performative. The incomplete project of modernity thus is not a matter of breaking off completely with a premodern past, but of making the latter inhere in modernity as a significant and empowering trace (for the subject is ignored in the grand narrative of abstract labor in Marx). For the Fiji Indians, as so manifestly observed by Fiji's most astute political activist and thinker, A. D. Patel, the premodern had to be eradicated altogether because it inhibited colonial ideals of individualism and democracy and made them instruments of colonial capitalism. In this reading a contramodernity thus lay with the indigenous Fijians and not with the Indians.⁴⁷

This argument needs to be spelled out as a major tension between a dominant narrative, which Chakrabarty calls the universalist narrative of capital (a totalizing category), and a second narrative that arises out of (nontotalizing) life-world knowledges. Marx's thought, though underpinned by the Enlightenment ideals of citizenship, justice, and Hegelian historicism, recognized in his central category of "abstract labour" how "the capitalist mode of production managed to extract from peoples and histories that were all different a homogeneous and common unit for measuring human activity" (50). Chakrabarty argues that histories of capital's "life-processes" (50) are always in excess of "abstract labour," because the disciplinary processes of the factory (the symbol of classic capitalism) could sublate neither the master-slave relationship nor those expressive forms of being human often "acted out in manners that do not lend themselves to the production of the logic of capital" (66).

Chakrabarty finds in Marx the insinuation, against the logic of abstract labor, of the possibility of multiple ways of being human. These insert into the logic of global capital an alternative, heterogeneous history. We would therefore suggest that if the “real” must refer to ways of work practice that are linked to nonmaterialist modes of being (the agency of gods and spirits in our lives, for instance), then the translation of a multiplicity of work-forms into an abstract category of labor will also carry with it traces of its own prior corporeality.

Even orthodox Marxism accepts that the working classes had to be created, and are not some “transcultural” subject in a universalist historicism. Writes Chakrabarty: “If real labour . . . belongs to a world of heterogeneity whose various temporalities cannot be enclosed in the sign ‘history,’ . . . then it can find a place in a historical narrative of commodity production only as a Derridean trace of that which cannot be enclosed, an element that constantly challenges from within capital’s and commodity’s—and by implication history’s—claims to unity and universality” (92–93). This leads Chakrabarty to stress the importance of translating, even as the colonial enterprise is transitional (from one mode of production to another). Because the act of translating existing labor (the artisan, the family unit) into abstract labor is not unproblematically transitional or exchangeable (but is translational), there is a disruption in the historical narrative. With respect to the incomplete narrative/project of postcolonialism we are confronted with the absence of a mediating principle by which oppositions may be reduced. Abstract labor is the grand mediating category of Marx. The question of a heterogeneous history arises because in non-European cultures that mediating category is missing. The act of barter as distinct from generalized exchange of commodities mediated through abstract labor is offered by Chakrabarty as a radical instance of an alternative model of exchange.⁴⁸

It is the insightfulness of this analysis which suggests to us (though Chakrabarty does not say this) a crucial limitation in postcolonialism as deployed on what is seemingly a core object in its field. The phenomenon he is looking at does not make sense from the vantage of the after-(post-) colonial, nor even from the colonial. It is an instance of the Other of postcolonialism and colonialism alike: forces and processes that continue on outside their competing narratives, equally elided by both. The critical reading that is required now needs to be conscious of questions of difference, including those elided, as Chakrabarty says, in the dominant traditions of Marxism (94), and also those elided in the dominant traditions of postcolonialism. It should pay attention to the “heterotemporality” of the world underpinned by an ethics and a politics acutely aware of this difference. In this heterotemporality, the

moment of the eternal clash between colonial and postcolonial becomes contingent and blurred, unable to make sense of itself or its context.

Postcolonialism has taken the idea of multiplicity of archives from the diverse struggles that make up subaltern histories, themselves a collective challenge to the homogeneity of the dominant narrative. From this it has constructed a discourse and site from which to construct the sublime object of the postcolonial subject. This is an achievement to celebrate, not to minimize or deny. Yet at the same time we need to be conscious of the immense resilience of the bourgeoisie in matters of capital and history. Unless there is critical vigilance, the project of postcolonialism is likely to be incorporated or routinized back into the grand narrative of historicism. Eternal vigilance always has a price. In this case, that price may now be postcolonialism itself.

