

The

POLITICS
of CULTURE
in the SHADOW
of CAPITAL



Edited by LISA LOWE *and*
DAVID LLOYD

**THE POLITICS OF CULTURE IN
THE SHADOW OF CAPITAL**

POST-CONTEMPORARY INTERVENTIONS

Series Editors: Stanley Fish and Fredric Jameson

The

POLITICS

of CULTURE

in the SHADOW

of CAPITAL

Edited by LISA LOWE

and DAVID LLOYD

Duke University Press

Durham & London

1997

© 1997 *Duke University Press*

All rights reserved Printed in the United

States of America on acid-free paper ∞

Typeset in Sabon 3 with Scala Sans display

by Keystone Typesetting, Inc.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication

Data appear on the last printed page of
this book.

CONTENTS

Acknowledgments vii

Lisa Lowe and David Lloyd Introduction 1

I. CRITIQUE OF MODERNITY 33

Dipesh Chakrabarty The Time of History and the Times
of Gods 35

Aihwa Ong The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity 61

Reynaldo C. Ileto Outlines of a Nonlinear Emplotment of
Philippine History 98

María Josefina Saldaña-Portillo Developmentalism's Irresistible
Seduction—Rural Subjectivity under Sandinista Agricultural
Policy 132

David Lloyd Nationalisms against the State 173

II. ALTERNATIVES 199

Arturo Escobar Cultural Politics and Biological Diversity: State,
Capital, and Social Movements in the Pacific Coast of Colombia 201

Grant Farred First Stop, Port-au-Prince: Mapping Postcolonial
Africa through Toussaint L'Ouverture and His Black Jacobins 227

Homa Hoodfar The Veil in Their Minds and on Our Heads:
Veiling Practices and Muslim Women 248

Jacqueline Urla Outlaw Language: Creating Alternative Public
Spheres in Basque Free Radio 280

III. "UNLIKELY COALITIONS" 301

Interview with Lisa Lowe Angela Davis: Reflections on Race, Class,
and Gender in the USA 303

George Lipsitz "Frantic to Join . . . the Japanese Army":
The Asia Pacific War in the Lives of African American Soldiers and
Civilians 324

Lisa Lowe Work, Immigration, Gender: New Subjects of Cultural
Politics 354

Clara Connolly and Pragna Patel Women Who Walk on Water:
Working across “Race” in Women Against Fundamentalism 375

IV. WORLD CULTURE AND PRACTICE 397

José Rabasa Of Zapatismo: Reflections on the Folkloric and the
Impossible in a Subaltern Insurrection 399

Nandi Bhatia Staging Resistance: The Indian People’s Theatre
Association 432

Chungmoo Choi The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular
Memory: South Korea 461

Martin F. Manalansan IV In the Shadows of Stonewall: Examining
Gay Transnational Politics and the Diasporic Dilemma 485

Tani E. Barlow Woman at the Close of the Maoist Era in the
Polemics of Li Xiaojiang and Her Associates 506

Works Cited 545

Index 581

Contributors 591

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This project has been inspired by so many conversations and encounters that it is impossible for us to acknowledge them all. Our learning from friends, colleagues, and students in different locations has been an unceasing source of encouragement. We hope that all those who have in their generosity wittingly or unwittingly assisted over the years will find *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* a fitting tribute.

This work emerged from our sympathies with struggles in the United States and worldwide: with the opposition to the war in Iraq, with the decolonizing movements of East Timor, Ireland, and South Africa, with the struggles against racism and state-sanctioned wars against migrants and minorities in Europe and North America, and with those organizing locally and across borders against exploitation and patriarchy. Our hope is that this book will contribute in some way to the survival and legibility of such struggles and of those who have dedicated themselves to them.

The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital has been from the start an intensely collaborative effort. Our first thanks go, of course, to the contributors. The work here is the product of their engagements with one another: their willingness to offer, exchange, and receive critique. So many of the contributors, including ourselves, have shifted, rethought, and revised as a result of being in dialogue with one another and with the project. To the writing of the introduction and the shaping of the book, they have all directly or indirectly contributed. Yet we would also like to acknowledge Dipesh Chakrabarty, Donald Lowe, and Aihwa Ong, who each gave us particularly valuable comments on the introductory essay. We also thank those whose work informed and friendship sustained us throughout the vicissitudes of realizing this project: Sandra Azeredo, Homi Bhabha, Judith Butler, Angela Davis, Ann duCille, Yen Le Espiritu, Takashi Fujitani, Rosemary Marangoly George, Luke Gibbons, David Gutiérrez, Judith Halberstam, Elaine Kim, George Lipsitz, Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Satya Mohanty, Michael Omi, Camillo Penna, Naoki Sakai, José David Saldívar, Rosaura Sanchez, and Lisa Yoneyama.

We have also received material and practical support that made it possible to bring the many contributors together, some needing to travel great distances. A University of California Organized Research

Group in the Humanities Grant permitted us to begin the work in 1992. William Simmons, Dean of Social Sciences at the University of California, Berkeley, and Anthony Newcomb, Dean of Humanities at the University of California, Berkeley, provided the resources for a colloquium in 1994 at which the contributors discussed their work with one another. The University of California Humanities Research Institute at Irvine offered us accommodations and meeting space for that colloquium; we thank the staff at the Institute for their cheerful assistance. We thank also the Departments of Literature and Ethnic Studies at the University of California, San Diego, and the Department of English and Comparative Literature at the University of California, Irvine: their generosity and support gave us a year together in which we could work consistently on the book and on our introduction.

Ken Wissoker has been for us, as ever, an editor without compare: we are grateful for his faith in the project. More than an editor, he has been our friend. Finally, at different moments, we have had indispensable practical help and editorial assistance from Grace Kyungwon Hong, Helen Heran Jun, Eithne Luibheid, and Chandan Reddy. Victor Bascara was the “midwife” whose knowledge and patience was crucial in the last stages of manuscript preparation; Helen Jun compiled the index. We thank them all not only for their labor but for their humor, intelligence, and friendship. Without them, *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* might never have been realized.

A different kind of acknowledgment goes to our three children: Sam Pauwels Lloyd, Talia Pauwels Lloyd, and Juliet Lowe Nebolon; their loving presences renew and sustain us. To them and to their futures this book is dedicated.

We thank the publishers for permission to republish the following essays, which appeared previously as follows: Aihwa Ong, “The Gender and Labor Politics of Postmodernity,” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 20 (1991): 279–309. Reynaldo Ileto, “Outlines of a Nonlinear Emplotment of Philippine History,” in *Reflections on Development in Southeast Asia*, ed. Lim Teck Ghee (Singapore: ASEAN Economic Research Unit, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 1988). David Lloyd, “Nationalisms Against the State: Towards a Critique of the Anti-Nationalist Prejudice,” in *Gender and Colonialism*, ed. Timothy Foley, Lionel Pilkington, Sean Ryder, and Elizabeth Tilley (Galway, Ireland: Galway University Press, 1995). Lisa Lowe, “Work, Immigration, Gender: Asian ‘American’ Women,” in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996). Chungmoo Choi, “The Discourse of Decolonization and Popular Memory:

South Korea,” *positions: east asia cultures critique* 1, no. 1 (spring 1993): 77–102. Arturo Escobar, “Cultural Politics and Biological Diversity: State, Capital, and Social Movements on the Pacific Coast of Colombia,” in *Between Resistance and Revolution: Cultural Politics and Social Protest*, ed. Richard G. Fox and Orin Starn, copyright © 1997 by Rutgers, The State University. Reprinted by permission of Rutgers University Press. Jacqueline Urla, “Outlaw Language: Creating Alternative Public Spheres in Basque Free Radio,” *Pragmatics* vol. 5, no. 2 (June 1995): 245–261.

Introduction

The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital is a collection of essays that, in their combination, advance a critical approach to the “international,” the “global,” or the “transnational” as theoretical frameworks within which intersecting sets of social practices can be grasped. These practices include anticolonial and antiracist struggles, feminist struggles, labor organizing, cultural movements—all of which challenge contemporary neocolonial capitalism as a highly differentiated mode of production. While such practices are ubiquitous, they generally take place in local and heterogeneous sites, and rarely make the claim to be “global” models in scope or ambition. Accordingly, the kind of intervention that *The Politics of Culture* makes has become necessary insofar as neither the postmodern conception of the transnational nor the liberal assumption of the congruence of capitalism, democracy, and freedom are currently adequate to address the ubiquity and variety of alternatives.

We understand the transnational to denote the stage of globalized capitalism characterized by David Harvey, Fredric Jameson, and others as the universal extension of a differentiated mode of production that relies on flexible accumulation and mixed production to incorporate all sectors of the global economy into its logic of commodification.¹ It is the tendency of such understandings of transnationalism to assume a homogenization of global culture that radically reduces possibilities for the creation of alternatives, in confining them either to the domain of commodified culture itself or to spaces that, for reasons of mere historical contingency, have seemed unincorporated into globalization.² It will be our contention, to the contrary, that transnational or *neo-colonial* capitalism, like colonialist capitalism before it, continues to produce sites of contradiction that are effects of its always uneven expansion but that cannot be subsumed by the logic of commodification itself. We suggest that “culture” obtains a “political” force when a cultural formation comes into contradiction with economic or political logics that try to refunction it for exploitation or domination. Rather than adopting the understanding of culture as one sphere in a set of differentiated spheres and practices, we discuss “culture” as a terrain in which politics, culture, and the economic form an inseparable dynamic. This entails not simply a critique of liberal cultural, political, and legal

theories that are the social correlative of capitalist economics, but an affirmative inventory of the survival of alternatives in many locations worldwide. Our interest is not in identifying what lies “outside” capitalism, but in what arises historically, in contestation, and “in difference” to it.

Marxism has always theorized capitalism in relation to its globalizing tendencies and accordingly sought to link struggles internationally; the work collected here is in agreement with the importance of such linking.³ In this introduction, we seek to rethink the older Marxist notion of internationalism in light of the present conjuncture. The limit of this older notion lies in the difficulty of conceptualizing an international proletarian formation within the current global restructuring of capitalism. Since that formation was principally thought in terms of class antagonism within national capitalist state relations, the fact that transnational capitalism now operates at levels that are at once sub-national and supranational interrupts the even formation of a uniform proletariat and demands a more differentiated understanding of what constitutes political processes and activities. The challenge to the privileging of class antagonism as the exclusive site of contradiction requires a critique of Western Marxism’s assumption of the universality of capitalist development and of the need to “delink” individual national economies.⁴ We are arguing for the equal importance of sites of struggle that do not privilege the nation and are not necessarily defined by class consciousness. This is not a question of integrating oppositional formations such as peasant revolts, feminist struggles, antiracist or anti-imperialist movements into a politics ultimately defined by class struggle; rather, these struggles in themselves occupy significant sites of contradiction that are generated precisely by the differentiating process of advanced globalizing capitalism. We would contend, furthermore, that these oppositional formations are neither novel nor outmoded. On the contrary, the critical displacement of “modern” modes of opposition — particularly state nationalism and Western Marxism — permits us to see how feminist, antiracist, and subaltern struggles, in their continual adaptations and transformations over time, have the potential to rework the conception of politics in the era of transnational capital itself.

In assuming the relative autonomy of different sites of contradiction, we are not only signaling the inadequacy of present theoretical frameworks for the “global,” but are also making an intervention as to the location of theory. However enabling at one point, the “center-periphery” model of both economic and cultural relations cannot survive a recognition of the heterogeneity of the contemporary capitalist

mode of production. For the automatic assumption that theory emanates from the West and has as its object the untheorized practices of the subaltern, the native, and the non-West, cannot be sustained.⁵ To “short-circuit” the notion that theory, like capital, flows or travels in one direction from West to non-West, we have brought together essays that make connections between local sites of production, that focus insistently on situated theories and practices as well as the translations and transformations of imported theories in those sites.⁶ The challenge to the unidirectional and hierarchical schematic binary “West/non-West” involves the displacement of concepts and practices of “development” and challenges the uniform applications of Western Marxism in all places. That is, by “Western Marxism” we do not mean only Marxism as it is practiced in the West, but rather the adoption of its developmental terms and teleology in other sites. For this reason, a number of the discussions included here consider the transformation of “Marxist” theories and practices in colonized, postindependence, and neocolonized sites. In this sense, we bring together national Marxist, “third world” feminist, and subaltern projects, and note that one effect of this is to highlight the insufficiency of concepts of political agency that are defined within the modern Western nation-state in terms of specific practices governed by the separation of the spheres of politics, culture, and the economic. We will be arguing for the need to reconceive the “social”—as the terrain in which politics, culture, and the economic are related—in terms radically other than those given by post-Enlightenment rationalizations of Western society. This separation of spheres that constitutes “society” is seen in liberal legal and political philosophy to emerge alongside capitalism as a product of historical development. While Marxism arises as the critique of capitalist exploitation, it has not critiqued the theory of historical development that underlies liberal philosophies.

