

# MARXISM, MODERNITY, AND POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

Edited by

Crystal Bartolovich and Neil Lazarus



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## Contents

1	Introduction: Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies <i>Crystal Bartolovich</i>	page 1
<b>Part I Eurocentrism, “the West,” and the world</b>		
2	The rise of East Asia and the withering away of the interstate system <i>Giovanni Arrighi</i>	21
3	The fetish of “the West” in postcolonial theory <i>Neil Lazarus</i>	43
4	The Eurocentric Marx and Engels and other related myths <i>August Nimtz</i>	65
5	Karl Marx, Eurocentrism, and the 1857 Revolt in British India <i>Pranav Jani</i>	81
<b>Part II Locating modernity</b>		
6	Misplaced ideas? Locating and dislocating Ireland in colonial and postcolonial studies <i>Joe Cleary</i>	101
7	Liberation theory: variations on themes of Marxism and modernity <i>Benita Parry</i>	125
8	Sex, space, and modernity in the work of Rashid Jahan, “Angareywali” <i>Priyamvada Gopal</i>	150

*Contents*

- 9 Was there a time before race? Capitalist  
modernity and the origins of racism 167  
*Helen Scott*

**Part III Marxism, postcolonial studies, and “theory”**

- 10 Postcolonial studies between the European wars:  
an intellectual history 185  
*Timothy Brennan*
- 11 Marxism, postcolonialism, and *The Eighteenth*  
*Brumaire* 204  
*Neil Larsen*
- 12 Postcolonialism and the problematic of uneven  
development 221  
*E. San Juan, Jr.*
- 13 Adorno, authenticity, critique 240  
*Keya Ganguly*

*References* 257

*Index* 279

## **Introduction: Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies**

*Crystal Bartolovich*

This book has its origins in a panel on “Marxism and Postcoloniality” organized by the editors for a “Rethinking Marxism” conference at Amherst several years ago. The large turnout for, and lively discussion during, that session – even as a blizzard swirled around the building housing the meeting rooms – convinced us that we should try to recapture the intellectual excitement of that day by continuing the conversation in print. Some of the contributors to this volume were participants in that conference; others were invited to add their thoughts later. All, however, share with the editors the convictions that Marxism and “postcolonial studies” have something to say to each other – and that there might be more productive ways of dealing with their differences than have been exhibited hitherto. There has, in fact, been little direct, serious dialogue *between* Marxists and postcolonial theorists. The neglect (even ignorance) of Marxism in postcolonial studies has often been countered by the reflexive dismissal of the entire field of postcolonial studies by Marxist writers. In this longstanding dispute, a good deal of oversimplification, caricature, and trivialization has crept into the discourse on both sides, with the charges each group hurls against the other being by now well known: Marxism is said to be indelibly Eurocentric, complicit with the dominant master-narratives of modernity (including that of colonialism itself) and, in its approach to texts, vulgarly reductionistic and totalizing; postcolonial studies, in turn, is viewed as complicit with imperialism in its contemporary guise as globalization, oriented exclusively to metropolitan academic adventurism, and, in its approach to texts, irredeemably dematerializing and unhistorical. In contrast to these polarizing and exclusionary positions, this volume advocates a strong and visible *Marxist* postcolonial studies.

*Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies*

Insisting on a specifically Marxist understanding of problems raised by the question of “postcoloniality” takes on an added urgency given the spectacular success of postcolonial studies within the metropolitan academy since its inception nearly twenty years ago. For these are years in which Marxism itself has had to combat a growing consensus in the intellectual culture at large – on the political left as well as the right – that capitalism is an untranscendable horizon: as the academic credibility and prestige of postcolonial studies has risen steeply, Marxism has been confronted with widespread capitalist triumphalism in the wake of the events of 1989, when we were all, as Eduardo Galeano put it, “invited to the world burial of socialism” (1991: 250). Meanwhile, advertisements for academic positions in postcolonial studies and/or “ethnic” or “global” studies – mostly in English departments, but also in the disciplines of history, anthropology, art, and others – have been proliferating. Several dedicated academic journals – among them *Public Culture*, *Postcolonial Studies*, *Diaspora*, *Third Text*, and *Interventions* – have begun publication, and countless other journals have devoted special issues to “postcolonial theory” or “the postcolonial condition.” In addition to the hundreds of books and thousands of articles that might be said to be *in* the field of postcolonial studies today or indeed to make it up – from Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and the works of Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Spivak, V. Y. Mudimbe, Arjun Appadurai, and Trinh Minh-ha to the mass of specialist work on particular authors, periods, situations, events, and concepts – there has recently emerged a burgeoning production of texts that take the field itself as their object: witness the publication – merely over the course of the past decade – of books by Boehmer (1995), Childs and Williams (1997), Gandhi (1998), Loomba (1998a), Moore-Gilbert (1997), Quayson (2000), and Young (1990).<sup>1</sup> Perhaps it is not surprising that Marxists have eyed this burgeoning production – which is for the most part so ambivalent toward, so unsystematic in its treatment of, the realities of “actually existing capitalism” – with suspicion. Even within postcolonial studies, there has been an acknowledgment that neo-colonial imbalances in the contemporary world order . . . have in fact not been engaged with enough by postcolonial critics who grapple with the shades of the colonial past much more than with the difficulties of the postcolonial present. If postcolonial studies is to survive in any meaningful way, it needs to absorb itself far more deeply with the contemporary world, and with the local circumstances within which colonial institutions and ideas are being moulded into the disparate cultural and socio-economic practices which define our contemporary “globality.”

