

Touchstones

You have navigated with raging soul far from the paternal home, passing beyond the seas' double rocks and now you inhabit a foreign land.

—*Medea*

THE HYPE OF POSTCOLONIALISM

The terms *postcolonial*, *postcolonialism*, or *postcoloniality* address and express the different modulations of postimperialism. Postcolonial literature in particular reflects all these variations because literature constitutes the contact zone between society and its representation through language. In this literature theories and politics meet to defy and subvert previous colonial hierarchies. Postcolonial literature thus constitutes a fruitful and contentious field of studies, which is not devoid of internal frictions or paradoxes.

Postcolonial critique nourishes itself upon its inherent contradictions. This marks the vitality of the field but also highlights the highly speculative nature of its practices. Being one of the most interesting interventions in cultural theory since the linguistic turn, postcolonialism neither presents itself in easy packaging nor offers ready-made solutions for the issues raised and investigated. To be aware of the arbitrariness of linguistic meanings is, in fact, not sufficient to dispel the hegemonic nature of language itself. Writing in the language of one former metropolitan power instead of another automatically relocates the role of postcolonial literature in the global market place. This is because the historical traces that connote colonial relations not only influence but also determine the position that new cultural productions acquire in an age of late capitalism. Language has become a commodity in itself and it marks the positioning of literature along the diffused and complex lines of colonial dynamics.

For example, within academia the study of postcolonial literature tends to be an expansion of English department curriculum,¹ and this paradoxically recenters

postcolonial literature around the rubric of the English language. This confirms Anne McClintock's anxiety that the postcolonial paradigm narrows down intellectual investigations not only around the rubric of European history but—even more limiting—around the British canon. This has been amply demonstrated by the many studies focusing on British India and on “the empire writing back” from India as the ad hoc peripheral location. By privileging the British context, postcolonialism reproduces one of the main paradoxes whose abolition was at the center of the postcolonial agenda.

Given the impact of British colonialism in India and the politics of institutionalization of the English language through a systematic educational system,² it is no coincidence that the strongest response comes from India, the jewel in the crown, and that as a consequence the deep interest in postcolonial literatures initially stemmed from English literature departments. Literatures “out there” were, in fact, not merged within the standard curriculum, but were introduced through a special course entitled “Commonwealth Literature.” The term has itself been highly criticized because, as Salman Rushdie said in his *Imaginary Homelands*, “Commonwealth Literature does not Exist”³ unless as a ghetto of the standard British curriculum. Authors like V. S. Naipaul,⁴ a Caribbean writer of Indian ancestry, were considered as hovering between established Western literary genres and ideas and their critiques. Naipaul's elaborations on the complex nature of travel literature and its implication for the spirit of empire preceded much of Said's critique expressed in *Culture and Imperialism* (1993). Yet he defended the values of Western civilization as the only source of enlightenment and progress. His obtaining the 2001 Nobel Prize for literature surprised the world as much as the writer himself since he is notorious for his politically incorrect statements about Third World countries that often overshadowed the appraisal for his brilliant and sparse prose. Naipaul is a Third World writer who longed to be at the center of the empire. He pursued his career in order to redeem himself from the narrowness of the peripheral mentality of his native country, and he strove to become a universal writer and interpreter of the world through his sharp and cynical pen. Traveling from Port of Spain, Trinidad, to Oxford University in the fifties, V. S. Naipaul's itinerary is the prototypical colonial intellectual odyssey.

Naipaul directs his harsh criticism at people from the former British colonies, endorsing a far more Eurocentric view than even the ex-colonizers would dare to express, by saying, for example, that the colonized are like monkeys pleading for evolution. However, despite the arrogant attitude that reveals his tormented relations with his roots and his insecurities within the hosting country, he mobilized the territory between center and periphery, indelibly changing the view on both, and therefore substantially contributing to the postcolonial debate.⁵