Liberalism and Western Marxism, along with other emancipatory discourses of modernity, share a foundation in what Walter Benjamin refers to as “historicism,” that is, the conception of history as the narrative of the development of modern subjects and cultures. For liberalism, historicist temporality entails the gradual emergence of civil society and the citizen-subject of the state out of the barbaric prehistory of human society; for Marxism, the development of proletarian class consciousness out of the contradictions of capital and labor. Both superordinate one particular understanding of what constitutes the “political” over all other forms of opposition or sociality; in consequence, those other forms are relegated to marginality or temporal anteriority. Modern colonialism involved the extension of historicist logic on a

global scale: colonized societies were assigned to the prehistory of the West, and political resistance could only be recognized as such insofar as it was organized through nationalisms that took as their object the capture of the colonial state and the formation of modern institutions and subjects. As Partha Chatterjee and Benedict Anderson, and Frantz Fanon before them, have pointed out, bourgeois nationalism is the form in which colonized societies enter modernity.⁷ So saturated is historical narrative with assumptions of development that it has been virtually impossible to write the history of alternative modes.

In considering practices that are not adequately revealed by the developmental temporality of the model of state formation, we turn away from the assumption that the critique of modernity and modern institutions is registered within the temporality of the “postmodern.” Rather, the essays in *The Politics of Culture* focus especially on locations at odds with the modern institutions of the state that are produced *simultaneously* with state regulations and the intrusions of capital. These locations refer neither to “postmodernism” per se, with the emphasis on a posterior temporality, nor to the concept of “tradition,” with its emphasis on anteriority; rather, the essays are interested in another understanding of the temporality of the breakup of modernity, taking into account the antagonisms to modernity that take place in a variety of locations and that emerge simultaneously with and in relation to modernity itself. In their different ways, subaltern historiography, feminist historiography, and some postcolonial critiques have attempted to intervene in developmental historicism by refusing the tendency of historicism to view its objects as representative instances within a totalized, developmental teleology. The essays in this volume by and large put into relief the relatively autonomous meaning of the singular instance without needing to reinscribe it as a founding moment in an oppositional narrative of emancipation. The critique of temporality implied by the choices made in these essays suggests the reconceptualization of history and historical material. In Benjamin’s terms, the critique of “the historical progress of mankind” dislocates the material event “out of the continuum of history.” It is just this distinction between the universalizing secular time of historicism and “the time of the gods” that is the subject of Dipesh Chakrabarty’s critique of modernity, as he contemplates the modern historian’s translation of nonsecular phenomenologies of labor in South Asia. Reynaldo Ileto’s essay, in turn, emphasizes that the reconstruction of Philippine “banditry” and popular medical practices of the *curanderos* demand historiographical forms that displace the modern linear narratives of either colonial or nationalist histories. We can understand C. L. R. James’s act in bringing

the Haitian revolution to bear on African decolonization, discussed in Grant Farred's essay, as retrieving similar moments that Benjamin would regard as "lost for history" and grasping their "retroactive force." George Lipsitz, in his essay, likewise reclaims what Marx called the "unvanquished remnants of the past" in recollecting Black soldiers' antagonisms to U.S. imperial wars in Japan and in the Philippines: the meaning of such moments lies not in their inaugural force within a preordained narrative, but in the possibilities opened by their recovery. José Rabasa understands Zapatismo as the irruption of nonmodern cultural forms into the modern state, the significance of which does not depend on projecting the rebellions as either the culmination of a continuous historical development or the avant-garde of national revolution.

The other impulse of the critique is the excavation and connection of alternative histories and their different temporalities that cannot be contained by the progressive narrative of Western developmentalism. Rather than striving to universalize their instances by way of such a narrative, many of the essays signal the need to shift to other frames that permit a comprehension of the lateral relationships between sites in which alternative practices emerge. *The Politics of Culture* includes essays that document exchanges and collaborations across sites, connecting subjugated practices that cut across the orthodox categories that have organized historical understanding: the people, the nation, the epoch, the state. These connections are documented in Clara Connolly and Pragna Patel's essay on coalitions of Middle Eastern, South Asian, and Irish immigrant women in Britain, and in Homa Hoodfar's study of veiling as a highly differentiated Islamic social practice in which modernity and fundamentalism are negotiated. Forging connections is no less important in the above-mentioned historical retrievals that link U.S. Black soldiers in World War II and Japanese Americans interned in camps on the west coast of the United States, and the Haitian revolution with African anticolonial movements. Likewise, the collection suggests lateral connections that may yet be possible: the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty and José Rabasa explicitly connects subaltern studies in India and subaltern studies in Latin America. Through Connolly and Patel's essay, the interview with Angela Davis, and Lisa Lowe's essay, potential connections emerge between the Black feminist movement in Britain and the political struggles of racialized and immigrant women in the United States. Many of the essays discuss alternative political cultures: Jacqueline Urla considers the construction of an alternative public sphere through Basque youth media in Spain; Arturo Escobar discusses the politics of race and development in the context of

Afro-Columbian environmental movements; Nandi Bhatia and Chungmoo Choi both elaborate the political cultures of anticolonial movements through analyses of people's theater in India and South Korea, respectively.

Evidently, the connections explored here are not predicated on a "cosmopolitanism" and its elitist and universalizing purview but, on the contrary, adamantly emphasize diversely localized projects and struggles. Though in a general sense most of the essays address what might be called the "postcolonial" period, we wish to distinguish the work here from the "postcolonial" concept. That is, we understand the postcolonial, as Chungmoo Choi does in her essay, as marking the decisive defining moment of struggle as independence and what happens after, as prioritizing (even in its deconstruction) Western modernity and non-Western hybridity, and as privileging the capture of the state and the relationship between state formations. In contradistinction, we consider here connections and struggles that are ongoing and simultaneous with, but not less important than, state nationalisms — theories and practices that cross national boundaries that need not be mediated by the state, the form in which the West is instantiated. Such connections provide the ground for rethinking the notion of the "political" in terms distinct from those defined by the state and state formations. Insofar as anticolonial struggles have been directed at the capture of the state and the inhabiting of its political forms, then, as Fanon argues, the articulation of such struggles took place in terms of "rights" and "citizenship," through forms like the "nationalist party," modern media like the press, and by way of national bourgeois capital. Elite nationalism and anticolonialism have sought to absorb subaltern struggles into uniformity with the terms of the political sphere, or, where that proved impossible, to subjugate or marginalize them as "feminine" or "racialized" spaces. We wish to understand these subjugated or ignored struggles not as the detritus of history, but as the work of a still ongoing decolonization, the place of different social imaginaries and formations, actively preserved and invented. This implies, in turn, the need to reconceive the sites and ends of cultural struggle. Owing to the history of colonialism underpinning the current global restructuring of capitalism, the "cultural" in colonized sites, far from being rationalized as a separate sphere as it was with Western capitalist social formations, actually embodies, and is the form of, alternative rationalities. The subordinated culture's difference and incommensurability with the economic and political operations of the colonial power, along with the hybridities, damages, and recalcitrances that are produced by colonization, make spaces for alternative practices, alternative public spheres,

unofficial countercultures, and the remaking of official civil society and its divisions.⁸ Our discussion of the redefined notion of culture will be taken up in the last section.

NATIONALISM, MARXISM, FEMINISM, AND THE QUESTION OF ALTERNATIVES

As Arturo Escobar has argued, in the period following World War II the domination by the West through direct colonialisms is transformed into a global project of domination by way of modernization and development.⁹ For this period, the state is the principal form demanded of postcolonial nations in order that they can provide the body of institutions through which modernization is imposed. Etienne Balibar argues that, practically speaking, the state is the form through which nations enter the modern world system.¹⁰ But the state form entails more than a pragmatic adjustment to that world system; it implies not only an assimilation to a hierarchized system of global power, but compliance with a normative distribution of social spaces within that state's definitions. The entry of the nation through the medium of the modern state into the global world system requires the massive conversion of populations and their cultural forms into conformity with the post-World War II project of universal modernization. Civil society must be reshaped to produce subjects who might function in terms of modern definitions of social spaces, as the political subject of the state, the economic subject of capitalism, and the cultural subject of the nation, however much the discreteness of these spaces is contradicted by conditions that are lived as racialized and gendered labor stratification, apartheid, and poverty. The state form's importance extends beyond the immediate post-World War II geopolitical system; we would wish to maintain that even in the post-Fordist, postmodern transnational economy, the modern state form and its contradictions persist within the mobility of global capital as the primary set of institutions for regulating resources, investments, and populations. Hence the state becomes the site of contradictions and the object of contestation for political projects such as bourgeois nationalism, Marxism, and feminism.¹¹ To a large extent, the state defines the terms and stakes of these projects: the continuing extension and redefinition of popular democracy or citizenship and the promotion of national culture; the antagonism to regulation of labor on behalf of national and international capital; the contestation of the legal and social subordination of racialized populations and women within the context of a discourse on

“rights.” In different ways, bourgeois nationalist, Marxist, and feminist movements confront the limits of state-oriented definitions both in the form of the direct antagonism of the state and in the form of the alternative spheres and practices that emerge in the very formation of modernity itself. The contradictions of modernity are not new, though they may take new forms at any given historical moment; they are embedded in the history of colonization and of global capitalism and have been constitutive in the emergence of contemporary social formations. It will be our contention here that productive rethinkings of the categories of these movements take place through the alternative formations that emerge in the space of contradictions.

Nationalism

The nationalism articulated in Western state formations posits a historical continuity between the emergence of a people and the development of the state that represents its political sovereignty.¹² But even contemporary Western theorists of nations and nationalism, such as Gellner, Hobsbawm, Nairn, and Breuilly, do not fundamentally challenge this assumption. The emergence of the nation-state is largely understood in contemporary history as a Western development and as a more or less organic emergence of European civilizations. Even where contemporary historians are skeptical of the nineteenth-century backward projection of the “spirit of the nation” into primordial origins, and prefer the concept of the “invented tradition” by which the people is constituted retrospectively by the modern political imagination, the territorial boundaries and historical claims to legitimacy of modern European nations are accepted as givens of Western modernity. Correspondingly, the European nation-state remains the template of proper political formations globally despite the singularity, from a genuinely world-historical perspective, of its formation. The historical or temporal dimension of the nation, the development and maturation of civil and political society and the formation of their proper subjects, and the spatial dimension, what Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson call “the isomorphism of place, culture, nation, and state,” provide the terms to which the political formations of other societies are required to conform or approximate.¹³

Following such theories of the nation-state and of nationalism as a political force, the emergence of the European nation-state and its political ideology is distinct from the forms of anticolonial or “belated” nationalism. Not all thinkers demarcate European from non-European nationalisms as strictly as Hans Kohn in his seminal distinction of

“Western” from “non-Western” forms, but the tendency to make such distinctions is virtually ubiquitous.¹⁴ What is being marked in this kind of formulation is a certain incommensurability between the cultural forms of non-Western societies and the political forms they have sought or been obliged to adopt in the course of decolonization. From the perspective of Western modernity, this incommensurability is perceived as a lack, and the remedy is generally held to be the state-directed development of a mature civil society with its corresponding ethical civil subjects. This prescription is the political correlative of capitalist economic development as imposed by Western-dominated international organizations. Both prescriptions preclude the emergence of alternatives out of contradictions with equal force and constitute the leading edge of neocolonialism as powerfully in the era of transnational capital as at any previous moment.

Contradiction is virtually constitutive of the practices of anticolonial nationalism. On the one hand, the ends of anticolonial nationalism are defined by the goal of the capture of the state, and its ideology is in large part structured in terms of liberal discourses and for liberal state institutions: it speaks of rights and the citizen, of equality, fraternity, and liberty, makes its claims to self-determination on the basis of enlightenment universality, and asserts the cultural if not economic and military equivalence of its nation-people to that of the imperial power. At the same time, within the terms of an anticolonial struggle, it is rare for a nationalist movement not to draw on conceptions of “tradition,” of cultural antimodernity, and indeed, of alternatives to capitalist development in order to mobilize the antagonism of the populace against the colonial power and to mark the differences that transform that populace into a people with a legitimate right to separate and sovereign statehood. In this, nationalism repeats the very distinction between tradition and modernity that colonialism institutes to legitimate domination. In the first place, this demands the transformation of the colonial model that largely assumes that tradition must be reformed by modernization. Instead nationalism invokes tradition in order to assert the antagonism between irreconcilable social and cultural values. For this reason, in fact, the moment of anticolonial struggle is generally very productive of “emancipatory” possibilities far in excess of nationalism’s own projects, a point to which we shall return. But the ultimate fixation of anticolonial nationalism on the state form tends to reproduce the articulation of tradition and modernity by which traditional society requires to be modernized—even if the forms of post-colonial modernity are modified to accommodate a fetishized version of tradition through which a distinct people is to be interpellated by the

nation-state. State nationalism then seeks to mask the contradictions that reemerge between formal political independence and economic dependence (the contradictions of neocolonialism) and to contain the excess of alternatives released by the decolonizing forces of which it was a part.

We would want, therefore, to distinguish, but not separate out, state-oriented nationalism from a larger and potentially more productive decolonizing process that emerges and persists in the very contradictions of colonialism in all its stages. As a range of anticolonial intellectuals from Fanon to Cabral argue, racialization of the colonized population is fundamental to the dynamics of colonial society, constituting the principal impetus that brings nationalist movements into being.¹⁵ The racialization of all colonized subjects permits what Bipan Chandra analyzes as the nationalist “vertical integration” of the caste- and class-stratified colonial society, and enables the nationalist movement to cut across such distinctions.¹⁶ Bourgeois nationalism tends to reshape its antiracist practices and ideologies around a notion of the nation’s capacity to develop and assimilate European cultural and political forms. Popular movements, on the contrary, organize around antagonisms to colonialism that are founded on an understanding of racialized exploitation under colonialism that leads to modes of decolonization aimed at creating new and radically democratic forms of social organization. This latter decolonizing process is what Fanon terms, in his broad sense, “national culture,” as opposed to bourgeois nationalism’s fetishization of selected and canonized “traditions,” which artificially freeze cultural difference, reintroducing or reinforcing lines of ethnic or “tribal” stratification within the new nation. With regard to the new nation’s external relations to global capitalism and neocolonial powers, the fixing of popular culture into artificial national forms and the racial stratification of society helps to reproduce the concept of a specific “underdevelopment” that facilitates and legitimates neocolonialist exploitation.