(Loomba 1998a: 256–57)

Agreeing with this, the contributors to this volume further assert that Marxism is the theoretical perspective best suited to accomplishing the concerted and effective critique of the violence of the contemporary world order as well as of the ravages of the colonial past that Loomba calls for here.

However, our conviction as to the privileged role of Marxism in this critique is unlikely to be welcomed unequivocally within the field of postcolonial studies. For unquestionably (as a metropolitan disciplinary formation, at least) this field has been deeply and constitutively informed by theoretical protocols and procedures – Foucauldian discourse analysis, deconstruction, Lacanianism – which are not merely indifferent, but, in their dominant forms, actively and explicitly hostile, to Marxism. As Stuart Hall has conceded recently, in response to Arif Dirlik, among others: “two halves of the current debate about ‘late modernity’ – the postcolonial and the analysis of the new developments in global capitalism – have indeed largely proceeded in relative isolation from one another” (Hall 1996a: 257–58). Hall attributes the failure by postcolonial theorists to attend to these “developments in global capitalism” – and, more generally, we would add, to any of the larger questions of political economy – to the fact that

the discourses of the “post” have emerged, and been (often silently) articulated against the practical, political, historical and theoretical effects of the collapse of a certain kind of economistic, teleological and, in the end, reductionistic Marxism. What has resulted from the abandonment of this deterministic economism has been, not alternative ways of thinking questions about the economic relations and their effects . . . but instead a massive, gigantic and eloquent disavowal. (258)

About the “disavowal” of Marxism within much of postcolonial studies, Hall is surely correct, though what he might have given more emphasis to – as this volume does – is how *heterogeneous* Marxism has actually always been. Not only has the “reductionistic” version of Marxism Hall conjures up had critics *within* Marxism all along, but Marxists have been working in a number of ways from the start on the very issues and concerns – such as imperialism, nationalism, racism, subalternity, and so on – which have become central to postcolonial studies, though you would be hard pressed to find much acknowledgment of this in the work of many of the scholars active in the field. Among our primary agendas in this volume, accordingly, is the reactivation of this *disavowed* Marxist heritage in the theorization of the (post-)colonial world. At the same time we attempt to bring to the forefront some of the specifically Marxist interests and tendencies

located in the work of critics (among whom Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak is probably the most prominent) who have situated themselves, or have been situated, in postcolonial studies from early on. We seek to confront head on the ambivalence toward, or rejection of, Marxism characteristic of "post-"discourses in general, and indicate the particular ways the Marxist tradition has itself dealt with the theoretical and practical dilemmas that "post-"theorists have raised.

Some critical commentary on the Editorial of a recent issue of the journal *Postcolonial Studies* (3.3) can suggest the stakes of our project, and its variance with dominant trends in contemporary postcolonial studies. In this Editorial, the regular journal editors supplement a guest-edited special issue – on the theme of fashion – by reproducing photographs of objects from an exhibition entitled "1000 Extra/ordinary Objects," which was curated in Florence under Benetton's auspices to celebrate the tenth anniversary of the Benetton magazine, *COLORS*. They take as their point of departure Benetton's own press release, which presents the exhibition as "an anthropological report on our world, which goes beyond the boundaries between ordinary and extraordinary, designer objects and those in everyday use, reality and representation, and between haute couture and the commonplace" (qtd. Cairns et al. 2000: 247). Discussing this press release, the editors point out that it is a mere rationalization: the claim to "anthropology" masks the truth that the exhibit is a giant advertisement for Benetton. "This is commerce," the editors write, "even if sophisticated, state of the art commerce, which achieves its ends through seduction" (247). This "critique" seems unexceptionable, if banal. But having delivered themselves of it, the editors then move immediately to disavow it, fleeing from their own critical position instead of developing it, as if embarrassed that it had ever occurred to them. First they declare that their own initial assessment of the exhibit is "seriously incomplete"; and then they move to decry "left critique" more generally:

too leaden-footed a left critique falls into economism by treating the radical aesthetic disjuncture of advertising as epiphenomenal, as a simple but clever ruse to hide the cash register devices of the Benetton group. What is not registered by this focus on cash, however, is the productive, seductive effect of their promotional materials' shock effect. What is not registered, in other words, is our own seduction by their techniques of representation. Perhaps part of the reason for our ambivalence lies in our inability to pin these two sides of the Benetton story down. (247)