Nowadays postcolonial studies (a rephrasing and political complexification of the old term “Commonwealth studies”) have redeemed themselves from any

status of marginality. It is a booming field that addresses common preoccupations arising from the process of decolonization and the search for alternative national and cultural identities. In this book the term *postcolonialism* will be embraced as an overall category in order to analyze different postcolonial conditions within the same framework. The politics of fragmentation is emphasized in order to avoid the risk of totalization and homogenization that is endemic to the postcolonial discourse. This perspective allows, for example, to compare different postcolonial traditions such as the Anglo-Indian and the Afro-Italian while respecting their specificity. Using gender and ethnicity as categories that cut across different geopolitical locations, the focus will be on how women writers represent identity in their works and on how the experience of transnationalism affects and creates problems in these representations. This comparative approach brings to the fore a set of asymmetric relationships in which language, hegemony, and diaspora play a crucial role. These are all issues at the heart of postcolonial critique but will be dealt with from a very specific positioning—that of minority literature.

THEORETICAL CONTENTIONS

More complex terms and analyses, of alternative times, histories and causalities, are required to deal with complexities that cannot be served under the single rubric of post-colonialism.

—Anne McClintock, “The Angel of Progress”
in *Imperial Leather*, p. 13

The serious yet productive dispute surrounding the historical ground, the theoretical breadth, and the cultural implications of postcolonialism’s hyphenated formula has not generated any precise theory or method. What is at stake for this contentious field of studies is the enactment of alternative ways of reading and writing that exploit the fertile tensions between different approaches and discourses.

Historically speaking, the term *postcolonialism* refers to the consciousness arising after colonization from the countries that were once colonized and are now independent. These countries engage in subversive, resistant politics that call for the preservation of difference rather than assimilation to the West. Assimilation represents a transcultural fusion modeled on the dominant cultural patterns. Postcolonialism implies the reversion of the role of the postcolonial from an object that is scrutinized and spoken for into a subjective role in which the postcolonial represents her/himself and speaks back. However, there is no consensus as to when this postcolonial consciousness historically started, before or after independence, or whether this is an accurate term to describe the

condition of so many Third World people who did not share the same colonizer. These people, in fact, use different imposed languages, are located in different geographical areas, differ in race, ethnicity and sex, and vary in their opportunities for migration.⁶

Due to its heterogeneous and diffused character, postcolonialism is therefore not devoid of internal contradictions. The term, in fact, “closes as many epistemological possibilities as it opens” (Suleri, 1995: 136). However, under the rubric of postcolonialism, it would be useful to distinguish postcolonial theory from postcolonial politics. The first refers to poststructuralist critique of Western epistemology, whereas the second refers to Marxist philosophies that embrace oppositional thinking.

The first is more of a transhistorical mode (Edward Said: 1978, 1993, 2000; Trinh T. Minh-ha: 1989; Homi K. Bhabha: 1990, 1994; Paul Gilroy: 1987, 1993, 2000; Sara Suleri: 1995; Stuart Hall: 1997, 2001; McClintock: 1997; Gayatri C. Spivak: 1988, 1990, 1993, 1999; Ania Loomba: 1998; Robert Young: 1990, 1995; Graham Huggan: 2001; Robert Fraser: 2000). The second approach entails a historical and materialist interpretation (Anthony Appiah: 1992; Aijaz Ahmad: 1992; Chandra T. Mohanty: 1991; Fredric Jameson: 1991; E. San Juan Jr.: 1995, 1998; Gayatri Spivak: 1988, 1990, 1993, 1999; Gyan Prakash: 1995; Arif Dirlik: 1994; Gandhi Leela: 1998; Benita Parry: 1972, 1997; Elleke Boehmer: 1995; Michael Hardt and Tony Negri, 2000). However, the two perspectives are clearly more imbricated with each other than this subdivision would suggest, and the one cannot exist without the other. As Leela Gandhi writes, “The postcolonial critic has to work toward a synthesis of, or negotiation between, both modes of thought” (Gandhi, 1998: IX).