Although nationalism seeks, in the Gramscian sense, to direct popular forces, and thereby to gain hegemony over them, it is in fact constituted within a rich site of intersections among simultaneous social processes and modes of organization, which include not only anti-racism but linked practices such as subaltern agitation and women’s movements, to which nationalism contributes in often unpredictable ways and by which it is inflected at every moment. In *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*, Kumari Jayawardena has documented the conditions within which nationalist struggles can furnish some spaces for feminist practice and politics.¹⁷ In this vein, David

Lloyd's essay examines early twentieth-century Ireland, in which Markievicz conjoined Irish feminism with nationalism by redefining the terms of suffrage and of political citizenship. But these alternative practices have their own histories and trajectories, which are not synchronous with the nationalist project of state formation. Focus on nationalism accordingly not only obscures the ways in which alternative social processes, both within the anticolonial struggle and across the longer duration of what we conceive of as decolonization, work concomitantly with and through nationalism; this focus also renders invisible the fact that such struggle occupies another terrain constituted by its externality to the state and shaped by the rhythms of different temporalities. This is at once a historiographical question and suggestive regarding contemporary contradictions. For example, in his essay in this volume, Reynaldo C. Ileto has shown the ways in which Philippine nationalist historiography tends to repeat imperial histories in relegating alternative social formations to the violent and irrational manifestations of "banditry" or, at best, protonationalist consciousness. When the antagonism between colonialism and nationalism is considered the only legitimate site for the political, it relegates alternatives to the domain "outside of history," and obscures the ongoing constitution of other social formations through contemporary antagonisms. For the antagonism between nationalism and imperialism also unleashed other contradictions than those addressed by decolonizing or nationalist movements specifically. This becomes evident in Nandi Bhatia's essay, which discusses an anti-imperial movement that mobilized class antagonism and came into conflict with elite nationalism as much as with British colonialism. The retrieval of such spaces and struggles that are by definition at odds with state projects and elite nationalism has been the characteristic work of subaltern and feminist historiographies, though we will take up later the different emphases of both projects.

Marxism

Bhatia's essay on Indian People's Theatre underscores one of the primary theses of our introduction: that Marxist theory and practice have been crucial correctives to bourgeois nationalism. For although Marxism has tended to share with nationalism the political frame of the nation-state, it has consistently critiqued forms of bourgeois and cultural nationalism that ignore class difference. The classical Marxist understanding of contradiction asserts that the contradiction between capital and labor takes place within the totality of nationalist capitalist relations, and that the exacerbation of contradiction is part of a pro-

gressive development that includes the emergence of proletarian consciousness within that totality. For Western Marxism, the proletarian subject emerges primarily in relation to the goal of the capture of the state: in an earlier form in Leninism, dictatorship of the proletariat, in a later form in Gramsci, the construction of working-class hegemony through institutions Gramsci describes as institutions of the ethical state. Gramsci's refinement of the Leninist position for less autocratic states than czarist Russia suggests that the emergence of working-class hegemony necessitates a detour through "culture" by means of working-class consciousness and concomitant cultural forms. It is further assumed that the territorial basis of this culture is national, and that there is a correspondence between a national popular culture and political hegemony; the state that is to be captured is ultimately the expression of that correspondence. Whereas Gramsci would seem to be the Western theorist of Marxism who, through the discussion of the Southern Question, links analysis of the democratic industrial state with the different issues and conditions that affect colonized regions, what he in fact marks are problems of uneven cultural and political, as well as economic, development. We observe that "third world" Marxisms emerge not only from what Western Marxism would designate as such unevennesses, but from entirely different conditions and social formations. In particular, the condition of these Marxisms is that the forms of state and the forms of culture are incompatible. The work collected in this volume is, in part, exploring the question of "third world" Marxism and the specific conjunctures out of which it emerges.

Our critique of Western Marxism, then, is at one with our critique of the developmental narratives of Western modernity, but does not extend to the materialism that founds Marx's method. Rather, "third world" Marxisms, we would emphasize, already diverge from the classical Western Marxist formulation, having sought to come to terms with the intersection of colonization of largely agrarian societies with capitalist exploitation. The differences of Leninism in Bolshevik Russia or Maoism in revolutionary China are precisely an effect of their analyses of different material and historical conditions. Donald Lowe has argued that while the orientalist construction of the "Asiatic mode of production" within Western Marxism had fixed understandings of "China" and other peasant societies in a static, unchanging concept of "underdevelopment," the "later" Lenin and Mao rethought Marxism for Russia and China not in relation to "underdevelopment" but through the understanding that peasant societies are materially different and contain different historical possibilities for transformation.¹⁸ The rethinking of Marxism by Lenin and Mao for their societies is

echoed in the rethinking of Marxism in other contexts. For example, Dipesh Chakrabarty has demonstrated in his study of the Calcutta jute mill workers between 1890 and 1940 that the reproduction of capitalist social relations did not necessarily pass through European-style proletarianization but through cultural forms quite incompatible with that model of development; his essay here offers further reflection on the translation of difference into the terms of Marx's labor theory of value.¹⁹ Aihwa Ong has similarly argued that Malaysian factory women protest capitalist discipline not through Western class consciousness or feminist consciousness but by stopping production on the factory floor through local cultural forms like spirit possession.²⁰ Both arguments are materialist in their modes of investigation, yet clearly demand a rethinking of classic Marxist formulations. In our critical engagement with Marxist theory, there are two axes of analysis that concern us: one is the emergence of new forms of political subjectivity, the other is the domain of race and culture in relation to the transformation of capitalist social relations; both, of course, are closely related.

Western Marxism assumes that conflicts that fall "outside" the development of class consciousness are politically subordinate, or constitute "false consciousness": antagonisms articulated, for example, around gender or race, are seen as effects of a more fundamental contradiction. According to the same logic, it also assumes the necessity of a globalization of capitalist proletarianization that would privilege the locations of greatest modernization and development in ways that obscure the historical expansion of capital through uneven differentiation of geographies, sectors, and labor forces. Thus far, we agree with the postmodern critiques of Western Marxism that argue that, contrary to its classical formulation by Marx, capitalism has proceeded not through global homogenization but through differentiation of labor markets, material resources, consumer markets, and production operations. But we wish to add that it is not simply that there has not been an even, homogeneous spread of development, but that, in what Bipan Chandra has called the "colonial mode of production," different problems emerge in the encounter between "indigenous" forms of work and cultural practices and the modern capitalist economic modes imposed upon them.²¹ Whereas the relations of production of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism were characterized by the management of the urban workers by the urban bourgeoisie, colonialism was built on the racialized split between colonial metropolis and agrarian colony, organizing the agrarian society into a social formation in which a foreign class functioned as the capitalist class. In order to maximize the extraction of surplus, the necessary reproduction of the relations of

production in the colonial mode was not limited to the reproduction of class relations, but emphasized also that of hierarchical relations of region, culture, language, and, especially, race. In *Reading Capital*, Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar extend Marx's original formulation of the relationship between the "mode of production" and the "social formation" by defining a social formation as the complex structure in which more than one mode of production, or set of economic relations, may be combined.²² Their elaboration suggests not only that the situations of uneven development, colonialist incorporation, and global restructuring and immigration are each characterized by the combination of several simultaneous modes of production, but that each constitutes a specific, historically distinct social formation (that includes economic, political, and ideological levels of articulation). The need to understand the differentiated forms through which capital profits through mixing and combining different modes of production suggests, too, that the complex structures of a new social formation may indeed require interventions and modes of opposition specific to those structures. Whereas Western Marxism assumes to a greater or lesser extent the correspondence of the institutions of civil society to the needs of the reproduction of capitalist social relations, in colonial and neocolonial social formations there arise what we might term "discoordinated" structures of civil society, which in themselves mediate a disjunction between existing cultural practices and the modernizing forces embodied in the rationalizing forms of civil society put in place by the nation-state.

That "discoordination," although it is not always theorized as such, can be understood as requiring us to think the existence of different historical temporalities that are simultaneously active within a given social formation. At the level of political analysis, "third world" or national Marxisms, as in the work of Fanon and Cabral, have always understood the necessity for mobilizing anticolonial resistance around the antagonism between indigenous social forms and the colonial state; class relations themselves in the colonial state are always already predicated upon racialization, and thus the dynamic of nationalist revolution is seen by them to involve race and class inseparably. However, in the formation of postindependence policy, national states with quite various political agendas have tended to contain popular movements, and have by and large attempted to resolve the peculiar contradictions of the "colonial mode of production" by adapting Western modernization models. A number of essays in this volume, such as Maria Josefa Saldaña-Portillo's study of Sandinista agricultural policy and Chakrabarty's discussion of Marxist categories and South Asian work prac-

tices, suggest the need to rethink the economic and social strategies of modernization in ways that would not capitulate to the mandate of assimilation to Western development and a Western-dominated world system. What is assumed here is not a notion of “the traditional” versus the Western model of “modernity,” but rather the possibility of forms of agency that inhere in the longer duration of social forms that have emerged in resistance and in relation to modern institutions; this leads Saldaña-Portillo, for example, to study the importance of the Nicaraguan rural workers defining themselves as “peasantry” rather than “proletariat.” In our last section, we will discuss the larger implications of the contradictions between culture and civil society for the emergence of political alternatives.

It is our intention to intervene in discourses on transnational capitalism whose tendency is to totalize the world system, to view capitalist penetration as complete and pervasive, so that the site of intervention is restricted to commodification; or, more insidiously, with the result that all manifestations of difference appear as just further signs of commodification. To pose the argument about transnationalism at the level of commodification not only obscures the practices of exploitation that lead to antagonism, but also ignores the ways in which transnational capital’s exploitation of cultural differentiation produces its own contradictions. Our critique of the assumption of absolute globalization or universal commodification does not lead us to fetishize imaginary spaces that are not yet under the sway of capitalism. Rather, what we focus on is the intersection of commodification and labor exploitation under postmodern transnational modes of production with the historical emergence of social formations in time with but also in antagonism to modernity; these social formations are not residues of the “pre-modern,” but are *differential* formations that mediate the processes through which capital profits through the mixing and combination of exploitative modes. What we are concerned with is the multiplicity of significant contradictions rooted in the longer histories of antagonism and adaptation. All of these are obscured by either a totality governed by globalization of capitalism or the superordination of the proletarian subject.

The work of Aihwa Ong, Swasti Mitter, and Maria Mies, for example, suggests that flexible accumulation depends precisely on capitalism’s laying hold of “traditional” social formations that have not been leveled by modernity either in terms of labor relations or the political nation; in these encounters, capitalism “respects” those forms even if for exploitative aims.²³ In these analyses, questions of gender, within the racialized consolidation of social forms into traditions that takes

place under colonization, are inseparable from the exploitation of labor. As Dipesh Chakrabarty has argued in his study of the Bengali working class, capitalism under colonialism is not reproduced through the formation of abstract political subjects but rather through the formation of subjects embedded in precapitalist social relations. To the extent that the formation of these subjects belies the homogenization of capitalist social relations according to the Western model, it also contradicts the assumption of a correspondence between the cultural and political domains and their reproduction for economic exploitation. Yet at the same time, the “culture” that emerges from this encounter mediates in complex ways the contradiction between contemporary global capitalist development and the culture whose social relations have an extended history that is always in part determined by encounters with emergent modernity. Accordingly, these encounters do not erase contradiction; neither do they produce the resolution of contradictions. Against theoretical prediction, cultural forms that might seem incompatible with capitalist social relations both permit their reproduction and provide for oppositional modes. In other words, it is neither that capitalist modernity expands and commodifies the “traditional,” nor that it simply destroys it, making it necessary for one to look for “pure” sites that have not yet been incorporated in order to find “resistance” (as in the as-yet-undiscovered primitive tribe in the Amazon), but rather that both antagonism and adaptation have been part of the process of the emergence of modernity over time. That is, what we are calling the alternative is not the “other” outside, but the “what-has-been-formed” in the conjunction with and in differentiation from modernity over time. The alternative takes place in the contradictions that emerge when the cultural forms of one mode of production are taken up and exploited by an apparently incommensurable mode of production.

Feminism

There is from the outset a dissymmetry between our discussion of “feminism” and the preceding discussions of nationalism and Marxism: it is less possible to discuss a singular “feminism,” since its emergence both inside and outside of national contexts, not only in the West but globally, has given rise to a wide variety of theories and practices. Even in the West, given that versions of modern liberal feminism have sought enfranchisement for female subjects within national political spheres articulated through the concept of “rights,” no feminist movement has sought a “capture” of the state in the manner proposed by nationalism

or Marxism, and feminist projects must be distinguished as nonanalogous to nationalist and Marxist ones.

