

# *Postcolonial Discourse: The Raw and the Cooked*<sup>1</sup>

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**A**RIF DIRLIK'S RECENT DISCUSSION of "postcolonial discourse" in his "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism," published in the Winter 1994 issue of *Critical Inquiry*, is welcome for its continuation of a crucial debate that dates back to the mid-1980s, if not to Bandung and before.<sup>2</sup> The theoretical and practical project of rethinking the relationships of groups within and around the colonial encounter has been a defining feature of the era of decolonization, which, as Dirlik observes, often throws into unsteady juxtaposition the most heterodox of partners. One need only mention the work of Frantz Fanon to evoke the staggering complexities of counter-hegemonic group formations on the brink of revolution, which, in the heat of battle, appropriate and combine elements of tribal, village, and national cultures in their clash with the international violence of colonialism. Dirlik's remarks, in some sense, could be taken as symptomatic of the history of cultural conflict endemic to many colonial and postcolonial situations in so far as they attempt a further sorting of alliances and antagonisms against what appears to be a common enemy, especially as they do so within the larger debate about the role of intellectuals and the usefulness of theory to groups in struggle.

In this sense, the essay originally seemed to promise an exciting engagement between Marxism, which has been so instrumental in defining the goals of decolonizing movements around the globe, and the still largely undefined mass referred to here as "postcolonial discourse." We feel that an engagement of this kind is absolutely necessary in charting the itineraries of both discourses towards the end of the twentieth century, especially so in

light of the recent discrediting of Marxism in the eyes of the world and in the context of the new multi-polar configuration of the world-system, no less than in the historic usefulness of Marxist principles to the process of decolonization. Unfortunately, however, Dirlik's essay forgoes this suggestive possibility in the way it constructs incommensurable oppositions between what one would have imagined to form potentially sympathetic allies, flattening complicated arguments in favour of an almost reactionary party line. Dirlik is far too hasty, careless, and polemical in his approach to suggest even the most basic configurations of the necessary articulation of Marxism with the new intellectual disposition of the postcolonial. Instead, we are offered a crude indictment of immigrant opportunism in the US academy and an equally unsubtle reevaluation of Marxism for the postmodern world economy.

In brief, Dirlik polemically plots the field of what he calls "postcolonial discourse" by reducing it to a merely opportunistic expression of non-Western intellectuals lofted, on the "wings of progress," to respectability in America and thus as the radical other of an authentically "political" Third World Marxism. The article attempts to debunk the claims of these "postcolonial intellectuals" on the basis of their amelioration in US academic institutions, describing their intellectual utterances as emanations of shame over their new enfranchisement and their guilty alienation from authentic communities back home. While there is a certain emotional resonance to this charge, its failure to engage with the basic intellectual contours of any putative "postcolonial criticism" (his phrase) thus renders it impossible (and even irrelevant) to contextualize his argument within the serious history and theory of anti-colonial group disposition and strategy. Cut loose from any responsible intellectual anchor that would allow us to consider them as usefully articulating tactics of struggle, Dirlik's remarks become mere symptoms of the intuitive dynamic of cultural consolidation and differentiation that occurs between any groups forced to share space. As such, this intervention into the postcolonial debate is less a self-conscious insertion into the theoretical genealogy of anti-colonialism than a local polemic designed to win adherents to a particular US

academic cause. In our reading of the essay and the narrow disciplinary battle it enjoins, the new "postcolonial intellectual" and the discourse he or she employs emerge not so much the global lackeys of anti-Marxism, as Dirlik would have it, but as new colleagues compelled to share office space in over-heated departments.