Nonetheless, the more historicist approach has been slowly submerged by increasingly fashionable poststructuralist jargon, which often runs the risk of becoming self-referential and of erasing the materialist and political specificities of postcolonial realities. This can be damaging when the mannerism of terminology obfuscates the political agenda of a group with a weaker cultural identity, as in the case of Italian postcolonial writers. To avoid an improper use of postcolonial discourse, it is important not to divert the attention from the historical specificities that create its complexities and its riveted paradoxes. Furthermore, the tangible reality of globalization requires a quick reorientation of the postcolonial critique towards the forces of capitalism that subsume geographical peripheries and market difference as a new exotic commodity (Huggan, 2001). In this respect Marxist theorists are seeking revenge against those “culturalist critics” who have brought postcolonial studies to so many historical distortions and theoretical evasions. However, a text such as *Empire* by Michael Hardt and Toni Negri (2001) that claims to recenter postcolonialism around issues of globalization, tends to align the Third World with the old Marxist notion of the working class, thereby reigniting oppositional thinking

between globalization as the invisible monster that came in the wake of colonialism and the Third World. In so doing, such approaches only partly address the complexity generated by late capitalist formations and the role that cultural difference plays in it.

For the sake of clarity some of the major issues at stake in postcolonial thinking will be highlighted here in order to indicate the specific position taken in this book within the eclecticism of the debate. A brief excursus between the two streams of postcolonial thought indicated above is necessary to detect major critical interventions and to elaborate on some of the negotiations suggested. Anne McClintock, for example, states that there is some basis for finding the term *postcolonialism* suspicious because it is too celebratory of the so-called end of colonialism. However, we must also watch out for the return to nostalgic myths of origin. If, on the one hand, there is the risk of a spurious universalization of the term, there is, on the other hand, the danger of a return to clear-cut politics of binary oppositions.

It is necessary therefore to focus on what we mean by the term and how we want to make it operational. The term should not be considered as a dogmatic entity but as a critical tool that needs to be used with careful discrimination. This care is all the more urgent if we do not want to locate the Third World discursively, an essentialism which in turn loses the cutting edge of postcolonial critique. As Stuart Hall has written “it is only too tempting to fall into the trap of assuming that, because essentialism has been deconstructed *theoretically*, therefore it has been displaced *politically*.”⁷

In this respect Ella Shohat’s question is important: she asks whether the postcolonial mark the ruptural point between two epistemes in intellectual history or whether it refers to the strict chronologies of history *tout court*.⁸ Here the term *postcolonialism* will be used to interpret the intense subversive practice that has taken place at the end or before the end of colonial empires. This alternative practice arose not only to assess the cultural and political aftermath of colonialism but also to reinscribe representation according to a postcolonial perspective. Therefore, postcolonialism qualifies itself as a resistant set of strategies which aim at reversing the supremacy of the West over Third World countries.⁹ Here Prakash’s quote comes in useful, since he makes the hyphen in postcolonialism superfluous, nonetheless accounted for:

post-coloniality as an aftermath, as an after—as a location formed in the fragile functioning of colonialism. Post-coloniality in this sense does not reinterpret either the transcendence or the reversal of post-colonialism, and it sidesteps the language of beginnings and ends. Containing a link to the experience of colonialism, but not contained by it, post-coloniality can be thought of as a form of realignment that emerges *in medias res*, critically undoing and redrawing colonialism’s contingent boundaries.¹⁰

If we consider postcolonialism in a strict historical perspective, we tend to agree that it was generated at the end of colonial empires. However, if we approach it as an ideological and intellectual awareness that has characterized the uprising of colonial countries from political and cultural domination, then we have to agree that postcolonialism started before the date of independence. In this case independence itself has to be seen as the coronation of the postcolonial state of mind and not as the beginning of it. Nonetheless, even though the Yale critic of Pakistani origin Sara Suleri understandably manifests her irritation at being endlessly labeled as postcolonial (she asks, in fact, “when will we cease to be treated as an otherness machine?”¹¹), the term retains a useful quality. It critically demarcates the realignment of hegemonies that are far from being undermined.

For these reasons, the concept of postcolonialism will be abandoned as a self-contained and descriptive concept, and shifted towards its use as an analytic and discriminatory tool. By indicating the trajectory from global to local in theory and literature, the focus here will be on the present capacity of transnational cultures to open up to new possible visions for the future. Thus the term will be used both in its strictly historical specificity, as the Indian critic Aijaz Ahmad does, and in its transhistorical mode, which addresses new global dimensions as Gayatri Spivak does. The qualification of the *post* is intended both as epistemological and as chronological, but most importantly as an indicator of the transformations at stake in global dynamics.