To the extent that the dominant strands of Western feminism have been articulated within the terms of liberal modernity, the limits of that feminism have been discussed by Chandra Talpade Mohanty, Angela Davis, Chela Sandoval, and others as being marked by their historical articulation with both imperial projects and state racisms.²⁴ Indeed, where neither nationalism nor Marxism has fully critiqued the “nationalist subject” or the “class subject,” international and antiracist feminisms, as well as Anglo-American feminism, have interrogated the subject of feminism — “woman” — as embodying an implicit universalism that obscures unequal power relations that are the consequence of colonialism and capitalism.²⁵ Therefore, it will not be our task here to write generally about all feminisms, but to look specifically at women’s struggles within the racialized structures of colonial modernity and transnational capitalism. The women’s struggles we are foregrounding demand neither a homogeneous subject nor a conception of a fixed social totality; rather, they are practices antagonistic to the distinct modes of subjectivity disciplined by divisions of the modern state — the political, economic, or cultural (and its attendant separation into “public” and “private”). To frame the contemporary situation of women, we begin by situating the historical contradictions of women in their encounter with modernity, contradictions that remain active in and continue to determine the dynamics of transnationalism. By the encounter with modernity, we mean with the racialized and gendered regimes of the colonial state and the modern nation-state, which extend not only to the formation and reproduction of gender in the family and in other social spaces and institutions such as schooling, religion, law, the workplace, and cultural and popular media, but to ideological and epistemological suppositions of the particular and universal, constructions of interiority and exteriority, and evaluations of purity and impurity. While the modern state has in theory offered women emancipation in the economic and political spheres, and even participation in anticolonial nationalist struggles, the regulation and consolidation of national identity has generally led to women’s political/juridical exclusion, their educational subordination, economic exploitation, and ideological suppression.²⁶ Within this history, it is often in the violent contestations over the meaning and place of cultural practices that women’s contradictory status in relation to the state becomes evident. At the same time, the subordination of women in contradiction with modernity allows transnational capital access to women’s labor as a site of

hyperextraction. In turn, the contestatory sites of contradiction within modern national forms can provide the very opportunities and tools for practices that challenge transnational exploitation. This is why we need to understand that new subjects operate not exclusively through the “political” or “economic” categories of nationalism and Marxism, but through the politics of culture as well.

It has been the tendency of nationalism and Marxism to consider gender a secondary formation, which has subordinated women’s activism to anticolonial nationalist struggle or proletarian labor struggles, respectively. This tendency has symptomized the most serious limit of these political projects, that is, the insistence on totality and unity to the exclusion of different axes of determination and struggle, other axes whose intersections may be the sites of the most aggravated contradictions. We’ve argued that the political subject of modernity has been conceived as either the citizen of the nation or the proletarian class subject. Both forms of political subjectivity depend on a gendered ideology of separate spheres; the political and economic subject is presumed to be male and must be differentiated from realms cast as “feminine”: the domestic sphere of the “home,” the “spiritual” cultural antecedents of modernity, and labors situated as “reproductive.” The counter-spheres marked “feminine” are seen as sites of *reproduction* rather than *production*, and in that respect correspond to sites of culture. Along with the antinomy “private” and “public,” women have been subject to the construction of “tradition” and “modernity,” which perpetually locates “third world women” as the “other” of modernity, the symbol of premodern “tradition” to be “modernized.” We contend, to the contrary, that women have always been agents in the dialectical production of the heterogeneous, differentiated forms of modernity itself.²⁷ Even before the currently gendered international division of labor, women under colonialisms and in so-called developing nations composed the primary labor force exploited in the production of economic modernity.

Extending materialist theory in ways adequate to the present moment requires an understanding of the gendered division of labor that not only interprets the era of transnationalism but allows us to grasp retrospectively the historical occlusion of women’s struggle. Feminist historiography sheds light on formerly undocumented and unanalyzed histories of women’s contradictory engagement with modernity. As much as feminist historiography that recaptures the agencies of women as makers of history shares some of the impulse of subaltern historiography, its methods and purposes are not identical. Subaltern historiography in general seeks to recover practices from domains that are defined as external to the state or public sphere; consequently, the ref-

erence point of subaltern study has continued to be the relation of subaltern struggles and practices to elite nationalist or colonialist formations. In contradistinction, feminist historiography that regards women's activities and gendered social relations as central is concerned with sets of cultural and political practices that cut across all domains of the social and require a different periodization and temporality.²⁸ Though nationalist narratives have subordinated the ubiquity of women's participation in social struggles to the terms of a national model, it is not a matter now of simply inserting "women" into the nationalist narrative. As Kumkum Sangari and Sudesh Vaid state, "A feminist historiography rethinks historiography as a whole and discards the idea of women as something to be *framed* by a context, in order to be able to think of gender difference as both structuring and structured by the wide set of social relations."²⁹ Radha Radhakrishnan has put it this way: "feminist historiography secedes from the structure [of nationalist totality] not to set up a different and oppositional form of totality, but to establish a different relation to totality."³⁰ In a way that nationalism cannot, and Marxism has not yet, this feminism rethinks historical periodization and agency, reconceptualizes the division of social spheres, and ultimately advances a new conception of the political subject itself. Homa Hoodfar's discussion in this volume of the refunctioning of the practice of veiling among Muslim women disrupts the periodization of nationalist historiography; veiling is at one time a symbol of traditional community for Western imperialism, at another a sign of challenge to Western-backed authoritarian regimes, and at another a pragmatic practice permitting entry of women into the labor force. Veiling, as discussed by Hoodfar, also cuts across the spatial demarcations of modernity, politicizing "cultural" practices that might otherwise be thought of as extrapolitical.

Feminist historiography thus reveals that women's practices are only partially grasped when reduced to the horizon of the national state, and that implicitly those practices demand alternatives to the formations prescribed by the modern state, whose emancipatory promise is contradicted by the persistent subordinations. In the transnational era, the "modern" forms in which the nation mediates capital come into contradiction with the "postmodern" forces and movements of the global economy; yet we maintain that even in the postmodern transnational economy, the modern patriarchal state form persists within the mobility of global capital as the primary set of institutions for regulating women's labor and sexuality and for dictating spheres of gendered social practice. Furthermore, the globalization of capitalism reorganizes the operations of production exploiting women precisely in ways

permitted by their subordination by national patriarchal states. Patriarchal definitions of gender are continuously reproduced throughout a genealogy of social formations: patriarchy is consistently dominant, though not identically so, under colonial rule, in nationalist regimes, and in postcolonial and neocolonial state formations. There is a perpetual dialectic between “traditional” patriarchy and its “modern” rearticulations, whereby the selective redefinition of the “traditional” woman through which modernity rearticulates patriarchy serves both to intensify the constraints upon and to extract differentiated labor from female subjects. The hyperexploitation of women under transnationalism brings women’s cultural practices to the fore as incommensurable with capitalist rationality. Since the 1970s and 1980s, the deindustrialization of the United States and Europe has been accomplished by a shifting of production to Asia and Latin America, particularly making use of female labor in overseas export assembly and manufacturing zones.³¹ Aihwa Ong points out in her essay that, contrary to the literature on Fordism that predicted the increasing adoption of mass-assembly production, since the early 1970s subcontracting firms and sweatshops have come to typify industrialization in Asia and Central America. One of the distinct features of global restructuring is capital’s ability to profit not through a homogenization of the mode of production, but through the differentiation of specific resources and markets that permits the exploitation of gendered labor within regional and national sites. Part of this differentiation involves transactions between national states and transnational capital, which formalize new capital accumulation and production techniques that exploit by specifically targeting female labor markets. This occurs where women are disciplined by state-instituted traditional patriarchy, whether in Malaysia or Guatemala, or by racialized immigration laws that target female immigrants in particular, such as in California. These conditions, produced by the differentiating mode of transnational capital, counter a center-periphery model of spatial or developmental logic, and hence point to the timeliness, which we will take up later, of conceptualizing linkages between and across varied sites of contradiction. Such linkages recognize the dispersed forms of transnational operations of capital accumulation and exploitation as an opportunity for, rather than a limit on, new political practices.

While it is the understanding of some analysts of transnationalism that global capitalism has penetrated and saturated all social terrains, exhausting the possibilities for challenges or resistance, the situations of women workers suggest that transnational capitalism, like colonial

capitalism before it, continues to produce sites of contradiction and the dynamics of its own negation and critique. These contradictions produce new possibilities precisely because they have led to a breakdown and a reformulation of the categories of nation, race, class, and gender, and in doing so have led to a need to reconceptualize the oppositional narratives of nationalism, Marxism, and feminism. The latest shift toward the transnationalization of capital is not exclusively manifested in the “denationalization” of corporate power or the nation-state, but, perhaps more importantly, it is expressed in the reorganization of oppositional interventions against capital that articulate themselves in terms and relations other than the “national” or the “international proletariat” — notably feminist activism among U.S. women of color, cross-border labor organizing, and neocolonized and immigrant women’s struggles (see Davis, Lowe, and Connolly and Patel).

In its intensification of exploitation, transnational capitalism has exacerbated the gendered political and economic contradictions that were active in modern state capitalisms; paradoxically, this takes place in part through an erosion of the legal and social regulations that underwrite the ideology of separate spheres. Making use of the structures of patriarchal societies and its modes of gender discipline to maximize its exploitation of “docile” female labor, transnational capital simultaneously undermines the reproduction of patriarchies by moving women from one sphere of gendered social control to another. Yet the reconstitution of patriarchy within the transnational capitalist system, we argue, produces different and more varied practices of resistance to that system, practices that do not turn exclusively on the opposition of abstract labor to capital. Where this “feminized” domain of culture is in contradiction with capitalist production we find a convergence of struggles generated by different axes of domination: capitalism, patriarchy, and the processes of racialization that take place through colonialism and immigration. The specific modes of discipline that apply to women as gendered subjects necessarily give rise to different modes of organization and politicization; for example, *maquiladora* workers in Mexico protesting the factory’s regular requirement of “beauty pageants” that rearticulate patriarchal domination of women in the workplace have generated cross-border workers’ organizations that have targeted more generally the gendered nature of both U.S. and transnational industry’s exploitation of *maquiladora* workers in Mexico and Central America.³² With the feminization and racialization of work that more and more relies on immigrant women and women in the neocolonized world, different strategies for organizing emerge; for ex-

ample, the variety of strategies for addressing the international garment industry's abuse of immigrant women workers includes actions in the realms of both national and international law, consumer boycotts, and national and cross-border labor organizing modes.³³ These mixed strategies do not imply the dispersal of struggle, we contend, but they recognize a "new" laboring subject impacted at once by axes of domination previously distinguished within an ideology of separate spheres.

It must be emphasized that the differentiated nature of globalization also produces contradictions that give rise to feminist activism in the site of "culture," precisely because the globalization of capitalism depends on the patriarchal cultural regulation of women, and because transnational capitalism reproduces those cultural regulations in the workplace itself. Maria Mies's discussion of the "housewifization" of women's labor in the transnational economy, for example, demonstrates the ways in which global restructuring is both transgressive of and parasitic on the material culture of gendered "public" and "private" spheres as they have distributed and organized social relations.³⁴ A culturally practiced division of labor that directed women toward atomized, isolated "domestic" work is extended and rearticulated in what Swasti Mitter has termed a newly "spatialized" gendered division of labor that moves women from "domestic" spaces to the international workspaces of casual, ill-paid, insecure work.³⁵ As Aihwa Ong argues, the "cultural" formation of women, which often appears to run counter to modernization, becomes a specific resource and mode of "capitalist discipline" for forming workers who will fit into the current needs of transnational capital.³⁶ By the same token, women's resistance on the level of culture has ramifications for every other sphere of social life. Thus, a number of the essays in this volume focus on cultural struggles, with the understanding that women's labor is not the exclusive site of regulation, exploitation, and control. Clara Connolly and Pragna Patel's essay on the activities of Women Against Fundamentalism in Britain makes evident that women's cultural and religious struggles attack the foundations of state-sanctioned "multicultural" policies that subordinate women and seek to discipline and exploit immigrant communities. Similarly, Homa Hoodfar's essay on veiling practices among Muslim women demonstrates that women's struggles on the terrain of culture and religion powerfully shape women's resistance in the labor force and participation in the political sphere. Tani Barlow's essay on the figure of "woman" in post-Maoist People's Republic of China suggests that the disciplining of women's bodies in culture is central to a state project that seeks to regulate the relationship between China and the larger network of Asian capitalist states.

Transnational capitalism has reconfigured the mode of production in ways that are parasitic on the nation-state and its institutions, but rely on a disempowered citizenry; it continues to exploit labor, but redefines and differentiates who that labor is in terms of gender, race, and nation, and thus seeks to preclude the formation of a univocal international proletarian subject. It seeks to extend universal commodification, but by conditions that so impoverish the mass of the global workforce that unrestricted access to those commodities is limited to a few elites within a few nations. This unevenness in the processes of commodification generates contradictions across the globe: the deindustrialization of the United States and Europe and the shift of manufacturing operations to Asia and Latin America result not only in a relatively diminished base of consumers in relation to the expanded exploitation of labor power, but also in an intensification of the monopolization of resources by some and the immiseration of an ever increasing proportion of the world's population. Furthermore, as the base of consumers fails to expand in keeping with the expansion of the mode of production, the capitalist transformation of culture by way of universal commodification falls short of the exaggerated completion claimed by some theorists of globalization. Therefore, contradictions emerge along the fault lines between the exigencies of capitalist production and the cultural forms directly and indirectly engaged by those disciplines of production.