Those of us on the academic Left who, like Dirlik, are puzzled by the uncritical proliferation of jobs, conferences, articles, journals, books, etc., professing the postcolonial welcome a serious debate on the subject. Unreflexive denunciations of Marxism, too, on both the Left and Right, recently have become *de rigueur* expressions of a trendy new "post"-ness within the profession. Some of our friends and colleagues, postcolonial and otherwise, initially expressed a kind of relief when Dirlik's article appeared, hoping this would be the occasion for a debate into these related phenomena. On closer inspection, however, it is not. Dirlik, unfortunately, is too polemical, too dogmatic in his formulation of the "postcolonial paradigm" (his term), and too sanguine in his faith in an unreconstructed Marxism to be of much help in navigating either the tangled swirl of what gets said in the name of the postcolonial or the necessary flexibility of a properly materialist response to the changing conditions of ideological and material production in the contemporary world. In his zeal to resolve the debate about what academic Marxism can continue to do for us in a postcolonial "era," Dirlik takes considerable liberties with his subject, resulting, when not in mere dismissal, in some startling inaccuracies and misconceptions. His hastiness not only results in premature denunciation but raises serious doubts about the value of his solution as well. While we have no stake in rehabilitating the immediate object of this attack, the Princeton historian Gyan Prakash, and maintain at best an uncertain relationship to the emerging discourse of the postcolonial, we do welcome the continuation of this important debate on somewhat more informed and responsible terrain. The purpose of the present response is to redirect the discussion towards both a fuller understanding of the themes of postcolonial discourse and a more nuanced attitude towards its relationship with Marxism. For the sake of clarity, we refrain from

using Dirlik's terminology except in quotation. Instead, our terms "postcolonial studies" (in general) and "postcoloniality" (in specific) will substitute for the crisis of overproduction in Dirlik's language.

The title of Dirlik's article indicates his correct belief that something called "postcolonial discourse" cannot really be said to exist in any coherent theoretical or practical space within the US academy; it does not yet inhabit any distinct political, academic, disciplinary, or institutional subfield, much less constitute a coherent body of thought in its own right. On the other hand, any random glance at conference posters or university press catalogues will prove that the term (and its cognate, "colonial") is experiencing an almost "auratic" currency and proliferation, largely limited, however, to two particular spheres of academic interest. The first sphere describes the strictly historical and sociological study of what happens after colonization (as in "post-Independence" or "after-colonialism," a usage that has informed studies of US culture as much as those of the Middle East, India, Africa, Latin America, or other previously colonized social formations). The second sphere includes a rather larger reference to the transformation in philosophical and cultural languages of criticism world-wide since at least the Second World War, a transformation that has attempted to question the hegemonic position of European modernity as the culture of reference for the rest of the world, the achieved *telos* of world-spirit to which all other civilizations must measure up. In this sense, as informed by the strong rewritings of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Freud undertaken by European poststructuralist philosophers, and no less by the practical critics of anti-colonial independence movements, the term "postcolonial" can be seen not merely as the political moment of the break from the colonial past but also as the philosophico-cultural departure from the larger homogenizing logic of European modernity itself. Although Dirlik seems to endorse the descriptive power of the first usage, his comprehension of the second seems strangely limited and contradictory. If postcoloniality as we have described it in our second usage functions as a means of theorizing the philosophical rupture with European modernity (along with its imperialist and fascist

tendencies, epistemological as well as politico-economic), if its project can be described as attempting to think a path of development that would not necessitate the violence that European modernity habitually and systematically inflicted upon the rest of the world in its drive towards "progress," one would be tempted to concur that in its basic impulses it is essentially similar to that other great project of international liberation known as socialism. Indeed, from India to Ghana, China to Cuba, anti-colonial independence was as often fought in the name of socialism as in its parliamentary rhetoric of freedom and democracy; and just as independence movements sought to put the "post-" before colonial, those that sought to do so by emulating the imperialist strategy that had held them in check for centuries were relatively rather few.<sup>3</sup> If the mobilizing slogan of this type of rethinking is "After Orientalism" (the title of an article by Rosalind O'Hanlon and David Washbrook), one fails to see why we should not be quick to embrace it. At the same time, if "After Orientalism" means interrogating *all* the logics of European modernity, then it surely must not limit itself to the imperialist capitalist model alone but must comprehend the alternative modernizing (or "modernist") strategies of collective farming and state-controlled industrialization, as well as the theories of history, epistemology, and their dialectical relationships to practice that characterize Marxist organization itself.

Dirlik is thus correct to notice the postcolonial aura within the US academic institution (invoking what Walter Benjamin termed a religious and traditionalist "presence"), but incorrect when he attempts to define it as anything more tangible than that, and much less so as a direct challenge to the political, economic, and ideological force that Marxist thought has been and continues to be in both the First and Third Worlds. If postcolonial discourse is seen seriously to threaten Marxism either in or outside the US academy, one would have thought that its credentials would be more prominently on view. This is adamantly not the case in Dirlik's article, apart from a kind of *ad hoc* Nielsen rating of academic trends. Dirlik's only real evidence for even positing an existing "postcolonial discourse" is the new "respectability" and "assertiveness" (his words) assumed by a small group of foreign-

born, US-located academic intellectuals who seem to speak a common philosophical language, along with the half-hearted attempts American institutions have made during the last few years to hire people of colour from what used to be called the Third World. To make world-historical claims for the strength of this aura based on a narrow sampling of US academic trends is unconvincing. To make the Indian historian Gyan Prakash its authoritative spokesperson is the first indication of the inadequacy of Dirlik's definition.

