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REVIEW

**Overcoming the Impasse? Postcolonialism and
Globalisation Studies**

Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley, eds. *The Post-Colonial and the Global*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

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More than a decade ago, Stuart Hall remarked that the “two halves of the current debate on modernity – the postcolonial and the analysis of the new developments in global capitalism- have largely proceeded in relative isolation from one another and to their mutual cost”(Hall, 1996) . It is only now that a collection of essays, edited by Revathi Krishnaswamy and John Hawley, seeks to rectify this damaging and disabling impasse between postcolonial studies and globalization theory.

Krishnaswamy begins this collection by pointing out that postcolonial studies has primarily been focused on Eurocentrism and subaltern practices of resistance to Western domination. Meanwhile, globalization theory has sought to develop an analysis of how neocolonialism operates in the world through contemporary Western practices and productions. Certainly, it is already clear from these respective definitions that there is much common ground between the two fields of study. Indeed, Krishnaswamy argues that earlier theoretical divisions between postcolonialism and postmodernism have “given way to a much cozier fit between the postcolonial and the global” such that “the two seem to have become one and the same”(Krishnaswamy, 3). This volume sets out to articulate what the historical and ideological convergence between these two academic fields might entail by drawing on essays from thinkers across the humanities and the social sciences. Broadly, the essays address questions related to globalized capital, imperialism, the politics of identity and culture, and the possibility of resisting capitalist imperialism.

Three essays in this volume directly tackle the question of how global capitalism operates today. Ramón Grosfoguel's essay calls for a critical dialogue between the world-system approach and postcolonial critique. His essay is one of the few in this volume that bring into relief the central tensions between globalization theory and postcolonial studies, which he succinctly summarizes as the "culture versus economy dilemma"(100). Importantly, he argues that this is in fact a 'false dilemma' and highlights the possibilities for a convergence between the two fields. His essay is certainly worth engaging with to get a sense of what the central points of divergence are between these two fields and how a dialogue between them can unfold. The other two essays on global capital by Anouar Majid and Leslie Sklair do not explicitly stimulate a dialogue between globalization theory and postcolonial studies. Majid's article is nevertheless representative of the increasing concern within postcolonial studies of the effects of capitalism on cultural sovereignty, and Leslie Sklair's article provides an extremely useful re-conceptualization of the bourgeoisie as the Transnational Capitalist Class in the current phase of capitalism.

Imperialism is woven through these essays as a theme, but two essays in this volume tackle the issue most explicitly. John McMurtry's essay critiques postmodernism and postcolonialism as the hidden logic of the capitalist empire, through its anti-foundationalist, anti-essentialist celebration of pluralism and difference. He conceptualizes postmodernism and postcolonialism as the ideological veneer that masks the unfreedom and inequality of capitalist imperialism. This line of critique is by no means ground-breaking today and perpetuates the tendency to depict postmodernism as a monolithic system of thought. Moreover, McMurtry conflates postmodernism with postcolonial theory without recognizing the historical and ideological differences between the two bodies of thought. Despite its problems, it is a critique that is worth being familiar with, if only to understand the basic position against postmodern and postcolonial theory. Ruth Buchanan and Sundhya Pahuja on the other hand provide a much more critical and sophisticated engagement with the issue of imperialism in the contemporary world. They argue that nations, far from withering away, are in fact arranged in a hierarchical manner through the framework and discourse of the 'international community'. They explore this argument concretely through three examples relating to U.S unilateral action and the workings of institutions like the World Bank and the World Trade Organization. Their arguments are lucid and well supported by empirical and theoretical literature. As a result, Buchanan and Pahuja give a robust account of the interaction between nations and international institutions today and thus make an important intervention into contemporary debates on the nature of globalization and imperialism.

Any volume that seeks to comment on new directions in postcolonial studies must inevitably address issues of identity and culture. Accordingly, this collection has a wide range of essays analyzing postcolonial identity, especially as it relates to processes of cultural and economic globalization. Harish Trivedi's essay on the

globalization of Hindi cinema is a good example. He draws out the overlapping concerns between postcolonialism and globalization theory by focusing on some recent developments in Hindi cinema. Trivedi argues that Indian cinema has always spoken for and represented the nation in a way that is unlike any other national cinema. However, he contends that the onslaught of globalization threatens the artistic and linguistic particularity of this mode of expression. Through the example of Hindi cinema, he shows how both globalization studies and postcolonial theory have been concerned with similar problems: the nation, language, cultural survival, modes of artistic production and consumption (201). Thus, Hindi cinema proves to be a particularly productive ground for demonstrating the links between the postcolonial and the global. Trivedi's concluding arguments are certainly intriguing since he argues for the importance of cultural and linguistic particularity in light of the homogenizing tendencies of cultural globalization. This final argument seems to go against the celebration of cultural hybridity and miscegenation advanced in some postcolonial theory and one could find good reasons to squabble with him on this issue. Trivedi's essay is nevertheless an important piece in this collection because it speaks directly to the possibility of stimulating a dialogue between globalization studies and postcolonialism.