Within modernity, the sphere of culture is defined by its separation from the economic and political, within the general differentiation of spheres that constitute "society." Against this model, "premodern cultures" are defined as lacking such differentiation or complexity. Several of the essays collected here address orientalist representations of the "primitive": Hoodfar criticizes colonialist understandings of veiling practices among Muslim women; Martin Manalansan problematizes the Eurocentric gay representations of Filipino gay practices as "undeveloped" and "premodern" precisely because they do not seek to enter into a public sphere of visibility. Orientalist definitions of modernity suggest that modern societies "have" culture, while nonmodern societies "are" culture. Against either of these notions—culture specialized as the aesthetic, or culture defined in anthropological terms—we have sought to elaborate a conception of culture as emerging in the economic and political processes of modernization. This is not to say that culture is the space in which capital as commodification reigns; rather, as we have been arguing, it is the space through which both the reproduction of capitalist social relations and antagonism to that re-

production are articulated. If the tendency of transnational capitalism is to commodify everything and therefore to collapse the cultural into the economic, it is precisely where labor, differentiated rather than “abstract,” is being commodified that the cultural becomes political again.³⁷ Insofar as transnational or neocolonial capitalism has shown itself able to proliferate through the seizure of multiple cultural forms, at the same time it brings to light more clearly than earlier capital regimes the volatility of the cultural space as a site of contradictions. To repeat our earlier formulation, culture becomes politically important where a cultural formation comes into contradiction with an economic or political logic that tries to refunction it for exploitation or domination.

One classic instance of such a contradiction between cultural formations and a dominant logic has been analyzed in relation to anticolonial nationalism that seeks to use “traditional” cultural forms in a modernizing project. It is no less true for the political function of culture in postmodern capitalism. As we have seen, under colonialism the correspondence between the modern differentiation of spheres and the reproduction of capitalism did not hold. Postmodern capitalism, in new ways, dispenses with the differentiation of spheres as part of its logic of exploitation; rather than passing by way of a fully articulated civil society, postmodern transnational capitalism exacerbates and intensifies the unevennesses of various national states’ transformations of colonial societies. In some cases, it passes by way of state-sponsored modernization, as in some authoritarian states in Asia and Latin America, where it produces the economic forms of capital without the corresponding civil society; the effects of these contradictions have already become manifest in the antagonism between “indigenous” movements and the state, and in liberalizing movements. Where transnational capital comes into contradiction with the autonomy of the nation-state, national struggles against global capitalism, such as in Cuba, China, and Nicaragua, attest to the difficulties and successes of such struggles that often are forced by international pressures into their own forms of state modernization. But where transnational capital grasps hold of forms it might regard as “backward,” brutally seizing on existent social forms rather than awaiting their transformation through the nation-state’s modernizing projects, it precisely produces conditions for alternative practices that have not been homogenized by economic and political modernity within the postcolonial nation-state.

While it should be clear that we are making use of the Marxist concept of contradiction, we are revising it away from the classical notions of the primary antagonism between capital and labor and the emergence of proletarian consciousness in order to reconceptualize its

sites and effects. Multiple sites of contradiction emerge where heterogeneous social formations that are the differential counterformations of modernity are impacted by and brought into contradiction with postmodern modes of global capitalism. The essays collected here consider different sites of contradiction: what they consider are not principally economically produced contradictions, but contradictions that emerge between capitalist economic formations and the social and cultural practices they presume but cannot dictate. These contradictions give rise to cross-race and cross-national projects, feminist movements, anticolonial struggles, and politicized cultural practices.

Linkages between such differentiated movements are of paramount importance. Transnational capitalism no longer needs to operate within the nation as a legal, political, cultural entity, but instead needs the nation as a means of regulating labor, materials, and capital. As we have argued, transnational capitalism exacerbates contradiction and antagonism between the “local” or regional sites of exploitation and the nation-state. It is the differentiation of the mode of production that permits the exploitation of localities and makes them, rather than the national, the principal nodes of contradiction and therefore the sites of emergent political practices. Indeed, it may be that resistances are more and more articulated through linkings of localities that take place across and below the level of the nation-state, and not by way of a politics that moves at the level of the national or modern institutions. The essays in this volume go some way toward suggesting the contours of the work of aligning local struggles whose very condition it is to be disjoined and differentiated.

Some of the essays in the volume point specifically to black racial solidarities that form against domination and economic exploitation that are global in scope: Escobar outlines the ways Afro-Colombian movements articulate themselves along racial lines in an intervention against the economic and ecological destruction of native communities; Lipsitz writes about Black soldiers in World War II wanting to join the Japanese army in a cross-race, cross-national, anti-imperialist effort; Farred writes of the San Domingan slave revolt as a model for black anticolonial movements in the Caribbean and Africa. Other essays point to feminist practices: Hoodfar discusses the ways in which women’s practices of veiling destabilize Western orientalist constructions of Muslim women, while cutting across national patriarchal determinations and linking women cross-nationally. Connolly and Patel’s essay discusses the linking of South Asian, Irish, and Caribbean immigrant women in Britain within a coalition that is at once antistatist and anti-fundamentalist. Davis reflects on “unlikely coalitions”: between the

environmental justice movement and U.S. communities of color, between African American women and Asian immigrant laborers, between prisoners in an overdeveloped “prison-industrial complex” and students impacted by the underfunding of schooling. Other essays, like Bhatia’s discussion of the Indian People’s Theatre, connect anticolonial struggle with a global antifascist one in ways that necessarily refuse the logic of elite nationalism’s prioritization of identity. Antiracism, feminism, and anticolonialism must constantly address national economic exploitation and political disenfranchisements, and in doing so deploy countercultural forms and create alternative public spheres. *The Politics of Culture in the Shadow of Capital* emphasizes that the linking of such forms “below” the level of the nation, and across national sites, has had a long and inadequately documented history, the recovery of which is equally if not more important in the present conjuncture.

In this volume, we hope not only to document but to stimulate the pursuit of further possibilities for linking through a differently conceived “politics of culture.” In doing so, we argue that returning to political economy as the master narrative and the foundational rationale for “political” transformation, by both left and conservative thinkers, is itself an aftereffect of modernity that would overlook the work of culture, regarding it as universally commodified. To relegate culture to commodification is to replay older arguments about the autonomy of the cultural sphere; neither conception of culture, as commodified or as aesthetic culture, admits culture’s imbrication in political and economic relations. The essays here specify instead cultural formations that have emerged, over time, in contradiction to the modern division of spheres and its rationalizing modes; described here, culture involves simultaneously work, pleasure, consumption, spirituality, “aesthetic” production, and reproduction, within an ongoing process of historical transformation in contradiction with colonial and neocolonial capitalism. Culture, understood in this way, constitutes a site in which the reproduction of contemporary capitalist social relations may be continually contested. In such cultural struggles, we find no less a redefinition of “the political,” for in contradistinction to abstract modern divisions of society, the political has never been a discrete sphere of practice within the nation-state; these essays demonstrate that “politics” must be grasped instead as always braided within “culture” and cultural practices. The politics of culture exists as the very survival of alternative practices to those of globalized capital, the very survival of alternatives to the incessant violence of the new transnational order with its reconstituted patriarchies and racisms. Violence is manifest wherever capital generates its contradictions. The unimagined-

able violence of the past years — in Indonesia, Korea, Taiwan, the Philippines, South Africa, Chile, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, to name only a few spaces — is the sign not only of capital's now unrestricted brutality, but also of the insistence of alternatives and the refusal to submit to homogenization. Our moment is not one of fatalistic despair; faces turned toward the past, we do not seek to make whole what has been smashed, but to move athwart the storm into a future in which the debris is more than just a residue: it holds the alternative.

NOTES

1. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990); Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1992); Masao Miyoshi, "A Borderless World? From Colonialism to Transnationalism and the Decline of the Nation-State," *Critical Inquiry* 19 (summer 1993): 726–751.
2. This is, for example, Jameson's conclusion to *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1992). He writes: "those doctrines of reification and commodification which played a secondary role in the traditional or classical Marxian heritage, are now likely to come into their own and become the dominant instruments of analysis and struggle . . . today as never before, we must focus on a reification and a commodification that have become so universalized as to seem well-nigh natural and organic entities and forms" (212).
3. See Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, vol. 1, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1954), 702–724, and Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, intro. A. J. P. Taylor (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1967), 81–84.
4. Samir Amin, *Delinking*, trans. Michael Wolfers (London: Zed Books, 1990), 7, 28. To the extent that Amin questions the even extension of capitalist development, he offers an alternative to the homogenizing "transnational" model. However, his focus on "delinking" the nation-state from global capitalism does not address adequately the contemporary shift in the mode of production, for the concept of delinking still depends on an understanding of the nation-state as an autonomous regulator of capital and labor flow.
5. See Edward Said, "Traveling Theory," in *The World, the Text and the Critic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); and James Clifford, "Traveling Cultures," in *Cultural Studies*, ed. Lawrence Grossberg, Cary Nelson, and Paula Treichler (New York: Routledge, 1992).
6. See Donna Haraway, "Situated Knowledges," *Feminist Studies* 14, no. 3 (fall 1988): 575–599; Chandra Talpade Mohanty, "Cartographies of Struggle," in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, ed. Chandra Tal-

pade Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991); Kumkum Sangari & Sudesh Vaid, introduction to *Recasting Women: Essays in Indian Colonial History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1990); and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson and Lawrence Grossberg (Urbana: University of Illinois, 1988). Feminist critiques of Western epistemology and imperialism have perhaps gone the furthest in theorizing the importance of location in relation to multiple axes of determination and systemic intersecting oppressions. We acknowledge the importance of these works to our understanding of overdetermined sites of contradiction.

7. Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1968); Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalism and the Colonial World* (London: Zed Books, 1986); Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1991).

8. The concepts of hybridity, damage, and recalcitrance with respect to Irish culture under British colonialism are elaborated by David Lloyd in "Counterparts: *Dubliners*, Masculinity and Temperance Nationalism," in *Burning Down the House*, ed. Rosemary Marangoly George (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1997), and "Regarding Ireland in a Post-colonial Frame," in *Cultural Studies*, ed., Seamus Deane (forthcoming).

9. Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995).

10. Etienne Balibar, Preface to *Race, Nation, Class: Ambiguous Identities* (London: Verso, 1991).

11. When they emphasize "civil rights," antiracist movements may be said to encounter some of the same kinds of contradictions that face the state-centered projects of bourgeois nationalism and liberal feminism. However, we argue that in relation to decolonization movements worldwide, antiracist anticolonial struggles have produced a profound crisis in the legitimation of the state and in its institutions themselves. As we go on to discuss in the nationalism section, antiracist anticolonialisms have gone beyond the notion of civil rights within the nation-state to a critique of the state form itself. Within the U.S. context, civil rights struggles for racialized peoples always had ramifications beyond enfranchisement within the nation-state; these struggles were met with state violence precisely because mobilizations by racialized peoples not only named the contradiction between the promise of political emancipation and the conditions of racialized segregation and economic exploitation, but they revealed the racial exclusions upon which U.S. liberal capitalism and U.S. neo-colonialism are founded. Civil rights struggles in the United States have revealed that the granting of rights does not abolish the economic system that profits from racism; see Melvin L. Oliver and Thomas M. Shapiro, *Black Wealth, White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Cheryl Harris, "Whiteness as Property," *Harvard Law Review* 106, no. 8 (June 1993): 1707–1791. On the extended critique waged

by civil rights struggles, see Angela Davis in this volume; Michael Omi and Howard Winant, *Racial Formation in the United States, from the 1960s to the 1990s* (New York: Routledge, 1994); and Robert Allen, *Black Awakening in Capitalist America: An Analytic History* (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1990). For a social history of the civil rights movement and organizing tradition, see Charles M. Payne, *I've Got the Light of Freedom: The Organizing Tradition and the Mississippi Freedom Struggle* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995). At our present moment, it is an understanding of *race* not as a fixed singular essence, but as the locus in which economic, gender, sex, and race contradictions converge that organizes current struggles for immigrant rights, prisoner's rights, affirmative action, racialized women's labor, and AIDS and HIV patients in communities of color. Both the "successes" and the "failures" of struggles over the past thirty years demonstrate the degree to which *race* remains, after civil rights, the material trace of history, and thus the site of struggle through which contradictions are heightened and brought into relief.

12. This founding equivalence between the history of a people and the history of its political institutions is common to nineteenth-century thinkers as various as Coleridge in England, Fichte in Germany, Michelet and Renan in France, and Mazzini in Italy.

13. Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, "Beyond 'Culture': Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference," *Cultural Anthropology* 7, no. 1 (February 1992): 6–22.

14. Cited in Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World: A Derivative Discourse?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), 3.

15. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*; Amílcar Cabral, *Unity and Struggle: Speeches and Writings of Amílcar Cabral*, trans. Michael Wolfers (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1979). See also Bipan Chandra, "Colonialism, Stages of Colonialism and the Colonial State," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 10, no. 3 (1980): 272–285; Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

16. Bipan Chandra, "Colonialism, Stages of Colonialism and the Colonial State," *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 10, no. 3 (1980): 272–285.

17. Kumari Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World* (London: Zed Books, 1986).

18. See Donald Lowe, *The Function of 'China' in Marx, Lenin, and Mao* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966).