For the purpose of his attack, Dirlik postulates certain guiding principles, which, he asserts, shape "postcolonial discourse." He garners these tenets from two essays written by Prakash, who himself selectively summarizes the "themes" of what he considers a unified "postcolonial criticism" by drawing on a summary reading of the *Subaltern Studies* series, several essays of Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha, with glances thrown at Jacques Derrida and Robert Young. Whatever the merits of Prakash's articles (which we cannot consider here), Dirlik is unwilling to move outside these self-described reviews to chart a fuller explication of the postcolonial. Since Dirlik briefly mentions Edward Said (*not*, however, as such a vanguard postcolonial critic, but rather as its opposite—what he calls the "Third World Intellectual"), we wonder at his decision not to take up another potential source for the elaboration of a "postcolonial criticism"—and a major one at that!—within the heteromorphous arena of postcolonial studies. By most accounts, Said's *Orientalism*—far more profoundly than the work of the *Subaltern Studies* group, Spivak, or Bhabha, not to mention Prakash—has influenced scholars working in the various fields that deal with textual representations of the non-European other. Perhaps Dirlik's hypostatization of the postcolonial intellectual as either Indian or historian would have been mitigated by his positing of *Orientalism* as the informing text of a "postcolonial discourse." Further, Dirlik's deep investment in the older Marxism that he claims should inform the theoretical examinations of various material and epistemic shifts in the Third World could not be maintained in quite the same way had he concentrated on Said's seminal text, which devotes some of its severest rhetoric to debunking Marx's prognostications on the

"British Rule in India" as a classic example of the Eurocentric bias of even the most radical European thinkers (153-57). Said's own project, moreover, does not simply reverse the polarities of orientalism by positing a clear-cut Third World alternative; any prefiguring of a resistant "postcolonial discourse" that can be derived from his work must account for the asymmetrical power relations by which orientalism achieved a hegemonic status within First World academies in the late nineteenth century and which they still enjoy by virtue of their filiative relationships with universities, corporations, governments, and states.

Yet Dirlik's conception of postcolonial discourse is strictly limited from the start; he is less interested in exploring the larger range of things that get said under the rubric of the postcolonial than in discursively constructing a "group," that of postcolonial intellectuals, which he opposes to other groups on the basis of its more-or-less successful appropriation of an Old Left discourse. Like the glossy sheen of commodities packaged to attract the eye of the consumer, Dirlik assembles a group of disparate intellectuals, produces a singular identity for them, and finally exhibits them on stage as one more fashion in the commodified marketplace of ideas. It is no wonder, then, that this reified group should exude an "aura," selectively polished and restricted as it is; nor is it surprising that this group should appear antagonistic to the three other endogamous sets Dirlik constructs as critical foils to the nefarious "postcolonial intellectual" (Third World intellectuals, Chinese Marxists, and First World academic Marxist historians each have their way with this debased other), since its identity is derived from precisely those features that fail to match the characteristics of the "in" group. The group identity of diverse "postcolonial critics" is thus constructed by a critically imposed differentiation between desirable/undesirable features in relation to what is presumed to be the larger goal of "formulat[ing] practices of resistance against that system of which it is a product" (356). The System! If, as postcolonial intellectuals more often assert, they are not merely products of a single system but are complexly overdetermined by a variety of overlapping systems (imperialism, nationalism, localism, etc.), how can this difference be taken seriously and not be subsumed under the

unifying rubric of a full and final determination of identity by the inexorable logic of capitalism in the last instance? Of course, it cannot.