The editors speak here of "ambivalence," but the further their discussion of the exhibit proceeds, the less ambivalent their position

becomes. Indeed, they progressively make it clear that they have nothing but scorn for *any* attempt to “follow the money,” not simply those which are “economistic.” Because they genuinely appear to believe that “Benetton’s extraordinary market reach, its seeming penetration of every corner of the globe” is an effect of the “profound semiotic indeterminacy and mobility” of its images, the economic, for them, becomes *entirely* superfluous (248). Toward the end of the Editorial, then, they confidently propose a “semiotic” attack on Benetton (as if this were novel or radical). Putting the old Foucauldian reading of Borges’s “Chinese encyclopedia” through its tired paces yet again (is there, at this point in time, any trope in all of critical theory more thoroughly trodden than this one?) they come up with a “tactic” which involves emphasizing the “convoluted folds and ludic openings in the seamless datum of Benetton’s semiotic world” (251)! They appear to assume that this confrontation with categorical contingency will cause the world according to Benetton to totter if not necessarily to fall.

We might all agree, perhaps, that a “leaden-footed” pursuit of the path of political economy is best avoided (indeed, the contributors to this volume would insist that it *has been* avoided in Marxist theory now for many, many years). But surely this ought not to lead to a wholesale flight from political economy – so characteristic of post-colonial studies in general today – as demonstrated here by the editors of *Postcolonial Studies*. Does it really never occur to the editors of that journal to explore Benetton’s labor practices, the sources of its income, or the economic colonization of everyday life demonstrated by the exhibit, and to imagine that these material forces might have something to do with Benetton’s “semiotic” success? Certainly, the essays in *this* volume reject the facile supposition that to mention “cash” is already to have fallen into “economism.” There are *mediations*, to be sure, but there are (irreducibly) *relations* between “the economic” and “the cultural,” nevertheless, which are simultaneously multiplied and rendered more elusive as capital permeates more and more aspects of our existence. Only by a direct address of *all* the tactics (not merely the narrowly semiotic ones) of the Benettons of the world can these relations be understood, and attacked, effectively.

Recognizing this, Henri Lefebvre famously observed that Marxism is “a critical knowledge of everyday life,” a definition in which the crucial term for him was not only the “everyday,” ineluctably allied with his name ever since, but also the “critical,” without which the quotidian would refuse to give up its secrets. A Marxist analysis of the everyday “is not satisfied with merely uncovering and criticizing this real,

practical life in the minutiae of social life," or focusing solely on the issues of subjectivity, cultural fragmentation, and dispersion of power typical of much postcolonial analysis (as the editors of *Postcolonial Studies* attest). Rather, Lefebvre urged, it ought, "by a process of rational integration . . . to pass from the individual to the social" – and, ultimately, to materialize itself in collective action toward social justice (Lefebvre 1992: 148). Like other theorists of the "ordinary" from Raymond Williams and Walter Benjamin to C. L. R. James, Stuart Hall, and Frantz Fanon, Lefebvre insisted on taking seeming trivialities seriously, believing that anyone devoted to resisting capitalist domination could not afford to ignore its permeation into the nooks and crannies of all aspects of our lives. And while Lefebvre did not direct his attention to the (post-)colonial condition, certainly for Fanon, James, and Hall, among others, the insidiousness of *colonial* regimes consisted, similarly, in their ability to capture subjects in the everyday, in language and culture. What distinguishes a specifically Marxist critique, however, from a more general anticolonialism, is the insistence that cultural analysis of the everyday (and the extraordinary alike) is inseparable from questions of political economy, in and outside the metropole; and that the critique of colonialism, and of the social order that has followed formal decolonization, is inextricable from the critique of capitalism.

As a brief rejoinder to the *Postcolonial Studies* analysis of Benetton, we would like to draw attention to a certain theme in the popular business culture of the 1990s which unabashedly celebrates capital's ongoing expansionism by deploying imperial tropes – and demands precisely the sort of analysis *Postcolonial Studies* would have us avoid. Consider, for example, the magazine spread which set portraits of "history's most ambitious leaders" (Lenin among them) next to a luminous bottle of Coca-Cola, with the caption: "Only one launched a campaign that conquered the world."<sup>2</sup> Or ponder the publicity letter advertising the publication of the 1996 *World Development Report: From Plan to Market*, which focused on Eastern Europe and the "challenges" and "expanding opportunities" it provides for "policymakers . . . scholars . . . and global investors." This letter *opens* with a citation from the famous "all that is solid melts into air" passage from the *Manifesto*, and goes on to note simply: "that's how Marx and Engels described the arrival of capitalism in the nineteenth century, and it's no less true of the economies in transition at the close of the twentieth." There is no suggestion that the *Manifesto* (which is never named) is a text which advocates "an association [of workers], in which the free