Numerous other essays also deal with questions related to identity and culture, especially as they have been taken up in postcolonial studies and globalization theory. These include: a timely and important essay by Pheng Cheah on area studies; a re-interpretation of contemporary cultural debates through a transhistorical and transnational framework by Ella Shohat and Robert Stam; a forceful critique of postcolonial theory's analysis of culture by E. San Juan Jr; an exploration of the tension between universal and local knowledge in scientific and technological research by Geoffrey C. Bowker; and finally, Inderpal Grewal's critical analysis of Amitav Ghosh's articulation of a pre-colonial cosmopolitanism in his novel *In an Antique Land*. Although these essays engage with issues of culture and identity in a productive manner, they do not explicitly open up the possibility of a dialogue between postcolonial studies and globalization theory, as Trivedi's essay successfully does. These essays will nevertheless give the reader a firm sense of some of the key points of debate and research within globalization studies and postcolonial theory on a wide range of topics from scientific and technological development to contemporary debates on multiculturalism.

Conceptualizing resistance to cultural imperialism and global capitalism has also been a dominant theme in postcolonialism and globalization theory, one that many essays in this collection revisit in numerous ways. Two of the strongest pieces are by Verity Burgmann and Pal Ahluwalia. Burgmann's essay on working class responses to globalization takes an explicitly Marxist approach to conceptualizing resistance. Her investigation of how the working class has responded to shifts in the capitalist economy is deeply valuable for understanding

the ingenious ways in which labor is mobilizing against neoliberal capitalist restructuring. Similarly, Pal Ahluwalia's essay also attempts to understand what he calls a 'new politics of resistance.' By bringing together contemporary social theorists like Giorgio Agamben and Achille Mbembe with Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, he constructs an innovative theoretical framework for understanding resistance in the contemporary age. This essay is particularly useful for those interested in a sophisticated, critical response to Hardt and Negri's conception of resistance in *Empire* and *Multitude*.

Numerous other essays in the volume also critically consider the possibility of resistance in the contemporary global politics. Saskia Sassen's essay for instance urges for an analysis of globalization that moves beyond the duality of national versus global in order to make visible new localized forms of resistance. She insists that we direct our attention to the ways in which the global exists in sub-national political spaces in the form of "cross-border networks of activists engaged in specific localized struggles with an explicit or implicit global agenda"(83). Sassen's arguments share an affinity with Hardt and Negri's arguments in *Empire*. However, it is less theoretically dense and more empirically grounded. Her call for a critical re-mapping of the spaces and actors of globalization certainly has the potential to our open eyes to new forms of collaborations, solidarities, and resistances in global politics. Furthermore, this is a useful essay for those who want to further investigate Sassen's body of work since it lays out her approach to globalization very well.

Interestingly, not all the essays in this volume project an optimistic outlook about resistance. For instance, Ileana Rodriguez concludes this volume with a rather dismal outlook on the possibility of social change. She argues that developmental models that are designed to alleviate poverty have in fact deepened the asymmetries of power and foreclosed all possibilities for political action. As she declares, "In this predicament, the poor have no medium to express themselves. Their vulnerability is total"(283). While her position is articulated eloquently, it seems to be out of touch with the proliferation of struggles against capitalist globalization from all corners of the world. Her extreme pessimism about the possibility and effectiveness of political action should certainly be moderated in light of some of the successes of people's mobilizations against corporations and repressive states. It is particularly noteworthy that the editors chose to conclude this volume with such an apocalyptic vision about change and resistance. Given the extremity of Rodriguez's position, the editors may have overestimated the potential of this essay to provide a sobering perspective on globalization.

This anthology brings together a strong collection of essays that will undoubtedly help to clarify the themes and debates within postcolonial studies and globalization theory. It is also helpful that some of the writers engage with both fields explicitly in their essays. In particular, essays by Timothy Brennan, Ramon Grosfoguel, E. San Juan Jr,

Harish Trivedi, Walter D. Mignolo and Madina Tlostanova attempt to spur a dialogue between these two disciplines quite explicitly. These essays and the editors' introduction help to situate the parameters of the debate and allow the readers to get a sense of how a common cause can be sought between postcolonial studies and globalization theory.

The fact that not all of the essays explicitly seek to engage these two fields in a dialogue is certainly a weakness of this collection. Unfortunately, it is often up to the reader to imagine where the conflicts, tensions, and convergences might lie between these two fields of study. For example, some of the strongest essays in this collection are exclusively focused on investigating and evaluating a particular issue in depth. These issues range from deeply theoretical ruminations on History and the subject of revisionism (R.Radhakrishnan), to more practical considerations of the legitimacy of sanctions as a political strategy in international diplomacy (Barbara Harlow). Despite the diverse range of topics covered, these essays do not explicitly address the question of how, on what terms, and to what ends, postcolonialism and globalization studies should engage with each other. Indeed, it may be rather difficult to get all the essays to respond to this question directly. However, an alternative way of organizing the book that made plain the tensions, conflicts and convergences between the two academic fields would have made the process of conceptualizing a dialogue between them a lot easier. The editors have certainly taken care to organize the book so that there is "an organic relationship between several of the essays" (27). Yet it would have been more valuable for the book to be organized in a way that enabled the reader to understand the differing and converging perspectives of the two disciplines on key issues in global politics.

Despite this problem, the editors have brought together a collection of insightful essays that make an important intervention into the social sciences and humanities. It is clear from this collection that postcolonial theory and globalization studies have significant resources to offer in understanding and resisting the current phase of capitalist imperialism. This book will be particularly appreciated by those who harbor the feeling that postcolonial theory and globalization studies has reached an impasse, and needs to seek new directions of thought. The essays in this volume offer new perspectives on how to re-conceptualize and interrupt the current forms of globalization. In that sense, this book is a long-awaited and much-needed collection that can inspire new forms of critique and analysis.

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Bibliography

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