"It is also misleading in my opinion," writes Dirlik, "to classify as postcolonial critics intellectuals as widely different politically as Edward Said, Aijaz Ahmad, Homi Bhabha, Gyan Prakash, Gayatri Spivak, and Lata Mani" (338). We will return to the implications of the incessant slippage in Dirlik's own language. It is difficult at best to define exactly how the specific set of the postcolonial intellectual is constructed here. Dirlik, in fact, does "classify," if only in footnotes, a Gang of Four to represent the "major themes" of postcolonial discourse (Prakash, Spivak, Bhabha, Mani). What happens to those Third World intellectuals, such as Said and Ahmad, who are exempted from this grouping? Prakash, according to Dirlik, is included because he cogently summarizes the "major themes in postcolonial discourse" (333). This dependency on Prakash to ventriloquize and thus unify the diverse, fractious voices of postcolonial scholars, however, poses certain fundamental problems. Both Prakash, and Dirlik's summation of Prakash, accurately point to a partial trajectory charted by certain proponents of postcolonial studies. However, there are other, equally significant trails mapped out by postcolonial intellectuals that, if followed, would contradict, counter, or supplement those that Dirlik adduces to prove his argument. In fact, the recent debates over several important postcolonial statements, such as Achille Mbembe's essay "The Banality of Power and the Aesthetics of Vulgarity in the Post-colony,"<sup>4</sup> and Aijaz Ahmad's book *In Theory*,<sup>5</sup> repeatedly demonstrate exactly what Dirlik says postcolonial discourse makes impossible—an attention to the workings of capital and power in the different nation-states, a close scrutiny of the ways in which global structures manifest themselves in local institutions, knowledges and practices, and, above all, the self-reflexive examination of the subject positions of postcolonial intellectuals in the First and Third Worlds.

It is curious that Mbembe should be mentioned in passing in Dirlik's text, while Ahmad is glorified by his exclusion from the false prophets of postcoloniality. What exactly are the terms of



entry into these categories? There is no attempt on Dirlik's part to temper his attack on these false intellectuals by engaging with the dissenting voices that clearly refuse to be grouped within the homogenized discourse that he constructs. There is no real explanation offered as to why Ahmad is not one of the postcolonial intellectuals under attack; if it is because "he does an excellent job of relating the problems of postcoloniality to contemporary capitalism"—he "*grounds* his critique within the operations of capital" (338; emphasis added)—it seems that Spivak and Lata Mani should be exempted also, as Dirlik grants that they, too, "*ground* their politics firmly in feminism [and in the case of Spivak, Marxism]" (338-39; emphasis added). If Spivak is redeemed partly by her attention to "the operations of capital," however, she must still be indicted, since her methodology is not entirely endorsed by Dirlik. An inequitable relationship of "grounds" is posited here, first between postcolonial discourse and Marxism, then between Marxism and feminism, and, finally, it seems, between any "ground" at all and the (epistemologically rather well-grounded) anti-foundationalism of Bhabha and Prakash. We remain curious as to why Bhabha is singled out as the "master of political mystification and theoretical obfuscation" and thus summarily dismissed as "exemplary of the Third World intellectual who has been completely reworked by the language of First World criticism" (334-35, n. 6). Is he insufficiently "grounded" in a First World discourse—Marxism or feminism—or grounded in First World discourses with which Dirlik would rather not reckon, such as those of poststructuralism and psychoanalysis?

Have Spivak, or Mani, Prakash, or Ahmad, or any of us, including Dirlik for that matter, not been "worked" upon by First World cultural criticism? Were any of these Indian postcolonial intellectuals, prior to occupying their privileged places in the academy, ever allowed to inhabit a pure Third World cultural zone? Would not the writings of almost all Third World scholars be equally guilty of being "reworked" by First World ideas and language? Growing up in independent India, overdetermined as it still is by the cultural and educational policies consolidated by the British, has made such pure spaces quite untenable for a number of

Indian postcolonial scholars in the US. Certainly, undergraduate and graduate education in India is still heavily determined by an Anglicist, Arnoldian cultural criticism. Or is Dirlik only attacking a particular *kind* of postcolonial criticism, one influenced by the contemporary poststructuralist critique of foundationalism? What about the reverse angle by which First World intellectuals have been “reworked” by the languages of Third World cultural criticism? Is it not the “in-betweenness” of the postcolonial subject so decried by Dirlik that makes possible a project such as Ahmad’s *In Theory*, which attempts to link responsibly First World theory and Third World culture? It is precisely this issue of the permeability of borders, the lack of a fixed location (or “ground”) from which to state definitively the truths of political economy, we would submit, that finally is so discomfiting for Dirlik.