development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (1988: 61). To the contrary, the *Report* evidently has an entirely different sort of "freedom" in mind: it "drives home the utter necessity of liberalizing economies through trade and openness to new markets, stabilizing them through reduced inflation and fiscal discipline." In other words, its vision is one of "free markets" and the subjugation of all peoples to the neoliberal policies that benefit metropolitan investors (as well as scholars and policy makers, apparently), with an eye to securing profits in territory that was formerly off-limits. By quoting Marx to the opposite of his purpose, the advertisement for the *Report* transforms the *Manifesto* into a document which comes not to bury capitalism, but to *praise* it.

To ignore the economic in an analysis of such gestures can only entail capitulation to them. The advertising agency which sponsored the "world conquest" spread goes so far as to suggest that its efforts have resulted in a *proper* revolution, whereas all earlier attempts failed because they did not choose "the right weapon." Interestingly, it does not even trouble to differentiate itself from "history's most ambitious leaders." Nor does it appear to find it troubling to think of advertising as a "weapon" – and, thus, to imply that its own projected conquest of the world is as much a matter of force as was, say, Napoleon's or Hitler's. The advertisement also enacts with stunning confidence the shift from a world in which struggles for power are depicted as involving human actors to one in which even politics has been usurped by the commodity form itself: a bottle of Coke, not that company's CEO, is credited with "success." And "success," furthermore, is explicitly *defined* as the mass subjection of consumers to the commodity which "speaks" in advertising. Likewise, the *World Development Report* advertisement takes capitalism's rule for granted, and views its (formal) movement into the former Soviet Union as monumental if inevitable. Indeed, the specter of counter-revolution haunts its rhetoric, though it is more circumspect than the Coca Cola advertisement: "consider that between 1917 and 1950, countries containing one-third of the world's population seceded from the market economy and instituted central planning... Today's transition back to a market economy is an event of equal significance." The historical narrative suggests that people once thought about (and even attempted to live) *alternatives* to capitalism, but that this is no longer the case. Marx has been conjured up to preside diagnostically over this "transition," presumably because, like a deactivated virus, he can no longer do any harm.

*Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies*

However, one might ask why, then, Marx needs to be adduced at all? While the advertisements we have just described offer direct articulations of the triumphalism that amounted to something rather like a spirit of the age during the 1990s, it can be argued that in conjuring up Marxism explicitly, such advertisements also speak to a continued need to “manage” the *possibility* of socialism, even after its supposed liquidation as a threat to actually existing capitalism. And the need to manage, of course, implies a continued power – implies, indeed, that the “specter” cited in the *Manifesto* has not yet been laid to rest – even at the very moment when the map of the world is being actively remolded in accordance with what Samir Amin (1997: 95) has called “the logic of unilateral capital.” “Everyday” appeals to an ostensibly discredited Marx(ism) paradoxically indicate its persistent afterlife – as well as the value of an ongoing Marxist critique of capitalist expansionism.

Among the factors that render a supposedly moribund Marx(ism) so embarrassing to the currently dominant order – and thus mandate its continued management – is Marxism’s insistence that it is *capitalism* which stalks about the world “dripping from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt” (Marx 1990: 926). It is, thus, *capitalism* that is “dirt” – matter out of place in Mary Douglas’s influential formulation – in any project to attain a just society. To expose this face of capital, the essays in this volume brush history against the grain to reveal its shadowy side: they direct our attention to what has been displaced and cast aside in the march of “civilization” and “modernization.” Brennan and Larsen, for instance, both locate a *disavowed* “Marx” at the gateway of the “theory” machine that dominates trendier scholarship in the humanities and social sciences today; Nimtz and Jani recover and assert the lost and ignored aspects of Marx’s texts that indicate a more nuanced approach to imperialism and the movement of history than is often acknowledged; Lazarus, Scott, and Ganguly address themselves to concepts (such as “the West” and “race”) which still await adequate theorization in postcolonial studies, while resuscitating others (such as “imperialism” or “authenticity”) that have been prematurely junked; Parry and San Juan direct our attention to the (marginalized) contributions to Marxism generated in the movements against imperialism in Africa; Arrighi and Cleary show how the histories of East Asia and Ireland, respectively, disrupt or falsify dominant assumptions about the development of capitalism and the coherence of “Europe”; and Gopal proposes that an adequate theorization of the figure of “woman,” especially in non-metropolitan contexts,

carries the capacity to unsettle not only the received understandings of modernity, but also the prevailing counter-understandings developed in postcolonial studies.