Despite the monumental contribution of postcolonial theorizing to subverting and displacing simplifying dichotomies between metropolitan centers and colonial peripheries—with the alleged cultural stereotypes and biased representations—post-colonial practices inherently reinstate the binary oppositions upon which its critique is constructed. The risk of postcolonialism becoming a self-referential category is very much alive today. The risk lies in the cross citations of major thinkers and key issues, often leading to pure misinterpretation or misreading, which become disengaged from specific and situated analyses. It furthermore consists in the over theorizing of identity issues, which often leads to empty rhetoric with no clear and direct political impact and which dangerously deprives minority groups of their language of oppression and impinges upon a more activist side of postcolonial *raison d'être*.

Furthermore, the self-celebratory character of postcolonialism's innovative force often leads instead to the use of a highly inflated jargon that is obscure not only to people within the field, but also to those subaltern subjects who are supposedly the main agents of the whole postcolonial enterprise. This last aspect, the huge gap between intellectual discourse and the “postcolonial natives,” has provoked most of the reiterated reprimands against the legitimacy of postcolonial studies, whose high level of theoretical sophistication often leads to frustration even among its proselytes. In fact, some Third World intellectuals

have made postcolonial issues their very own warhorse so as to obtain prominent positions within Western academia. In so doing they become complicit with the Western establishment they set out to undermine, and they exploit the cause of truly disenfranchised minority groups for their own reward.

Scholars such as Arif Dirlik write, in fact, that the term *postcolonial* is part of a poststructuralist, postfoundationalist discourse:

Deployed mainly by displaced Third World intellectuals making good in prestige “Ivy League” American universities and deploying the fashionable language of the linguistic and cultural “turn” to “rephrase” Marxism, returning it “to another First World language with universalistic epistemological pretensions.”¹²

However, Dirlik adds an interesting twist to the material/epistemological debate by being one of the first critics to remind us of the necessary connection between postcolonialism and global capitalism. This related argument is more substantial, and it focuses on the fact that “postcolonial” grossly underplays “capitalism’s structuring of the modern world.”¹³ Post-colonial discourse, he says blankly, is a “culturalism.”¹⁴ He agrees with the critics who attack postcolonialism as relying too heavily on literature and creating a “discourse” that shrinks to “texts” (Loomba, 1998: 96), meaning that textuality dominates social analyses and relies too much on its formulaic nature. The refrain lurking within these recent critiques of the term is linked to the extreme flexibility of the term *postcolonial* which has come to function as a fashionable commodity in itself. This is also linked to the prominent position in its deployment of academic intellectuals of Third World origin who, in the name of postcolonial critique, have come to act as pace setters in cultural criticism.

While some of the attacks against postcolonialism are petulant and tiresome, others are constructive and account, in part, for the renewal of postcolonialism. To the first category belongs a quarrel generated by a highly competitive academic market that instigates its own ritualized battlefield. These attacks are critically inconsistent because they conflate postcolonial categories of thought with biographical reductionism and would therefore better be positioned in the realm of celebrity tabloids than serious academic journals. However, to the second category belongs a critique of great relevance since it refers to the implicit question of authenticity, of who is entitled to speak for whom as a “competent informant” (Spivak, 1999: 330), and who can translate the double inscription of empire to the world at large.

This more serious critique concerns the overlooked role that capitalism plays in the rearticulation of global dynamics. The harshest criticism as stated comes from those postcolonial critics of Marxist orientation who blame a particular strand of postcolonial thinking for embracing the post-structuralist lin-

guistic turn and thereby for turning the postcolonial agenda into a mere intellectual exercise with no historically informed and politically motivated referents. Postcolonialism resonates with the conceptual needs of global relations caused by the shift of the world capitalist economy and must therefore address the increased complexity both at a theoretical and political level. But how fair is it to blame the whole postcolonial caravan for such disregard? Is the focus on globalization supposed to emblemize postcolonialism's swansong, or is it on the contrary its regenerative force? Many postcolonial critics have already inflected their analyses with a serious evaluation of the internationalization of financial markets and information flows (Arjun Appadurai, 1996; Saskia Sassen, 1999; Gayatri Spivak, 1999; Manuel Castells, 2000).