Indian scholars, to cite one example, are not so peremptorily dismissive of the appellation “postcolonial” as Dirlik evidently believes. Even as they point out the tensions generated by the different power structures governing the relationship of the non-resident postcolonial intellectual seeking to “decolonize the mind” and the Indian professor seeking to radicalize English departments under the threat of “political and other *actual* consequences” (337; emphasis added), in the example offered by Dirlik, this seldom results in outright dismissal of the term. Any number of scholars in the colleges and universities of India are trying concertedly to introduce into the curriculum post-structuralist and postcolonial theory produced by intellectuals in the First World, as well as the literature and culture of other postcolonial societies. A large number of Indian scholars who continue to teach in India have published essays and books deeply informed by postcolonial theory. Some of these works have found a ready audience in the US. The collection of essays *Recasting Women: Essays in Colonial History*, edited by Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid, was first published by Kali for Women in India before being brought out in a US edition. The essays in this anthology “focus primarily on the regulation and reproduction of patriarchy in the different class-caste formations within civil society” (1) and depict an easy familiarity with the dis-

courses of poststructuralism and the postcolonial, not to mention Western Marxism and a wide variety of Western feminist critiques.<sup>6</sup> Let us not forget (though it seems an apocryphal notion here) that Spivak herself frequently returns to India, and, on the occasion of the interview cited by Dirlik, was invited to lecture at various centres in Delhi and was then interviewed by two Indian scholars. The exchange between her and her Indian interlocutors (Dirlik 337-38) does not completely deny her the possibility of any space in India, as Dirlik would have us believe, when it self-consciously measures the "relationship of distance and proximity between you and us" (337). Nor can the term "postcolonial" in the US really be considered to exclude radical intellectuals at home when, in fact, it helps to measure this distance in terms of relative power and prestige. Is Dirlik not guilty here of the same kind of spatial homogenization of which he so glibly accuses postcolonial intellectuals?

It is also peculiar that a critic committed to de-capitalizing the auratic authority of the postcolonial intellectual in the US academic marketplace would focus solely on Indian intellectuals and fail to record the monumental contributions made to postcolonial studies by Latin American, Caribbean, Middle Eastern, and African writers and scholars (with, at times, very strong Marxist convictions). No dedicated scholar in the field can be unaware, for example, of V.Y. Mudimbe's *The Invention of Africa*, Edouard Glissant's *Caribbean Discourse*, Enrique Dussel's *Philosophy of Liberation*, Roberto Fernandez Retamar's *Caliban*, etc., as canonical texts in any explicit theorizing of the postcolonial. Moreover, if Ngugi wa Thiong'o does not literally inhabit a chair in a distinguished Ivy League university (Dirlik's yardstick of "respectability"), he surely wields enormous clout in the sanctified space of critical journals. His recent talk at Yale University was delivered in Gikuyu and simultaneously translated for the non-Gikuyu audience; it was then printed in the African language side-by-side the English translation in a volume of the *Yale Journal of Criticism*. The various displacements and ruptures of what Spivak calls "power lines" enacted by these events document one successful outcome of the release of postcoloniality from "the fixity of Third World location" (Dirlik 332), a "release"

that Dirlik mourns as a constitutive failure of postcolonial discourse. By focusing exclusively on the politics of location, Dirlik fails to engage with what Tejumola Olaniyan recently has phrased the “antagonistic contingent relations built above, below, and alongside” (49) the particular and the global, the post-colony and the neo-colony, generated by the politics of interaction. In this case, “postcolonial intellectuals in their First World institutional location” are *not* eternally and absolutely ensconced in positions of power “vis-à-vis the ‘native’ intellectuals back at home” (Dirlik 343).

Much postcolonial feminist theory, completely ignored by Dirlik, explicitly critiques the notion that a universalized feminist subjectivity can be projected globally. Even a cursory glance at one popular anthology, *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (we bracket a discussion on the ways in which the editors of the anthology, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, define Third World women) would have revealed to Dirlik how postcolonial feminists pay minute attention to the dialectic between the large-scale incorporation of Third World women into the multinational labour force and the specific and local factors that complicate relations of production and exchange both on the global and local fronts. Spivak’s remark apropos First World Marxist-feminist interpretations of Third World literature seems representative here: “why globalize?” (“A Literary Representation” 252). Postcolonial feminist theory in particular has generated serious theoretical repercussions in several fields of inquiry, and several internal to Marxism. Spivak’s “Scattered Speculations on the Question of Value” (1985) still reads today as one such seminal moment in postcolonial attempts to read Marx carefully for the cultural implications of economic globalization. Among Spivak’s main themes in this essay is the destabilization of the central Marxian tenet that consciousness is determined by social being, an ambiguity arrived at through a scrupulous reading of those pages of the *Grundrisse* that derive consciousness as the predicate of an unstable chain of representations within the labour theory of value. This insight alone (now almost ten years old) could have had positive effects on Dirlik’s claim that postcolonial discourse ema-