By focusing their attention on abandoned and undervalued aspects of history, these essays follow the methodological path Walter Benjamin explored so assiduously throughout his work, but especially in his *Arcades Project*: “rags and refuse – these I will not inventory but allow, in the only way possible, to come into their own: by making use of them” (1999: 460). The essays collected here as a whole show a particular concern for investigating what has been rendered archaic, rejected, or forgotten in mainstream postcolonial studies: the most important – from a Marxist perspective – being the primacy of the critique of capitalism itself.

This project is intended as a counter-force *within* postcolonial theory, where it has, in general, become perfectly acceptable – even conventional – to make no mention of Marxism, even when the situations described seem to call out for it (from Paul Gilroy’s highly visible neglect of the spatial implications of Marxist world systems theory in *The Black Atlantic* [1993] to the host of specialist work taking a non-Marxist worldview for granted, such as Eleni Coundouriotis’s *Claiming History* [1999], an otherwise insightful study of African fiction which evades altogether the Marxist inflections of liberation movements). When the subject of Marxism *is* brought up, it is typically with hostility. In the writings of some postcolonial scholars, for example, Marxism is held *primarily* accountable for the difficulties that certain decolonized states have experienced in the “postcolonial” era (Miller 1990: 31–67; Quayson 2000: 14–16). To see the problem with such analyses, one need only consult C. L. R. James’s (1977) patient and careful assessment of Nkrumah, which seeks – without in any way excusing or explaining away manifest failures and mistakes – to situate the critique where it properly belongs: in the profound dilemmas all post-independence states faced by virtue both of their intrication in a set of global relations they did not control and their inheritance of internal difficulties which were to a large degree a legacy of colonialism itself (cf. Davidson 1992; 1978: 283–382). What is centrally at issue in these differences between Marxist and postcolonialist perspectives, in short, is the former’s emphasis on the continuity and even extension of capitalism’s rule in the “postcolonial” world, even though this perspective has been abandoned across much of the *left*, which, as Slavoj Žižek has put it in a recent critique of multiculturalism, “silently accepts that capitalism is here to stay . . . [such that] the very mention

*Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies*

of capitalism as world system tends to give rise to the accusation of 'essentialism,' 'fundamentalism' and other crimes" (1997: 46). Working against such assumptions and charges, the contributors to this volume not only emphasize the importance of examining all parts of the world in irreducible, mutually implicating relation to each other from early modernity, but of understanding *capitalism* (not "Eurocentrism" or "cultural imperialism") as underwriting those relations in their historically specific form of "uneven and combined development" (see San Juan's essay for elaboration). They further insist that precisely because of these material interrelations, Marx and Marxism *belong* (and have always belonged) to the whole world, not merely to Europe, or still less, to that mythical entity "the West." Whether we look to the Marx of liberation struggles against imperialism in the postwar period (as do several contributors to this volume, including Parry and San Juan), the "creole culture of anti-imperialism" between the wars (explored here by Brennan), or the decentering effect of non-European struggles on the thought of Marx and Engels in their lifetimes (traced by Jani and Nimtz), we see a Marxist legacy that is not only *not* dismissable as Eurocentric, but is not even in any meaningful sense a "possession" of Europe. Thus, this volume maintains not only that Marxism is rightfully a matter of fundamental interest to intellectuals who would unsettle Eurocentrism and critique colonialism and its after-effects, as postcolonial studies purport to do, but also that, especially at this moment of capitalist triumphalism, a Marxist critique is unforfeitable.

But if it is indispensable to retrieve Marxism from its contemporary disavowal (not least in postcolonial studies), it is arguably also important not to commit oneself either to an undifferentiating (Marxist) disavowal of postcolonial studies. With such prominent Marxist and neo-Marxist scholars as Arif Dirlik and Aijaz Ahmad, we recognize the structuring conceptual and historical weaknesses of postcolonial studies as a field of inquiry. But we still feel that their categorical repudiation of postcolonial studies is deeply misconceived. (Ahmad, for instance, dismisses *all* postcolonial criticism as "postmodernism's wedge to colonize literatures outside Europe and its North American offshoots" [1995a: 1].) Among many other things, such repudiations make impossible any balanced consideration of the field's genuine intellectual (and ideological) achievements. It seems to us that Marxist theorists can and should engage *with* postcolonial studies in mutual sites of concern, and concede to the field the authentic insights and advances that have been generated within it. Among these we would

list the extension of the discussion of subalternity and political representation in the non-metropolitan context; the demonstration that in their aspirations toward unisonance or universalism, many of the most historically resonant “master narratives” of nationalism, secularism, and internationalism have typically been appropriative, neglectful of difference and even of active dissidence; the expansion of the purview of literature departments to include opportunities for the study of a geographically wider range of texts; the provision of detailed knowledges of particular local conditions, situations, and texts; the recognition that the former colonial languages are no longer the possession of the former colonizers alone; the identification of Eurocentric concepts, practices, and habits of thought; etc.