19. Dipesh Chakrabarty, *Rethinking Working-Class History: Bengal 1890–1940* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); see also Chakrabarty's "The Time of History and the Times of Gods" in this collection.

20. Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline: Factory Women in Malaysia* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987).

21. Chandra, "Colonialism, Stages of Colonialism and the Colonial State."

22. Louis Althusser and Etienne Balibar, "On the Basic Concepts of Historical Materialism," in *Reading Capital* (London: Verso, 1968).

23. Aihwa Ong, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*; Swasti Mitter, *Common Fate, Common Bond: Women in the Global Economy* (London:

Pluto, 1986); Maria Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labor* (London: Zed Press, 1986).

24. As we have suggested concerning “Western Marxism,” it is the case for “Western feminism” that its existence is not limited to the geographical West. See Chandra Talpade Mohanty, “Under Western Eyes: Feminist Scholarship and Colonialist Discourse,” in *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*, 52. For discussions of white liberal feminism and antiracist feminism in the United States, see Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981); and Chela Sandoval, “U.S. Third World Feminism: The Theory and Method of Oppositional Consciousness in the Postmodern World,” *Genders* 10 (spring 1991): 1–24.

25. Anglo-American and European feminist interrogations of “woman” include Parveen Adams and Elizabeth Cowie, *The Woman in Question* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990); Donna Haraway, *Simians, Cyborgs, and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1991); and Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

26. For a greater elaboration of this argument, see Deniz Kandiyoti, “Identity and Its Discontents,” in *Colonial Discourse and Post-Colonial Theory: A Reader*, ed. Patrick Williams and Laura Chrisman (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994).

27. For accounts of women’s roles in anticolonial political and labor struggles, see Jayawardena, *Feminism and Nationalism in the Third World*; and Nanke Redclift and M. Thea Sinclair, eds., *Working Women: International Perspectives on Labour and Gender Ideology* (London: Routledge, 1991). On women’s survival within formal and informal economies, see Homa Hoodfar, *Between Marriage and the Market: Intimate Politics and Survival in Cairo* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

On women’s activities in labor struggles in the United States, see for example Ruth Milkman, *Gender at Work: The Dynamics of Job Segregation by Sex during World War II* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1987); Jacqueline Jones, *Labor of Love, Labor of Sorrow: Black Women, Work, and the Family from Slavery to the Present* (New York: Basic Books, 1985); Vicki Ruiz, *Cannery Women, Cannery Lives: Mexican Women, Unionization, and the California Food Processing Industry, 1930–1950* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico, 1987).

Our consideration of non-Western and antiracist feminism as the site for the convergence of feminist, labor, anticolonial, and antiracist work is sympathetically allied with a variety of feminist projects represented by, for example, Sangari and Vaid, eds., *Recasting Women*; Mohanty, Russo, and Torres, eds., *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism*; Inderpal Grewal and Caren Kaplan, eds., *Scattered Hegemonies: Postmodernity and Transnational Feminist Practices* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1994); and M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty, eds., *Feminist Genealogies, Colonial Legacies, Democratic Futures* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

28. Kapil Kumar’s essay “Rural Women in Oudh 1917–1947: Baba Ram

Chandra and the Women's Question" in Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, is exemplary in this respect. Rather than focusing on the punctual moment of a specific peasant revolt in Oudh, or on the genderless "peasant" subject, the essay not only explores the roles of women in the revolt, but suggests how the refiguration of the cultural forms of womanhood in relation to particular economic and social issues necessitates a rethinking of the nature, temporality, and periodization of the struggle.

29. Sangari and Vaid, *Recasting Women*, 3.

30. Radha Radhakrishnan, "Nationalism, Gender and the Narrative of Identity," in *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, ed. Andrew Parker et al. (New York: Routledge, 1992), 81.

31. Committee for Asian Women, *Many Paths, One Goal: Organizing Women Workers in Asia* (Hong Kong: CAW, 1991); June Nash and Maria Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, eds., *Women in the International Division of Labor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1983); Vicki Ruiz and Susan Tiano, eds., *Women on the U.S.-Mexican Border* (Boston: Allen & Unwin, 1987); Paul Ong, Edna Bonacich, and Lucie Cheng, eds., *New Asian Immigration in Los Angeles and Global Restructuring* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994); Richard P. Appelbaum, "Multiculturalism and Flexibility: Some New Directions in Global Capitalism," in *Mapping Multiculturalism*, ed. Avery Gordon and Christopher Newfield (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, 1996).

32. See Kyungwon Hong and Mary Tong, "Aguirre v. AUG: A Case Study," in *Multinational Human Resource Management: Cases and Exercises*, ed. P. C. Smith (Tulsa, OK: Dame Publishing Company, forthcoming).

33. See Laura Ho, Catherine Powell, and Leti Volpp, "(Dis)Assembling Rights of Women Workers along the Global Assemblyline: Human Rights and the Garment Industry," *Harvard Civil Rights-Civil Liberties Law Review* 31, no. 2 (summer 1996): 383-414.

34. Mies, *Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale*.

35. Mitter, *Common Fate, Common Bond*.

36. See also Aihwa Ong's study of Malaysian factory women's practices, *Spirits of Resistance and Capitalist Discipline*.

37. Marx theorized that it is the tendency of capital to use "abstract labor," or labor as "use value" unencumbered by specific human qualities. In the *Grundrisse*, Marx describes abstract labor: "as *the* use value which confronts money posited as capital, labour is not this or another labour, but *labour pure and simple*, abstract labour; absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity. . . . but since capital *as such* is indifferent to every particularity of its substance, and exists not only as the totality of the same but also as the abstraction from all its particularities, the labour which confronts it likewise subjectively has the same totality and abstraction in itself" (Karl Marx, *Grundrisse: Foundations of the Critique of Political Economy [rough draft]*, trans. Martin Nicolaus [Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993], 296). However, in most capitalist situations, capital lays hold of labor that is precisely not abstract but differentiated by race, gender, and nationality. In the development of racialized U.S. capitalism, in

colonial capitalism, and now in transnational capitalism, it is through differentiating, rather than homogenizing, labor forces that capital expands and profits. For further discussion of Marx's concepts of "abstract" and "real" labor, see Dipesh Chakrabarty's "The Time of History and the Times of Gods" in this volume; and Lisa Lowe, *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), chap. 1.

Our argument throughout this introduction, and that of the papers in this volume, is that within the logic of capital, neither the economic nor the political subject have ever emerged as pure abstractions. To grasp the implications of this demands a rethinking of Marxism, right at the core of the labor theory of value, and prompts a new understanding of the continual production of cultural differences in the history of modernity. Culture is, over and again, the field on which economic and political contradictions are articulated.

DIPESH CHAKRABARTY

*The Time of History and
the Times of Gods*

In truth, the historian can never get away from the question of time in history: time sticks to his thinking like soil to a gardener's spade. FERNAND BRAUDEL, *On History*

The vulgar representation of time as a precise and homogeneous continuum has . . . diluted the Marxist concept of history. GIORGIO AGAMBEN, *Infancy and History*

At its core, this essay is about the problems a secular subject like history faces in handling imaginations in which gods, spirits, or the supernatural have agency in the world. My central examples concern the history of work in South Asia. Labor, the activity of producing, is seldom a completely secular activity in India. It often entails, through rituals big and small, the invocation of divine or super-human presence. Secular histories are produced usually by ignoring the signs of these presences. In effect, we have two systems of thought, one in which the world is *ultimately*, that is, in the final analysis, disenchanted, and the other in which the humans are not the only meaningful agents. For the purpose of writing history, the first system, the secular, translates the second into itself. It is the question of this translation — its methods and problems — that interests me here as part of a broader effort to situate the question of subaltern history within a postcolonial critique of modernity and of history itself.

This critique has to issue from within a dilemma that must mark a project such as subaltern studies. The dilemma is this: Writing subaltern history, documenting resistance to oppression and exploitation, must be part of a larger effort to make the world more socially just. To wrench subaltern studies away from the keen sense of social justice that gave rise to the project would be to violate the spirit that gives this project its sense of commitment and intellectual energy. Indeed, it may be said that it would be to violate the history of realist prose in India, for it may be legitimately argued that the administration of justice by modern institutions requires us to imagine the world through the languages of the social sciences, that is, as disenchanted.

History's own time is godless, continuous, and, to follow Benjamin, empty and homogeneous. By this I mean that in employing modern historical consciousness (whether in academic writing or outside of it), we think of a world that, in Weber's description, is already disenchanted. Gods, spirits, and other "supernatural" forces can claim no agency in our narratives. Further, this time is empty because it acts as a bottomless sack: any number of events can be put inside it; and it is homogeneous because it is not affected by any particular events: its existence is independent of such events and in a sense it exists prior to them. Events happen in time but time is not affected by them. The time of human history — as any popular book on the evolution of this universe will show — merges, when thought of backwards, into the time of prehistory, of evolutionary and geological changes going back to the beginning of the universe. It is part of nature. This is what allowed J. B. S. Haldane once to write a book with the telltale title *Everything Has a History*.¹ Hence the time of Newtonian science is not different to the time historians automatically assume as providing the ontological justification of their work. Things may move faster or slower in this time: that is simply the problem of velocity and speed. And the time may be cyclical or linear: the weeks belong to cyclical time, the English years go in hundred-year cycles, while the procession of years is a line. And historians may with justification talk about different regions of time: domestic time, work time, the time of the state, and so on. But all these times, whether cyclical or linear, fast or slow, are normally treated not as parts of a system of conventions, a cultural code of representation, but as something more objective, something belonging to "nature" itself. This nature/culture division becomes clear when we look at nineteenth-century uses of archaeology, for instance, in dating histories that provided no easy arrangements of chronology.

It is not that historians and philosophers of history are unaware of such a commonplace as the claim that modern historical consciousness, or for that matter academic history, as genres are of recent origin (as indeed are the imaginations of the modern sciences). Nor have they been slow to acknowledge the changes these genres have undergone since their inception.² The naturalism of historical time lies in the belief that *everything* can be historicized. So while the nonnaturalness of history, the discipline, is granted, the assumed universal applicability of its method entails a further assumption: that it is always possible to assign people, places, and objects to a naturally existing, continuous flow of historical time.³ Thus, irrespective of a society's own under-

standing of temporality, a historian will always be able to produce a time line for the globe whose structure is like this:

Time	Events in
T ₁	Area X Area Y Area Z
T ₂	Area X Area Y Area Z

It does not matter if any of these areas were inhabited by peoples such as the Hawaiians or the Hindus, who (unlike, as some would say, the Chinese or the Arabs) did not have a “sense of chronological history” — as distinct from other forms of memories and understandings of historicity — before European arrival. Contrary to whatever they may have thought and however they may have organized their memories, the historian has the capacity to put them back into a time we all are supposed to have shared, consciously or not. History as a code thus invokes a natural, homogeneous, secular, calendrical time without which the story of human evolution/civilization — a single human history, that is — cannot be told. In other words, the code of the secular calendar that frames historical explanations has this claim built into it: that independent of culture or consciousness, people exist in historical time. That is why it is always possible to discover “history” (say, after European contact) even if you were not aware of its existence in the past. History is supposed to exist in the same way as the earth does, for instance.

I begin with the assumption that, to put it strongly, this time, the basic code of history, is not something that belongs to nature (i.e., is not completely independent of human systems of representation). It stands for a particular formation of the modern subject. This is not to say that this understanding of time is false or that it can be given up at will. But, clearly, the kind of correspondence that exists between our sensory worlds and the Newtonian imagination of the universe, between our experience of secular time and the time of physics, breaks down in many post-Einsteinian constructions. In the Newtonian universe, as in historical imagination, “events” are more or less separable from their descriptions: what is factual is seen as translatable from mathematics into prose or between different languages. Thus an elementary book on Newtonian physics can be written completely in Bengali alphabet and numerals, using a minimum of mathematical signs. But not so with post-Einsteinian physics: language strains wildly when trying to convey in prose the mathematical imagination contained in an expression like “curved space” (for, thinking commonsensically, in what would such a space exist if not in space itself?). In this second case, one might say that

the assumption of translatability does not quite hold, that the imagination of Einsteinian physics is best learned through the language of its mathematics—for we are speaking of a universe of events where the events cannot be separated from their descriptions. Modern physics, one might say, took the linguistic turn early in this century. Post-Einsteinian cosmology, as the physicist Paul Davis puts it, makes even mathematical sense only so long as we do not try to take “a God’s-eye-view” of the universe (i.e., so long as one does not try to totalize or to view the “whole”). “I have grown used to dealing with the weird and wonderful world of relativity,” writes Davis. “The ideas of space-warps, distortions in time and space and multiple universes have become everyday tools in the strange trade of the theoretical physicist. . . . I believe that the reality exposed by modern physics is fundamentally alien to the human mind, and defies all power of direct visualization. . . .”⁴

Historians writing after the so-called linguistic turn may not any longer think that “events” are completely accessible by language, but the more sober among them would strive to avoid absolute lunacy by resorting to weaker versions of this position. As put in the recent book *Telling the Truth about History* by Lynn Hunt and her colleagues, historians, writing in the aftermath of postmodernism, would work toward an ideal of “workable truths,” approximations of “facts” that can be agreed to by all even after it is granted that language and representations always form a (thin?) film between us and the world (in the same way we can mostly ignore the insights of Einsteinian or quantum physics in negotiating our everyday movements in practical life). The higher ideal of translatability between different languages—thus Vietnamese history into Bengali—remains something worth striving for even if language always foils the effort. This ideal—a modified Newtonianism—is, in their view, the historians’ protection against the sheer madness of postmodernist and cultural relativist talk about “untranslatability,” “incommensurability,” and all that.⁵

Unlike in the world of the physicist Paul Davis, then, the imagination of “reality” in the discipline of history is dependent on the capacities of “the human mind,” its powers of visualization. The use of the definite article is critical here, for this “reality” aspires to achieve a status of transparency with regard to particular human languages, an ideal of objectivity entertained by Newtonian science where translation between different languages is mediated by the higher language of science itself. Thus *pani* in Hindi and *water* in English can both be mediated by H₂O. Needless to say, it is only the higher language that is capable of appreciating, if not expressing, the capacities of “*the* human

mind.” I would suggest that the idea of a godless, continuous, empty, and homogeneous time that history shares with the other social sciences and modern political philosophy as a basic building block belongs to this model of a higher, overarching language — a structure of generality, an aspiration toward the scientific — which is built into conversations that take the modern historical consciousness for granted.