nates from the projection of newly enfranchised subjectivities into a globalized theory of dislocation. Instead, he reifies this rich and varied scholarship, hoping to reduce it to a mere ideological deviation, a "false consciousness" about the "real" conditions of its production. As any attention to the sophisticated discussions of ideology that have emerged recently from the Marxists would have shown, however, this is not even good "vulgar" Marxism.

As Louis Althusser supposedly was fond of saying, "the lonely hour of the last instance never arrives." Even before it can be postulated in theory, the determination of a particular ideology by the economic requires a series of complex mediations that Dirlik, in his hasty appropriations from theorists of late capitalism such as Fredric Jameson and David Harvey, utterly fails to produce. If one had to assert a defining "theme" of the postcolonial, high on the list might well be this healthy suspicion of simple determinations, that "billiard-ball causality" that proclaims all ideology as an upheaval of thought directly dictated by a simple cause, much less the sublimely complex convulsions of global capital. Dirlik is less suspicious. The primary aim of his grouping operation is to assert that the unfixed geo-cultural location of the postcolonial intellectual results in a "hybridness and 'in-betweenness'" (336) of postcolonial subjectivity that essentially is homologous to the flexible production practices of postfordist economics. Like the profits reaped by multinational corporations through such scattered production techniques, and their concomitant power to dictate global policy through trade agreements, the United Nations, and the World Bank, the free-wheeling postcolonial intellectual dictates the shape of global culture through 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*" (336; emphasis added). It seems truly baffling to us, given its pervasive suspicion about determination, that any "postcolonial discourse" we know of can be said to "*intend . . . to achieve an authentic globalization of cultural discourses by the extension globally of the intellectual concerns of [postcolonial intellectuals] and by the introduction*

... of voices and subjectivities from the margins" (329; emphasis added). Even if one could *intend* to remake the world in the postcolonial image, it seems rather utopian to expect that this could be accomplished through the simple "introduction" of voices from the margins. However, the persistent *refusal* of postcolonial intellectuals to effect this "extension globally" rather seems to us a defining "theme" of the genre. Or perhaps Dirlik missed the irony that the European nineteenth century had effected a similar global project; hence the very possibility of *post*-colonial intellectuals.

Dirlik also seems to proceed on the assumption that the totality (or essence) of Marxist thought is locatable primarily in the modes-of-production narrative, and that a challenge either to that specific narrative or to concepts of teleology in general is damaging to Marxism as a whole. This, frankly, is bewildering in 1994. To proclaim such a challenge on these grounds as either theoretically or practically original to postcolonial intellectuals merely substitutes a newly visible antagonist for an internal fracture accomplished long ago, most notably by Althusser and other French Marxists, but quickly taken up throughout Europe and in intellectual centres all over the world.<sup>7</sup> Yet to conduct an examination of postcolonial discourse and its challenge to Marxism by beginning with the premise that postcolonial discourse constitutes merely the latest flare-up of bad faith by intellectuals who have risen to prominence on the "wings of progress" bequeathed them by capitalist America (much less socialist India!), have undertaken theoretical exercises to assuage that guilt, and thus have become apologists for a global postmodern opportunism is staggering, all the more so for the historical erasures it performs. Four such erasures are immediately apparent, and in any fuller exposition of the postcolonial would have to be considered: the preceding three decades of Marxist thought in the West; the specificity of Marxist thought in the (former) Third World, other than China (since Dirlik "covers" that in his piece); the practical political effects of the end of the Second World option; and, most importantly in the context of this article, the difference from these three events measured by the unstable term "postcoloniality."