Indeed, the standard critique of Marxism within postcolonial studies pivots on the charge that it is Eurocentric, and it would be foolish to pretend that some concepts – even many – generated in the history of Marxist thought (including by Marx himself) are not guilty as charged here, as it would be foolish to pretend that some – even many, including some of the most decisive – Marxist theorists (especially those with no experience of and no regard for non-European conditions) have not construed their own narrowly conceived horizons universalistically. We need to remember, however, that Marxism is, as Sartre argued, a “living philosophy,” and thus that it is continually being adapted and adapting itself “by means of thousands of new efforts” (1968b: 7). The very fact that many of the most brilliant, prominent, and effective anticolonial activists have insistently pronounced themselves Marxists should give pause to postcolonialists who stand poised to dismiss Marxism as a “European” philosophy.

Moreover, to the extent that Marxism has been susceptible to Eurocentrism, so too has postcolonial studies. The constitutive metropolitanism of the field inevitably structures the vision of its agents as well. In other words, the “politics of location” (geographical and historical) – to borrow the preferred postcolonial locution – affects Marxism and postcolonial studies alike. That members of each group have so frequently accused members of the other of “Eurocentrism” should not lead us to attempt to arbitrate the dispute (impossible, in any case). It would be much better to pay attention to the *unequal global politico-economic conditions* in which knowledge itself is produced, no matter what its ideological cast. Thus Ahmad correctly points out that the Euro-American academy and its faculties, as well as the various supporting institutions (e.g., book publishers, libraries), are constituted by forces which tend to position “non-Western”

literary works not through reference to their registration of the diverse and discrepant modes of appearance of *capitalism* on the world's stage, but rather as signifiers of "civilizational, primordial Difference" (1992: 64). To be sure, Bart Moore-Gilbert (and others) have pointed out in response to Ahmad that the politics of location are often more complicated than he typically seems to allow: his own institutional position (in India), is also privileged, after all, and he has made use of, and benefited from, the very apparatuses he attacks, in being published for example, in English, by an elite (if oppositional) metropolitan press, and accepting teaching assignments in metropolitan universities (1997: 153–57). But these objections, while not entirely impertinent (especially in their dismay at the personal tone that Ahmad's recriminations seem to take, and their occasional reductiveness) still miss the fundamental point of his argument, which is that any attempt to rectify the genuine widespread ignorance of non-metropolitan situations in the metropole which fails to address itself to the material asymmetries which both structure and sanction this ignorance, is doomed to failure. It can lead only to further appropriation: cooptation and cloying tokenism at best. The dizzying disequilibria (of power, resources, social agency) exhibited in the contemporary world system are, as Enrique Dussel (1997) among other Marxists, has persistently argued, literally *irreducible* without closing the gaps in *material* inequalities among peoples. The contest of cultures with which postcolonial studies has been so preoccupied, in other words, simply cannot be divorced from rigorous critique of the imbalances of global political economy, in which the scandalous fact – circulated each year with depressing predictability in United Nations reports of "human" and "economic" development – remains: 80 percent of the world's wealth circulates among 20 percent of its people, with the use of resources similarly unbalanced. To point this out – and, further, to recognize that these imbalances have real effects on intellectual and cultural (as well as other kinds) of production – is not "crude." On the contrary, it is crude to attempt to ignore, or treat as insignificant, the continuing existence – even expansion – of such levels of inequality.

Global imbalances manifest themselves in a number of ways in the relations between metropolitans and non-metropolitans in intellectual life, through a density of mediations that make their intrication with political economy obscure, but not absolutely unreadable. Take, for example, the institutionalization of *disproportion* in knowledge production, which mandates that while non-metropolitan intellectuals

must demonstrate a familiarity with Euro-American scholarship to gain credibility (and not only in the eyes of their metropolitan peers), the reverse does not apply; instead, a state of affairs that Dipesh Chakrabarty terms “asymmetric ignorance” obtains (2000: 28). Arif Dirlik has observed along similar lines that “hybridity” always seems to be assumed in the metropole to describe the fusing of metropolitan with non-metropolitan cultures, never as being an effect of cultural elements shared among non-metropolitan peoples (1994b: 342). In addition, because of widespread (“sanctioned”) ignorance of non-metropolitan cultural forms and conditions of existence on the part of metropolitan readers, certain non-metropolitan texts (typically ones which in reference or form seem familiar to metropolitan readers) gain extravagant weight – often being subjected to highly decontextualized assessments (for a critique of this, see Spivak 1993, 1994). For similar reasons, metropolitan cultural forms and works are sometimes celebrated in lieu of less familiar ones, even on matters of most concern to non-metropolitan populations. One notes in general, indeed, that concepts deriving from intellectual circuits outside the metropolitan world often fail to gain currency within this world until put forth, with or without attribution, by metropolitan intellectuals. To offer just one case of the many that could be produced: “transculturation” is widely associated today with Mary Louise Pratt rather than with Fernando Ortiz – even by critics who might be expected to be especially sensitive to its earlier development and widespread use among non-metropolitan intellectuals.<sup>3</sup> As Jean Franco (1988) has noted, it remains a commonplace assumption that theory as such is a metropolitan enterprise (and masculine too, Franco adds), and that its (feminized) non-metropolitan forms therefore require sponsorship and integration in the metropole – rather like the prefaces by white abolitionists that used to accompany slave narratives – to authorize them, and render them visible and available for circulation.