A proposition of radical untranslatability therefore comes as a problem to the universal categories that sustain the historian’s enterprise. But it is also a false problem created by the very nature of the universal itself that aims to function as a supervening general construction mediating between all the particulars on the ground. The secular code of historical and humanist time — that is, a time bereft of gods and spirits — is one such universal. Claims about agency on behalf of the religious, the supernatural, the divine, and the ghostly have to be mediated in terms of this universal. The social scientist–historian assumes that “contexts” explain particular gods: If we could all have the same context, then we would all have the same gods as well. But there is a problem. Whereas the sameness of our “sciences” can be guaranteed all the world over, the sameness of our gods and spirits cannot be proved in quite the same objective manner (notwithstanding the protestations of the well-meaning that all religions speak of the same God). So it could be said that while the “sciences” signify some kind of sameness in our take on the world across cultures, the “gods” signify differences (bracketing for the moment the history of conversion, which I touch on, very briefly, in a later section). Writing about the presence of gods and spirits in the secular language of history or sociology would therefore be like an act of translating into a universal language what belongs to a field of differences.

The history of work in South Asia provides an interesting example of this problem. *Work* and *labor* are words deeply implicated in the production of universal sociologies. *Labor* is one of the key categories in the imagination of capitalism itself. In the same way that we think of capitalism coming into being in all sorts of contexts, we also imagine this modern category *work* or *labor* to emerge in all kinds of histories. This is what makes possible studies in the genre of “history of work in . . .” In this sense, “labor” or “work” has the same status in my posing of the problem as does H₂O in the relation between *water* and *pani*. Yet the fact is that the modern word *labor*, as every historian of labor in India knows, translates into a general category a whole host of words with divergent and different associations. What complicates the story further is the fact that in a society such as the Indian, human activity (including what one would, sociologically speaking, regard as

“labor”) is often associated with the presence and agency of gods or spirits in the very process of labor itself. *Hathiyar puja* or the “worship of tools,” for example, is a common and familiar festival in many north Indian factories. How do we — and I mean narrators of the pasts of the subaltern classes in India — handle this problem of the presence of the divine or the supernatural in the very history of labor as we render this enchanted world into our disenchanted prose, a rendering required, let us say, in the interest of social justice? And how do we, in doing this, still retain the subaltern (in whose activity gods or spirits present themselves) as the subjects of their histories? I will go over this question by examining the work of three subaltern studies historians who have produced fragments of histories of work in the context of “capitalist transition” in India: Gyan Prakash, Gyan Pandey, and myself. And I hope that my discussion will have something to say about the historian’s enterprise in general.

II

Let me begin with an example from my research in labor history. Consider the following description from the 1930s of a particular festival (still quite common in India) that entails the worshipping of machinery by workers:

In some of the jute mills near Calcutta the mechanics often sacrifice goats at this time [autumn]. A separate altar is erected by the mechanics. . . . Various tools and other emblems are placed upon it. . . . Incense is burnt. . . . Towards evening a male goat is thoroughly washed . . . and prepared for a . . . final sacrifice. . . . The animal is decapitated at one stroke . . . [and] the head is deposited in the . . . sacred Ganges. . . .⁶

This particular festival is celebrated in many parts of north India as a public holiday for the working class, the day being named after the engineer god Vishvakarma. How do we read it? To the extent that this day has now become a “public” holiday in India, it has obviously been subjected to a process of bargaining among employers, workers, and the state. One could also argue that, insofar as the ideas of “recreation” and “leisure” belong to a discourse on what makes labor efficient and productive, this “religious” holiday itself belongs to the process through which labor is managed and disciplined and is hence a part of the history of emergence of abstract labor in commodity form (for the very “public” nature of the holiday shows that it has been written into an emergent national, secular calendar of production). We could thus produce a secular narrative that would apply, really, to any working-

class “religious” holiday anywhere. Christmas or the Muslim festival Id could be seen in the same light. The difference between Vishvakarma *puja* (worship) and Christmas or Id would then be explained anthropologically, that is, by holding another master code — “culture” or “religion” — constant and universal. The “differences” between “religions” are by definition incapable of bringing the master category “culture” or “religion” into any kind of crisis. We know that these categories are problematic, that not all people have things called “culture” or “religion” in the English senses of these words, but we have to operate as though this limitation was not of any great moment. This was exactly how I treated this episode in my own book. The workers’ practices suggesting a belief in gods was no threat to my Marxism or liberalism. Worshiping of machinery — an everyday fact of life in India, from taxis, to scooter-rickshaws, minibuses, and lathe machines — was something I interpreted, as do many of my colleagues in labor history, as an insurance policy against accidents and contingencies. That in the so-called religious imagination as in language, redundancy — the huge and, from a strictly functionalist point of view, unnecessarily elaborate panoply of iconography and rituals — itself proved the poverty of a purely functionalist approach, never deterred my Marxist narrative. (The question of whether or not the workers had a conscious or doctrinal belief in gods and spirits would also be wide of the mark; after all, gods are as real as ideology is, that is to say, after Žižek, they are embedded in practices.⁷ More often than not, their presence is collectively invoked by rituals rather than by conscious belief.)

Gyan Prakash’s monograph on the history of “bonded” labor in Bihar in colonial India contains an imaginative discussion on *bhuts* (spirits) that are thought to have supernatural power over humans, while not belonging to the pantheon of divinity. Prakash documents how these *bhuts* intercede in the relations of agrarian production in Gaya in the Indian state of Bihar, particularly a special category of *bhut* called *malik devata* (spirits of dead landlords). But Prakash’s monograph, at the same time, is part of a conversation in academia, as all good work has to be, for that is the condition of its production. This conversation is also an inherent part of the process through which books and ideas express their commodified character; they all participate in a general economy of exchange made possible through the emergence of abstract, generalizing ideas. It is instructive, therefore, to see how the protocols of that conversation necessarily structure Prakash’s explanatory framework and thereby obliterate from view some of the tensions of irreducible plurality I am trying to visualize in the very history of labor itself. Prakash writes:

In such fantastic images, the malik's [landlord's] power was reconstructed. Like Tio, the devil worshipped by the miners in Bolivia, the malik represented subordination of the Bhuinyas [laborers] by landlords. But whereas Tio expressed the alienation of miners from capitalist production, as Michael Taussig so eloquently argues, the malik devata of colonial Gaya echoed the power of the landlords over kamiyas [bonded labor] based on land control.⁸

Now, Prakash is not wrong in any simple sense. His sensitivity to the "logic of ritual practice" is in fact exemplary. It is just that I am reading this passage to understand the conditions for intertextuality that govern its structure and allow a conversation to emerge between Prakash's study, located in colonial Bihar in India, and Taussig's study of labor in the Bolivian tin mines. How do the specific and the general come together in this play of intertextuality, for we are trying to think our way to the art of "holding apart" that which coalesces *within* the process of this "coming together" of disparate histories?

The intertextuality of the passage from Prakash is based on the simultaneous assertion of likeness and dissimilarity between *malik devata* and Tio: witness the contradictory moves made by the two phrases "like Tio" and "whereas Tio." They are similar in that they have similar relationship to "power": they "express" and "echo" it. Their difference, however, is absorbed in a larger theoretic-universal difference between two different kinds of power, capitalist production and "land control." Pressed to the extreme, "power" itself must emerge as a last-ditch universal-sociological category (as indeed happens in texts that look for sociology in Foucault). But this "difference" already belongs to the sphere of the general.

A structure of generality within which specificities and differences are contained is normally the condition for conversation between historians and social scientists working on disparate sites. Paul Veyne's distinction between *specificity* and *singularity* is of relevance here. As Veyne puts it: "History is interested in individualized events . . . but it is not interested in their individuality; it seeks to understand them — that is, to find among them a kind of generality or, more precisely, of specificity. It is the same with natural history; its curiosity is inexhaustible, all the species matter to it and none is superfluous, but it does not propose the enjoyment of their singularity in the manner of the bestiary of the Middle Ages, in which one could read the description of noble, beautiful, strange or cruel animals."⁹

The very conception of the "specific" as it obtains in the discipline of history, in other words, belongs to the structure of a general that necessarily occludes our view of the singular. Of course, nothing exists as a

“singular-in-itself.” “Singularity” is a matter of viewing. It comes into being when we look on things in such a way as not to see them as “particular” expressions of that which is general. Philosophically, it is a limit-concept, since language itself mostly speaks of the general. Facing the singular might be a question of straining against language itself; it could, for example, involve the consideration of the manner in which the world, after all, remains opaque to the generalities inherent in language. Here, however, I am using a slightly weaker — philosophically speaking, that is — version of the idea. By “singular” I mean that which defies the generalizing impulse of the sociological imagination. To indicate what the struggle to view the singular might entail in the case of writing history, let us begin from a seemingly absurd position and see what happens to our intertextual conversation if we reverse the propositions of Prakash (and Taussig) to claim (a) that the “alienation of [Bolivian] miners from capitalist production” expressed the spirit of Tio, and (b) that “the power of the landlords over [Bihari] kamiyas” “echoed the power” of the *malik devata*. The conversation stalls. Why? Because we do not know what the relationship is between *malik devata* and Tio. They do not belong to structures of generalities, nor is there any guarantee that a relationship could exist between the two without the mediation of the language of social science. Between “capitalist production” and the “power of the landlord,” however, the relationship is known, or at least we think we know it, thanks to all the grand narratives of transition from precapital to capital. It is always at least implicit in our sociologies that permeate the very language of social science writing.

The history of weaving in colonial Uttar Pradesh that Gyanendra Pandey examines in *The Construction of Communalism in Colonial North India* offers us another example of this tension between the general secular time of history and the singular times of gods and spirits.¹⁰ Pandey’s work deals with the history of a group of north Indian Muslim weavers called the Julahas and constitutes an imaginative radical reexamination of the stereotype of religious fanatics through which the British colonial officials saw them. The Julahas, Pandey shows, faced increasing displacement from their craft as a consequence of colonial economic policies in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and this had much to do with the history of their culture in this period. Pandey’s text, however, displays tensions similar to those that operate in Prakash’s. On the one hand there is the figure of the weaver-in-general-during-early-industrialization that underlies his comparativist gestures toward European history. The sentence that opens the chapter on “The Weavers” in E. P. Thompson’s *The Making*

of the *English Working Class*—“The history of the weavers in the nineteenth century is haunted by the legend of better days”—and a generalizing quote from Marx act as the framing devices for Pandey’s chapter. “[B]ecause of the nature of their occupation,” writes Pandey, “weavers everywhere have been commonly dependent on money lenders and other middlemen and vulnerable to the play of the market forces, all the more so in the era of the advance of industrial capitalism”; he adds a few pages later, “The history of the north Indian weavers in the nineteenth century is, in E. P. Thompson’s phrase from another context, ‘haunted by the legend of better days.’”¹¹ Further on, he writes in a Thompsonian vein of the weavers’ “fight to preserve . . . their economic and social status” and of “their memories and pride” that fueled this fight.¹²

Pandey’s own sensitivity and his acute sense of responsibility to the evidence, on the other hand, presents the question of difference, already hinted at in his gesture of assigning the Thompson quote to a “different context,” in such a forceful manner that the comparativist stance is rendered positively problematic. The “legend of better days” in Thompson’s account is entirely secular. It refers to a golden age made up of stories about “personal and . . . close” relations between “small masters and their men,” about “strongly organized trade societies,” about relative material prosperity, and about the weavers’ “deep attachment to the values of independence.”¹³ A Wesleyan church in the village community marked if anything a physical distance between the loom and God, and the weavers, as Thompson says, were often critical of the “parish-church pa’son’s.”¹⁴ God, on the other hand, is ever present in the very phenomenology of weaving in north India, as Pandey explains it, and it is a rather different god from Thompson’s. Indeed, as Pandey himself makes clear, work and worship were two inseparable activities to the Julahas, so inseparable in fact that one could ask whether it makes sense to ascribe to them the identity of what only in the secular and overlapping languages of the census, administration, and sociology becomes the name of their “occupation”: weaving.