X. Conclusion

Chakrabarty's aims were to understand past and present as a guide to the future, and to work out the "social purpose of criticism."⁴⁹ He demonstrates how a form of postcolonialism, organizing a specific historical practice, could continue to produce an analytic of postcolonialism that holds sincerely to its earlier philosophical legacy. In an echo of Kant's original essay ("What Is Enlightenment?"), Chakrabarty celebrates (after Iris Young) "a deliberative democracy in which university-based humanities academics play the role of public intellectuals with the aim of furthering the causes of social justice and democracy."⁵⁰ We do not want to say that this double aim—to be true to a historical and philosophical project of postcolonialism—is not possible, or valuable, especially in all the many situations in the present or the past where recognizable forms of the old combatants still use similar methods to pursue the same goals. Yet for many who once found postcolonialism a more or less comprehensive framework, the limitations now have become too great, the tension between Chakrabarty's two aims too acute to generate the energy and insight that once was there. "Postcolonial," the adjective, is still alive and useful as a metaphor, if no longer a precise description. Postcolonialism, the system, has become too rigid, too burdened by its immediate histories and compromises, to remain afloat.

This is a dilemma, because clearly "postmodern" globalization incorporates new forms of colonization (endemic class exploitation and injustice, even when characterized as "informational capitalism," where "information generation, processing and transmission become the fundamental sources of productivity and power"⁵¹), which build on past practices, deployed by the usual suspects. The serious study of classic

European colonization and its “other” (“postcolonialism” in its initial scope) is still an urgent, unfinished project in that context, if only to remind us that “imperialism masks and conceals the nature of its system, a structural camouflage to which the ‘communicational rationality’ [Manuel Castells’s ‘informational capitalism’] of globalization no longer has to resort.”⁵² Yet to fold new forms of colonization into the old, as though there were no essential difference after all, is a serious mistake, which is compounded by supposing that all forms of Otherness, the postcolonial as an ahistorical category, are also essentially the same.

A postcolonial critique turns us away from postcolonialism, towards the words with which Foucault concludes his own contribution to the debates begun by Kant: a critical interrogation of the present and the necessity of “the labor of diverse inquiries.”⁵³ This is what the archive, as we have presented and read it, demonstrates clearly. The seeds of postcolonialism were sown in the project of modernity itself. It was always locked into that premise, and globalization does not resolve its contradictions. To relocate postcolonialism (as theory and as historical moment) in the past does not condemn it as an otiose, worn-out mode of critical endeavour; rather it energizes it in ways that would allow us to keep its critical antecedent (what we have referred to as the incomplete project of modernity) intact. It also forces us to rethink the program of postcolonialism, to see it as Foucault saw Kant’s essay, as a departure, a release, an exit, a way out, a way of considering the difference that “today introduces in respect of yesterday.” This is an attitude of modernity, deeply influenced by Marx, that postcolonialism has bequeathed us. If postcolonialism has indeed made us aware of this fundamental fact of critical continuity, then its insights may be readily deployed to honor its achievements and used as a platform from which to understand other scenes, in other times, in other paradigms.

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NOTES

1 Jacques Derrida, *The Post Card: From Socrates to Freud and Beyond*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987), 195.

2 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (1979; New York: Vintage, 1994), 438.

3 Said, *Orientalism*, 348.

4 Said, *Orientalism*, 349. Great postcolonial texts, writes Said, always reappropriate “the historical experience of colonialism” and then revitalize and transform it into “a new aesthetic of sharing and often transcendent re-formulation” (351).

5 Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” in *Postmodernism: A Reader*, ed. Patricia Waugh (London: Edward Arnold, 1992), 89–95.

6 Michel Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment," in Waugh, *Postmodernism*, 96–108 (hereafter cited in text).

7 See our earlier discussion—Vijay Mishra and Bob Hodge, "What Is Post(-)colonialism?" *Textual Practice* 5 (1991): 399–414—where we anticipate, as well, discussions about the genre of postcoloniality by suggesting that "beneath post-colonial literature lies the might of the novel form" and especially "Bakhtin's essentially polyphonic reading" of it (404). For a thorough engagement with postcoloniality as a site for the dissolution and contestation of the "very classifications and divisions that have produced" genre and its laws, see also Peter Hitchcock, "The Genre of Postcoloniality," *New Literary History* 34 (2003): 299–330.