The point here is not to determine priority for its own sake, but to illuminate the vast discrepancies in “being heard” under current conditions, and to assert the intimacy of the connection between the “deafness” of metropolitan intellectuals and their location – economic and ideological, not merely geographical. Taking stock of such imbalances and their root causes, Samir Amin has cautioned against supposing that it is an easy matter to “disengag[e] . . . oneself from the world as it is” when one is benefiting from it in the “developed

center" (1989: 141). What might appear to be gestures of openness to alternatives, or solidarity with marginalized cultural forms and peoples, can all too easily become instead marks of the old, familiar dynamic of *appropriation* (Brennan 1997: 8). Those of us who teach postcolonial studies in metropolitan universities might be able to testify to this on the basis of our own experience: it is extremely difficult to bring our students (and ourselves) to read *differently*, in a climate in which the "Third World" has literally been transformed into a battery of (highly regulated) objects for metropolitan consumption. Such commodification, an ineluctable consequence of the globality of contemporary capitalism, goes hand in hand with the greater exploitation, of labor-power and resources, across the international division of labor. Students socially trained to think of the "Third World" in terms of *Rainforest Crunch* cereal, Body Shop soaps and potions, ecotourism, the dance beats of Deep Forest, salsa or Afropop, will not necessarily abandon the habits of a lifetime when confronted by the work of a Carpentier or a Ngugi, a Kincaid or a Djébar, however brilliant and uncompromising in their critiques such work might be. The fact that such novels are conventionally recuperated either as "Great Family of Man" stories of "growing up" or "facing adversity," or extolled as exemplars of the "mystery" and "wonder" of far away places by their metropolitan marketers, powerfully mitigates their potentially radical effects.<sup>4</sup> In the popular imaginary, such books and other artistic forms become so many "culturalisms" to be celebrated – carefully detached from the material world(s) they inhabit. Exoticized fantasies of the "Third World" in this way displace the one world of relations between exploiters and exploited, which puts sport shoes on the feet, shirts on the backs and microchips in the computers of the students (and teachers) alike in US and European classrooms.

In this context, neither benevolence nor a "one size fits all" paradigm for viewing the world will suffice. Radical metropolitan intellectuals must recognize that it will only be possible to "think globally" as a matter of course when the current global asymmetries, economic, political, institutional, ideological, have been eliminated. The persistence of these asymmetries today, however, makes it doubly important to situate all cultural works and forms in their *specificity*, with reference to their conditions of production and circulation at their point of origin as well as in wider circles. In addition, metropolitan intellectuals in particular must be ever vigilant to the inequality that structures production, circulation and use of cultural forms, and to the various,

irreducible effects of this inequality. We emphasize this point because it seems to us that without the tools of political economy, postcolonial studies will never be able to diagnose these conditions and launch effective critiques of them.

Hence, the current volume offers essays which contest the dominant understandings in postcolonial studies on two fronts, with respect to both Marxism and modernity. Regarding Marxism, first, they offer readings which, through their contextualization of Marxist practice and their consideration of the institutional dimensions of Marxist thought make clear that Marxism has indeed served, and served consistently, as an anti-imperialist social project. One of our underlying assumptions in this volume is that Marxism has not only *not* been discredited – still less rendered obsolete – by recent historical developments (most significantly the collapse of Sovietism) or developments in theory (most notably the rise of postmodernism), but in fact remains indispensable to any authentically emancipatory social thought or practice. With respect to modernity, second, our ambition in this volume is to contribute toward the formulation of a different conceptualization of the phenomenon, one critically aligned with Marxism. Harry Harootunian has offered one such possible reconceptualization recently, proposing that Marxist cultural critics develop a sensitivity to

differing *inflections* of the modern . . . not alternative modernities, but co-eval or, better yet, peripheral modernities (as long as peripheral is understood only as a relationship to the centers of capitalism before World War II), in which all societies shared a common reference provided by global capital and its requirements . . . In this regard, modernity provided a framework of temporal imminence in which to locate *all* societies.