We now return to the interchangeability of the terms “post-colonial discourse,” “the postcolonial paradigm,” and “post-colonialism” in Dirlik’s essay. By outlining his version of the main themes of “postcolonial discourse,” Dirlik produces for the purposes of his argument “the postcolonial paradigm,” which, in turn, manifests the phenomenon of “postcolonialism,” an ideological posture “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” (353). We doubt that the great majority of postcolonial intellectuals in the US have the institutional power to constitute the world in their own self-image, even if the comfortable fit between enfranchisement and consciousness were not denied explicitly by postcolonial theory. Is the assertion of “new found power” (339) really available to those Third World intellectuals hired to teach postcolonial literature in small and large campuses across the US? In places such as Farmville and Allentown, Normal and Pullman, most postcolonial intellectuals in US space, Indian or otherwise, struggle to resist their continued marginalization and must fight to continue teaching the few courses on postcolonial literature (let alone theory) reluctantly offered by their departments. One wonders whether such intellectuals have the luxury to enjoy what Dirlik categorically affirms as the essence of “the postcolonial paradigm,” “postcolonialism” as a *bona fide* field of research with full departmental and administrative support. Far from the institutional and group solidarity defined by an “ism,” we must introject an alternate terminology into the debate. The specific term “postcoloniality” (an idiom Dirlik employs interchangeably with “postcolonialism”—further evidence of hastiness given its accepted currency within postcolonial circles) much more clearly evokes this unstable combination of power and powerlessness, authorization and marginalization, identity and difference implicit in the practice of *doing* postcolonial studies in the mixed space *between* centre and periphery, First and Third Worlds. Not only is postcoloniality a description of where postcolonial intellectuals seem to live and work in the hybrid space between diaspora and First World institutional validation but it also opens the possibility for re-

imagining alternate relationships to the multiple determinations that put them there.

In a brilliant essay entitled "Poststructuralism, Marginality, Postcoloniality and Value," published in 1990, Spivak addresses precisely the general questions posed by Dirlik. Her essay, she says, is "about the difference and the relationship between academic and 'revolutionary' practices in the interest of social change" (219). She critiques the commodification of marginality in the academic marketplace and cautions the radical academic not to forget that names such as Indian, Asian, British, etc., are burdened by their imbrications in the materiality of history. She contends that she cannot ignore the power of identitarianism even as she must struggle, "however indirectly, toward controlling the dangers [of identitarianism] by making them visible" (220). Refusing to describe this project in the shop-worn terminology of Third World intellectual or postcolonial subject, she seeks the term "teacher"; however banal it may seem, this is a teacher who is profoundly aware of the construction "of a new object of investigation—'the third world,' 'the marginal'—for institutional validation and certification" (222). Spivak's use of the modest term "teacher" suggests that she recognizes her important contributions to (not only) postcolonial studies, while remaining ever sceptical about the inflated value of the Third World intellectual on the American academic scene. It is undeniable that she has greatly influenced a whole generation of younger scholars in the field, and her cautionary statements reverberate in their critical elaborations as well. We quote this lengthy passage from Spivak in some measure to counter the extensive citations from Prakash in Dirlik's essay. We do not claim Spivak as the sole dissenting voice in postcolonial studies, but, given her status in the field, one may well argue that her influence is at least as great as those of the "authoritative" voices cited by Dirlik. She writes:

Let us attempt to read the possibility of our unwilling or unwitting perpetration of a "new orientalism" as the inscription of an "overall strategy."

It is not only that lines separate ethnic, gender and class prejudice in the metropolitan countries from indigenous co-operation with neo-colonialism outside, in the Third World periphery. It is also that



arguments from culturalism, multiculturalism and ethnicity, however insular and heteromorphous they might seem from the great narratives of the techniques of global financial control, can work to obscure such separations in the interests of the production of a neo-colonial discourse. . . . neo-colonialism is fabricating its allies by proposing a share of the centre in a seemingly new way (not a rupture but a displacement): disciplinary support for conviction of authentic marginality by the (aspiring) elite. (222)

Again and again, Spivak reminds us that the roles of postcolonial intellectuals can be productive only if they are conceived as a strategy that can interrogate the multiple and non-linear trajectories of the local and the global. The essay does not advocate a substitution of the term "postcolonial" with "Third World" or something else; we all recognize the dangers involved in using any single term to specify a heterogeneous condition, especially in dissimilar geo-political spaces. However, "postcoloniality" does remind us of how the world continues to be shaped by the culture of imperialism, and how even the best-intentioned of resistance movements can reinscribe hierarchy and exclusion into their politics of liberation. Postcoloniality maintains its relevance in the current debate since it allows us, however awkwardly, to mark simultaneously the continuity and difference between then and now, old and new, inside and outside, which the prefix "post" makes possible. To quote Spivak for the last time: "The impossible 'no' to a structure [postcolonial], which one critiques, yet inhabits intimately, is the deconstructive philosophical position, and the everyday here and now named 'postcoloniality' is a case of it" (225).