8 Terry Eagleton, *Figures of Dissent* (London: Verso, 2003), 158. Robert J. C. Young's book *Postcolonialism: An Historical Introduction* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2001) may be some such "secret handbook."

9 See Stuart Hall's interview with Julie Drew in "Cultural Composition: Stuart Hall on Ethnicity and the Discursive Turn," in *Race, Rhetoric, and the Postcolonial*, ed. Gary A. Olson and Lynn Worsham (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1999), 230. The difficulty with postcolonialism (already present, as a difficulty, in colonialism itself) means that a comprehensive explanatory model of it will elude us. There is also the vast field of Francophone postcolonial literature, the inspiration in many ways of some of the key theoretical texts of postcolonialism (essays and books by Frantz Fanon, Léopold Sédar Senghor, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Memmi, Aimé Césaire, Édouard Glissant, and others were decisive in the creation of a "third-world" language of critical difference from the metropolitan center) that we, regrettably, do not take up in this essay.

10 Simon Gikandi, *Maps of Englishness: Writing Identity in the Culture of Colonialism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 14.

11 Emily Apter, *Continental Drift: From National Characters to Virtual Subjects* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5.

12 John Erickson, *Islam and Postcolonial Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 25.

13 Hamid Naficy, *An Accented Cinema: Exilic and Diasporic Filmmaking* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2001).

14 David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 6.

15 Apter, *Continental Drift*, 5.

16 *Webster's Dictionary*, ed. N. Porter and W. Harris (Springfield, MA: G. & C. Merriam, 1905), 279.

17 J. White and J. Riddle, *A Latin-English Dictionary* (London: Longman, Green, 1876), 330.

18 For an account of this "imperial dictionary," see John Willinsky, *Empire of Words: The Reign of the OED* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994).

19 Peter Cook, *Tragically I Was an Only Twin*, ed. William Cook (London: Century, 2002), 136.

20 Stephen Slemon, personal communication, January 20, 2004.

21 Alex Callinicos, "Wonders Taken for Signs: Homi Bhabha's Postcolonialism," *Transformation* 1 (1995): 98.

22 Neil Lazarus, *Nationalism and Cultural Practice in the Postcolonial World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 134.

23 Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994), 173.

24 Bhabha, "DissemiNation: Time, Narrative, and the Margins of the Modern Nation," in *Nation and Narration*, ed. Bhabha (London: Routledge, 1990), 315.

25 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 172.

26 Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 177.

27 Lazarus, *Nationalism*, 64 (hereafter cited in text).

28 Bhabha, "Remembering Fanon: Self, Psyche and the Colonial Condition," in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 122.

29 Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (London: Penguin, 1990), 194. Fanon, of course, failed to see that precolonial (but not premodern) social and cultural practices have survived colonial times and continue to exist, albeit encumbered by capitalist practices of economic exploitation, in the postcolonial world. What Fanon did not foresee, furthermore, and what, it appears, postcolonial theory too has only latterly grasped, is that colonialism was experienced preeminently in terms of dominance (that is, material extraction) and not via hegemony (the winning of the subaltern ideological support for the colonial enterprise) [Lazarus, *Nationalism*, 90]. This is, of course, Ranajit Guha's point in his essay "Colonialism in South Asia: A Dominance without Hegemony and Its Historiography" (in *Dominance without Hegemony: History and Power in Colonial India* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997], 1–99), in which he creatively reworks Antonio Gramsci's concepts of hegemony and dominance.

30 Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *A Critique of Postcolonial Reason: Toward a History of the Vanishing Present* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) (hereafter cited in text).

31 For a fuller reading of Spivak's *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, see Mishra's review in *Textual Practice* 14 (2000): 412–21.

32 See Thomas R. Trautmann, *Aryans and British India* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997) for a fuller examination of the shift from an initial Indophilia to an (Orientalist) Indophobia.

33 In Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, the native, as raw man, is foreclosed from the indices of high aesthetic meaning since only those who are cooked by culture can name nature sublime: the sublime moment resides with Marlow and Mr. Kurtz, not with the natives, who are given the elliptical "Mistah Kurtz—he dead."

34 Spurr, *Rhetoric of Empire*, 100.

35 See Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. Peggy Kamuf, introduction by Bernd Magnus and Stephen Cullenberg (New York: Routledge, 1994).