As Pandey explains, his weavers called themselves *nurbaf* or “weavers of light.” Drawing on Deepak Mehta’s study of “Muslim weavers in two villages of Bara Banki district,” Pandey notes “the intimate connection between work and worship in the lives of the weavers, and the centrality of the weavers’ major religious text (or *kitab*), the *Mufid-ul-Mominin* in the practice of both.” The *Mufid-ul-Mominin*, Pandey adds, “relates how the practice of weaving came into the world at its very beginning” (by a version of the Adam, Hawwa [Eve], and Jabril

[Gabriel] story), and “lists nineteen supplicatory prayers to be uttered in the different stages of weaving.”¹⁵ During the initiation of novices, notes Pandey, “all the prayers associated with the loom are recited. . . . ‘The male headweaver, in whose household this initiation takes place, reads out all of Adam’s questions and Jabril’s answers from the *kitab* during the first six days of the month when both the loom and the *karkhana* [workshop or work-loom] are ritually cleaned.’ When the loom is passed on from father to son, again, ‘the entire conversation between Adam and Jabril is read out once by a holy man.’ ”¹⁶ To cap it all, this was nothing like an enactment of some “memory” of times past, not a nostalgia, as Thompson sees it, haunted by the “legend of better days.” The *Mufid-ul-Mominin* is not a book that has come down to present-day Julahas from a hoary antiquity. Deepak Mehta expressed the view to Pandey that “[it] may well date from the post-Independence period,” while Pandey himself is decidedly of the opinion that “it is more than likely that the *Mufid-ul-Mominin* came to occupy this place as *the* ‘book’ of the weavers fairly recently — not before the late nineteenth or the early twentieth century in any case, for it is only from that time that the name ‘Momin’ (i.e. the faithful) was claimed as their own by the weavers.”¹⁷

So Pandey’s Julahas are both quite like and quite unlike Thompson’s weavers, and it is their difference that allows us to raise the question of singularity. Was their god the same as the god of Thompson’s Wesleyans? How would one translate into the other? Can we take this translation through some idea of a universal and freely exchangeable god, an icon of our humanism? I cannot answer the question because of my ignorance — I have no intimate knowledge of the Julahas’ god — but Richard Eaton’s study of Islamic mysticism in the Deccan in India gives us further insight into what I might crudely call nonsecular phenomenologies of labor.¹⁸

Eaton quotes from seventeenth-, eighteenth-, and early nineteenth-century Sufi manuscripts songs that Muslim women in the Deccan sang while engaged in such “domestic” tasks as spinning, grinding millet, and rocking children to sleep. They all reveal, as Eaton puts it, “the ontological link between God, the Prophet, the *pir* [the Sufi teacher] and [work].”¹⁹ “As the *chakki* [grindstone] turns, so we find God,” Eaton quotes an early eighteenth-century song; “it shows its life in turning as we do in breathing.” Divinity is brought to presence sometimes through analogy, as in:

The *chakki*’s handle resembles *alif*, which means Allah;
And the axle is Muhammad . . .

and sometimes in ways that make the bodily labor of work and worship absolutely inseparable experiences, as is suggested by this song sung at the spinning wheel:

As you take the cotton, you should do *zīkr-i jāli* [*zīkr*=mention of God].
As you separate the cotton, you should do *zīkr-i qalbi*,
And as you spool the thread you should do *zīkr-i 'aini*.
Zīkr should be uttered from the stomach through the chest,
And threaded through the throat.
The threads of breath should be counted one by one, oh sister.
Up to twenty-four thousand.
Do this day and night,
And offer it to your *pir* as a gift.²⁰

Straining further toward the singularity of this phenomenology of turning the *chakki* would require us to explore the differences between the different kinds of *zīkrs* mentioned in this song and to enter imaginatively the “mysticism” (once again, a generalizing name!) that envelops them. But on what grounds do we assume, ahead of any investigation, that this divine presence invoked at every turn of the *chakki* will translate neatly into a secular history of labor so that — transferring the argument back to the context of the tool-worshipping factory workers — the human beings collected in modern industries may indeed appear as the subjects of a metanarrative of Marxism, socialism, or even democracy?

Let me make it very clear that it is not the raging Medusa of cultural relativism rearing her ugly head in my writing at this point. To allow for plurality, signified by the plurality of gods, is to think singularities. To think singularities, however — and this I must make clear since so many scholars these days are so prone to see parochialism, essentialism, or “cultural relativism” in every claim of non-Western difference — is *not* to make a claim against the demonstrable and documentable permeability of cultures and languages. It is in fact to appeal to models of cross-cultural and cross-categorical translations that do not, unlike in sociological or social-scientistic thinking, take a universal middle term for granted. The Hindi *pani* may be translated into the English *water* without having to go through the science of H₂O. In this, at least in India but perhaps elsewhere as well, we have something to learn from nonmodern instances of cross-categorical translation. I give an example here of translation of Hindi gods into expressions of Islamic divinity that was performed in an eighteenth-century Bengali religious text called *Shunya-puran*. (The evidence belongs to the “history of conversion” to Islam in Bengal.) This text has a description, well-known to

students of Bengali literature, of Islamic wrath falling upon a group of oppressive Brahmins and in the course of this description gives the following account of an exchange of identities between individual Hindu deities and their Islamic counterparts:

Dharma who resided in Baikuntha was grieved to see all this [Brahminic misconduct]. He came to the world as a Muhammadan . . . [and] was called Khoda. . . . Brahma incarnated himself as Muhammad, Visnu as Paigambar and Civa became Adamfa (Adam). Ganesa came as a Gazi, Kartika as a Kazi, Narada became a Sekha and Indra a Moulana. The Risis of heaven became Fakirs. . . . The goddess Chandi incarnated herself as Haya Bibi [the wife of the original man] and Padmavati became Bibi Nur [Nur=light].²¹

Eaton's recent study of Islam in Bengal gives many more such instances. Consider the case of an Arabic-Sanskrit bilingual inscription from a thirteenth-century mosque in coastal Gujarat that Eaton cites in his discussion. The Arabic part of this inscription, dated 1264, "refers to the deity worshipped in the mosque as Allah," while, as Eaton puts it, "the Sanskrit text of the same inscription addresses the supreme god by the names Visvanatha ('lord of the universe'), Sunyarupa ('one whose form is of the void'), and Visvarupa ('having various forms')." ²² Further on, Eaton gives more examples from medieval Bengal of such cross-categorical translation: "The sixteenth-century poet Haji Muhammad identified the Arabic Allah with Gosai (Skt. 'Master'), Saiyid Mur-taza identified the Prophet's daughter Fatima with Jagat-janani (Skt. 'Mother of the World'), and Saiyid Sultan identified the God of Adam, Abraham, and Moses with Prabhu (Skt. 'Lord')." ²³

The interesting point, for our purpose and in our language, is how the translations that take place in these passages take barter for their model of exchange rather than that of a generalized exchange of commodities which always needs the mediation of a universal, homogenizing middle term (such as, in Marxism, "abstract labor"). The translations here are based on very local, particular, one-for-one exchanges, guided in part, no doubt, at least in the case of *Shunya-puran*, by the poetic requirements of alliterations, meter, rhetorical conventions, and so on. There are surely rules in these exchanges, but the point is that, even if I cannot decipher them all—and even if they are not all decipherable, that is to say, even if the processes of translation contain a degree of opacity—it can be safely asserted that these rules cannot and would not claim to have the "universal" character of the rules that sustain conversations between social scientists working in disparate sites of the world.

One critical aspect of this mode of translation is that it makes no

appeal to any implicit universals or sociologies. Codes are switched locally, without going through a universal set of rules. Which is another way of saying that there are no overarching censoring/limiting/defining systems of thought that neutralize and relegate differences to the margins, nothing like an overarching category of “religion” that is supposed to remain unaffected by differences between the entities it seeks to name and thereby contain. The very obscurity of the translation process would allow the incorporation of that which, strictly speaking, is untranslatable. It is obvious that this nonmodern mode of translation lends itself more easily to fiction, particularly of the nonrealist or magic-realist variety practiced today, than to the secular prose of sociology or history.²⁴ In these fictive narratives, gods and spirits can indeed be agents. But then what of history? What of its abiding allegiance to secular, continuous, empty, homogeneous time? And what of the project of Marxist-subaltern history in which my work participates?

I want to argue that the question of having to translate difference back into the sociological/secular same poses an ethical challenge to our writing. The following section takes up this point.

III

The ethical challenge is twofold. Mine is not a postmodern argument announcing the death of history and recommending fiction writing as a career for all historians. (For one thing, *I* do not have the talents to do this.) But personal talents apart, there is another reason why the training of the mind in modern historical consciousness is justified even from the point of view of the subaltern, and this has to do with the intermeshing of the logic of secular human sciences with that of bureaucracies. One cannot argue with modern bureaucracies and other instruments of governmentality without recourse to the secular time and narratives of history and sociology. The subaltern classes need this knowledge to fight their battles for social justice. It would therefore be unethical not to make historical consciousness available to everybody, in particular the subaltern classes. When has the International Monetary Fund or the United Nations listened to an argument involving the agency of gods?

Yet at the same time, historicism — the idea that things develop in historical time, that this time is empty and homogeneous, that history is layered and contains what Marx called the “unvanquished remnants of the past,” something that Marxists (after Ernst Bloch) have often tried to capture in the expression “simultaneity of the non-simultaneous” — carries with it, precisely because of its openness to certain kinds of

“evolutionism” and its association with the logic of bureaucratic decision making, an inherent modernist elitism that silently lodges itself into our everyday consciousness.²⁵

Historicism, as Heidegger explained in his critique, consists in a very particular understanding of the question of contemporaneity: the idea that things from different historical periods can exist in the same time (the so-called simultaneity of the non-simultaneous) but belong to different worlds. Thus we may have a “medieval” object before us, but it is relic from a past world that is no longer there. One could, in historicism, look at peasants in the same way: as survivals from a dead world.²⁶ This is a fundamental characteristic of historicist thought. It is what allows us to think that the “agency of the supernatural” is a problem from the past surviving, for good and understandable historical reasons, in a disenchanted present. So often historians see themselves as either reading the past off something like a palimpsest or engaged in a work of geologic interpretation. Eaton begins the last chapter of his meticulously researched book on Bengali Islam with a sentence that aims to appeal to the trained aesthetic sensibility of all historians: “Like the strata of a geologic fossil record, place names covering the surface of a map silently testify to past historical processes.”²⁷ I could launch into an examination here of the thought habits of most historians, but it is not the self-regarding attitude of historians that make history, the subject, important in the world outside of academia. History is important as a form of consciousness in modernity. (Historians may want to see themselves as its arbiters and custodians, but that is a different question.) Let me explain, therefore, with the help of an ordinary, casual example, how a certain sense of historical time works in the everyday speech of public life in modern societies. Consider the following statement in a newspaper article by the cultural studies specialist Simon During in an issue of the Melbourne daily *Age* (19 June 1993): “thinking about movies like *Of Mice and Men* and *The Last of the Mohicans* allows us to see more clearly where contemporary culture is going.”²⁸ The source for the statement actually does not matter, for During is not the target of my comments. My remarks pertain to a certain habit of thought that the statement illustrates. What I want to discuss is the imagination of historical time that is built into this use of the word *contemporary*. Clearly, the word speaks a double gesture, and an implicit acceptance of this gesture between the author and the reader is the condition that enables the sentence to communicate its point. The gesture is double because it is at the same time a gesture of both inclusion and exclusion. Obviously, *contemporary* refers to all that belong to a “culture” at a particular point on the (secu-

lar) calendar that the author and the intended reader of this statement inhabit. In that sense everybody is part of the *contemporary*. Yet, surely, it is not being claimed that every element in the culture is moving toward the destination that the author has identified in the films mentioned. What about, for instance, the peasants of Greece, if we could imagine them migrating to the “now” of the speaker? (I mention the Greeks because they constitute one of the largest groups of European immigrants into Australia.) They may inhabit the speaker’s “now” and yet may not be going in the direction that *The Last of the Mohicans* suggests.²⁹ The implicit claim of the speaker is not that these people are not moving, but whatever futures these others may be building for themselves will soon be swamped and overwhelmed by the future the author divines on the basis of his evidence. That is the gesture of exclusion built into this use of the word *contemporary*.

If this sounds like too strong a claim, try the following thought experiment. Suppose we argue that the contemporary is actually plural, so radically plural that it is not possible for any particular aspect or element to claim to represent the whole in any way (even as a possible future). Under these conditions, a statement such as During’s would be impossible to make. We would instead have to say that “contemporary culture,” being plural and there being equality within plurality, was going many different places at the same time (I have problems with “at the same time,” but let’s stay with it for the present). Then there would be no way of talking about the cutting edges, the avant-garde, the latest that represents the future, the most modern, and so on. Without such a rhetoric and a vocabulary and the sentiments that go with them, however, many of our everyday political strategies in the scramble for material resources would be impossible to pursue. How would you get government backing, research funding, institutional approval for an idea if you could not claim on its behalf that it represents the more “dynamic” part of the “contemporary,” which thus is pictured as something already always split into two, one part rushing headlong into the future, and another passing away into the past, something like the “living dead” in our midst?

A certain kind of historicism, the metanarrative of progress, is thus deeply embedded in our institutional lives however much we may develop, as individual intellectuals, an attitude of incredulity toward such metanarratives. (Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition* actually concedes this point.)³⁰ This is why the subaltern classes would need the idea of history and the historicist mode of thinking. And as intellectuals we need tools that help us develop critiques of institutions on their own terms, secular critiques for secular institutions of government. Hence,