We have not dwelt on Dirlik's representation of the work of Homi Bhabha for several reasons, among them the lack in the article of any substantial engagement with Bhabha's positions. Yet Bhabha's words, apocalyptic or utopian as they may sometimes sound, remind us of the tendency towards reification that a teleological narrative based on binary oppositions such as Dirlik's can promote. A brief quotation from an important article by Bhabha that Dirlik does not cite evokes the as-yet amorphous condition of postcoloniality that we would not like to discount prematurely:

This locality is more *around* temporality than *about* historicity: a form of living that is more complex than "community"; more symbolic

than “society”; more connotative than “country”; less patriotic than *patrie*; more rhetorical than the reason of state; more mythological than ideology; less homogenous than hegemony; less centered than the citizen; more collective than “the subject”; more psychic than civility; more hybrid in the articulation of cultural differences and identifications—gender, race or class—than can be represented in any hierarchical or binary structuring of social antagonism. (292)

Can this new postcolonial imaginary, simultaneously both more and less than those offered by established traditions, offer us other ways of thinking through the fragmented subjectivities and unwieldy collectives that have come to characterize “the Era of Global Capitalism”? Perhaps not. We can be sure, however, that any simple equation between postfordist means and relations of production, generalized into an “age” or “condition” and resulting in a simple emanation of consciousness will lead us to a definite dead-end. Ironically, Dirlik’s own postmodern Marxism *intends* to “project globally” the condition of fragmented subjectivity far more assuredly than any postcolonial theory by supposing that the new flexible production results in dislocated consciousnesses in both the First and Third Worlds. Bhabha and Spivak, on the other hand, attempt to describe the non-synchronous, multi-spatial events occurring within the folds of a world economy that simultaneously places and displaces, enfranchises and disempowers. They attempt to re-envision these relations in order to produce a practice for present and future work that is not merely the reflection of a determined subjectivity, however schizophrenic, but one that can anticipate ways of living this condition as something perhaps we do not yet recognize. The prevalent anxiety in their work is indeed symptomatic, but not of “new found power” as much as of an appropriately troubled response to the very power they have been accorded by the simultaneous commodification and marginalization of the liberating pretensions of a universalizing academic discourse.

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> We wish to acknowledge our thanks to the Washington DC Area Cultural Theory Group, especially Phyllis Butler, Peter Hulme, and José Rabasa, for a stimulating discussion of this essay. Although several of our insights were generated in this discussion, the responsibility for their formulation is entirely our own.

- 2 This essay was intended originally as a public response to Dirlík in *Critical Inquiry*, hence its somewhat topical nature.
- 3 Interestingly enough, it is in the US, of all the "postcolonial" societies around the world, in which we find perhaps the most dramatic example of turning the colonial relationship on its head. Post-colonies are obviously capable of becoming oppressor-states, but none has been quite so "successful" as the US.
- 4 For the ongoing debate, see *Public Culture* 5.1 (Fall 1992).
- 5 For a host of debates, see *Public Culture* 6.1 (Fall 1993).
- 6 Other important work from India, written in English and embracing the insights of postcolonial theory, include *Rethinking English: Essays in Literature, Language, History*, edited by Svati Joshi and *The Lie of the Land: English Literary Studies in India*, edited by Rajeswari Sunder Rajan. A substantial periodical literature containing postcolonial discussions includes the regular issues of *Economic and Political Weekly*, *Journal of Arts and Ideas*, and *Manushi*, among others.
- 7 The range of references is too vast to cite here. Three sources that describe the poststructuralist break from "classical" Marxism that might be useful to the beginner are Laclau and Mouffe; Surin; and the "anti-foundational Marxism" promulgated during the last several years by the US journal *Rethinking Marxism*. Jacques Derrida's new work, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, translated by Peggy Kamuf, addresses many of these issues from a perspective germane to postcolonial criticism.

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