36 See especially Benita Parry, "Signs of Our Times: A Discussion of Homi Bhabha's *The Location of Culture*," *Third Text* 28/29 (1994): 5–24.

37 Lazarus critiques Paul Gilroy's influential *The Black Atlantic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993)—a book about modernity as a diasporic formation—on two grounds: first, by placing blacks "internally" in the West, the presumption of modernity as a Western and not a global phenomenon is maintained and, second, by concentrating on racial collectivities ("[black] Atlanticism over [capitalist] world system as the preferred unit of sociohistorical analysis" [62]), the fundamental category of Marxist analysis—class consciousness—is completely marginalized by Gilroy. Lazarus's take on diaspora theory is to emphasize the materiality of historical memory ("consciousness as bearing social effects" [64]) as being fundamental, so that slavery (for blacks) or indenture (for Indians) is materially constitutive of contemporary black diaspora or Indian indenture diaspora sociality. This is not only a matter of relating life-worlds in terms of lived experiences but of seeing life-worlds as being part of a systemic process of imperialist domination and exclusion.

38 See Aijaz Ahmad, *In Theory: Classes, Nations, Literatures* (London: Verso, 1992).

39 David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).

40 Two key modes of resistance discussed at length by Lazarus are cricket and music. Cricket, of course, is a thoroughly establishment game, and yet C. L. R. James, the West

Indian Marxist cultural critic, saw it as the game through which the colonial enterprise itself was challenged. Cricket lends itself to the logic of the camera obscura, the inverted image that needs correcting for proper seeing. And so it was through cricket and all its nuanced rules and attitudes (black and white cricket, moral discipline and the principle of losing graciously that kept it a sport apart, and so on) that the aspirations of the federalists in the West Indies (an early move towards a West Indian Federation on the Malaysian model) were kept alive. The distinctive ways in which Gary Sobers (who as captain of the 1967–68 test series against England introduced an alternative, adventurous, West Indian style of play to the hitherto staid mode of English cricket), Rohan Kanhai, and Clive Lloyd's immensely resourceful West Indian cricketers played the game carried this "counter narrative of liberation." The point is acknowledged by an unlikely writer, V. S. Naipaul. See his "Cricket," in V. S. Naipaul, *The Overcrowded Barracoon* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 17–22. As for popular music, its lyrics too forcibly declare resistance to "Western homogenization and packaging" (218), noticeable in such immensely successful albums as Paul Simon's *Graceland* (1986). The popular music of the Zimbabwean Stella Rambisai Chiweshe is rooted in the tradition of *mbira* playing (*mbira* is a traditional African instrument). As "world music," African pop (such as that of Mory Kante) both challenges and dismantles the "ideological parochialism" of Euro-American popular music.

41 Here, of course, Spivak's path-breaking essay, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" (in Williams and Chrisman, *Colonial Discourse*, 66–111) has been decisive. Spivak's essay makes clear that anticolonial nationalism has been, by and large, an "elite configuration" (Lazarus, *Nationalism*, 110) divorced from the everyday struggles of the subaltern. Peasant resistance or nonassimilable forms of counter-colonial expression were never factored into a bourgeois liberalist ideology because the peasant was fighting for his or her immediate needs and not that of the putative nation as such.

42 Gauri Viswanathan, *Outside the Fold: Conversion, Modernity, and Belief* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998) (hereafter cited in text).

43 Jürgen Habermas, "Modernity versus Postmodernity," *New German Critique* 22 (1981): 3–14.

44 Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe: Political Thought and Historical Difference* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000) (hereafter cited in text).

45 Chakrabarty, *Provincializing Europe*, 10, after Bhabha.

46 R. R. Nayacakalou, *Leadership in Fiji* (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1975), 103.

47 See John D. Kelly and Martha Kaplan, *Represented Communities: Fiji and World Decolonization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001).

48 In Fijian society, once again, the act of barter is captured in the well-known custom of *kere kere*.

49 Chakrabarty, "The Future of Criticism—A *Critical Inquiry* Symposium—Where Is the Now?" *Critical Inquiry* 30 (2004): 458.

50 Chakrabarty, "Where Is the Now?" 459.

51 Manuel Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society* (London: Blackwell, 1996), 21n33.

52 Fredric Jameson, "The End of Temporality," *Critical Inquiry* 29 (2003): 700.

53 Foucault, "What Is Enlightenment," 108.