(2000: 62–63, *emphasis added*)

Certainly the theorization of modernity has been of central interest to both postcolonial studies and Marxism, with the former often focusing on modernity as a “cultural” dilemma, and seeking ways to confront the problem of entry into a “modernity” which has hitherto typically been conceived, erroneously, in terms of “Westernization” alone. Marxism, however, has, in the first instance (as Harootunian’s comments suggest), viewed modernity and capitalism as inextricably bound up with each other in the world as we, collectively – though heterogeneously – live it, and sought to understand its variously shaping force throughout the globe. Our hope, and indeed conviction, is that the time has come for a new orientation in postcolonial studies in this direction, capable of challenging the idealist and dematerializing tendencies that have heretofore dominated the field

*Marxism, modernity, and postcolonial studies*

as a whole, while keeping hold of its knowledge of and appreciation for the local differences that continue to matter.

We have chosen to organize and orient the volume under three rubrics – Eurocentrism, Modernity, and “Theory.” These mark flash points in the longstanding disputes between “Marxist” and “post-colonialist” scholars, as well, of course, as crucial areas of study and argument within both Marxism and postcolonial studies. The volume’s first section, “Eurocentrism, ‘the West’, and the world,” features essays which recognize and address the spatial interests of post-colonial studies (from *Orientalism* onwards), but gives a specifically Marxist inflection to its examinations of the importance of interstitial formations to capitalism (Arrighi), “the West” as a category of thought (Lazarus), and claims by postcolonial theorists that Marx(ism) is Eurocentric (Nimtz, Jani). Section II, “Locating modernity,” comes at the vexing problem of the modern from various focal points – the “anomalous” Irish case (Cleary), race (Scott), gender (Gopal), and anticolonial revolution (Parry). “Marxism, postcolonial studies, and ‘theory’,” our third grouping of essays, insists that Marxism is not the refuge of the crude in relation to poststructuralist sophistication. It tracks the prehistories of “post-”theory to find abandoned paths which the present might productively assess: a recognition of the milieux saturated by Marxism in which “post-”theories themselves emerged (Brennan), the too-hasty abandonment of Marxism as a *project* during the Althusserian moment (Larsen), the loss entailed in the rejection of “authenticity” as a serious theoretical category (Ganguly), and the neglect of the non-metropolitan perspective in Marxist theory (San Juan).

Where do we go from here? The essays that follow are by no means all-inclusive in their range, homogeneous in their perspectives, or representative in their approaches. What they all share, however, is a resistance to the devaluation of Marxism so evident in mainstream understandings of the world today, and, increasingly, in the academy as well – not least in postcolonial studies. Our contributors see the ongoing critique of capitalism as necessary to any project for social justice, and view the Marxist tradition as providing the conceptual tools and analytic frameworks essential to such a critique. Above all, the contributors to this volume see – and attest to – the continuing force of Marxism as a living *project*, neither simply a discourse nor a body of (academic) knowledge. It is this project that they propose as the most fruitful path to take in understanding both the colonial past and the contemporary world order.

NOTES

- 1 This statement should be taken as *descriptive* rather than prescriptive in its recognition that postcolonial studies in its current form is largely an academic and metropolitan disciplinary formation, practiced by diasporic intellectuals and their students and colleagues in the Euro-U.S., and – with various levels of enthusiasm and resistance – throughout the “commonwealth.” From this, it follows that its relation to anticolonial movements and non-metropolitan theory needs to be explored, expanded, and worked through – not assumed or merely asserted. Otherwise, the very real specificity of various forms of (post-)coloniality may be lost to view, and non-metropolitan formulations and ways of seeing silently appropriated or obscured.
- 2 This advertisement is reproduced (Illustration no. 64) in Hobsbawm (1994).
- 3 Cf. Loomba’s implicit attribution of the concept to Pratt (1998a: 68–70), in a book that calls attention to the continuing dependence of postcolonial studies on Eurocentric theoretical paradigms. The point here is *not* primarily to criticize Loomba – who is among the more careful and scrupulous of scholars in the field today – but to register the formidable difficulties that lie in wait for anybody attempting to negotiate the global theoretical terrain in a consistently critical idiom. In any case, Pratt herself encouraged Loomba’s reading by foregrounding the concept in her own *title*, but relegating Ortiz to a slender mention in one *footnote* in her text (1992: 6, 228 n.4).
- 4 To give two examples: the back cover of Farrar, Straus and Giroux’s English edition of Carpentier’s *The Kingdom of this World* (a stunning meditation on the violence of colonialism and its aftermath) describes it as “creat[ing] a brilliant improbable world which has the stylized reality of the great myths”; an advertisement for Plume’s “New American Library,” inserted into Jamaica Kincaid’s *A Small Place* (!), presents *Annie John* (among other listed books) as “contemporary fiction for your enjoyment,” through which “women especially will learn much about their childhood.”