The study of colonization as an event of global significance is essential for various reasons: first, for the understanding of the current restructuring of capitalism as a global force and the role of multinational corporations; second, for the understanding of the impact of migration as a form of human movement that is not only dictated by transculturation and hybridization of identities but also by the relocation of labor forces; and third, for the understanding of the impact of digitalization and new media technologies that lead to the construction of new virtual communities. Globalization therefore must be seen as a historically informed momentum that finds its source in colonial relations, though its increased complexities are no longer reducible to colonial divisions, if they ever were. Critics such as Gayatri Spivak (1999), Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1991), and Anne McClintock (1997) have not only reiterated the importance of postcolonial thinking for the critique of new neocolonial formations, but also the crucial role that gender plays in the rearticulation of difference at a global level. Feminism has played a monumental role in the postcolonial rethinking of crucial categories of thought such as marginality, agency, and voice.

This self-criticism signals not the need to abandon postcolonialism as an outdated frame of analysis too engrossed in its colonial nostalgia. It signals instead the need to reorient postcolonialism towards more pressing issues dictated by transnational economies, issues that are usually only partly considered under new headings such as multiculturalism, globalization studies, ethnic minority studies, or Third World development studies. In the past the sociological import clearly overshadowed the cultural significance of postcolonial literatures. Countering this imbalance requires a new analysis capable of dealing with both the text and its cultural contexts, as intersections in time and space and not as fixed entities, and revising categories of interpretation, evaluation, and categorization along new unprecedented routes.

Given the anxiety surrounding the term *postcolonial* here, the focus will be on detecting deviations or certain inner contradictions that could make the term more productive and politically responsible while also making it reflect the existing dissymmetrical relationships. High profile is therefore given to

the internal imbalances present within the postcolonial discourse itself. This consists in rejecting postcolonialism as a monolithic discourse and embracing it as a succession of multiple histories linked to the shifts in the world capitalist economy. The comparison between female writers of the Indian diaspora and Italian female writers from the Horn of Africa attempts such a detour and re-routing. The comparison of these authors across their significant differences is grounded in their common historical experience of colonization and life in the diaspora as gendered racialized subjects negotiating local values and global identifications.

LITERARY INTERSECTIONS

An analytical approach to postcolonialism has a double binding function. On the one hand, the postcolonial framework brings two streams of diasporic women's writings under the same spectrum of analyses in their commonalities. On the other hand, it emphasizes the internal contradictions, thereby highlighting how cautiously postcolonialism must be used in order to be employed at all.

We should not forget Stuart Hall's warning that "societies are not post-colonial in the same way and . . . in any case the post-colonial does not operate on its own but is in effect a construct internally differentiated by its intersections with other unfolding relations."¹⁵ Hall goes on to explain that a more careful discrimination is needed between different social and racial formations. The result is that countries like India or Eritrea are not postcolonial in the same way.

Hall's statement is crucial to understanding the nonmonolithic aspect of postcolonialism while acknowledging its indisputable capacity to address a wide range of shared topics, not only concerning the peripheries of the empire but also the very heart of it. It is from this angle that the differences and convergences between British and Italian colonialism will be analyzed—differences and convergences that have created very different postcolonial conditions, but that remain postcolonial nonetheless.

The focus therefore is on the literary production by two specific streams of postcolonial women writers: an established collection and a new corpus. This comparison highlights how power relations are dispersed and contradictory. Focusing on women writers is important because the issue of gender has not been sufficiently analyzed in the definition of transnational identity. From a comparison between the more polished, flamboyant work by women of the Indian diaspora and the scattered, embryonic production by Afro-Italian migrant women writers, gender emerges as an analytical category in different historical and spatial locations. The outcome is a dissymmetrical rearticulation of gender with other axes such as colonial history, language, and condition of transnationalism.

This approach is in itself clearly both conventional and contentious. On the one hand, it is in line with most traditional aspects of feminist studies. It reassesses and reevaluates omitted and misrecognized women's writings by endorsing gender analysis and by constructing alternative feminist genealogies. On the other hand, at the same time that it is reinforced, the traditional approach of discovering and assessing female voices is also dismantled. This practice of subversion within strategies of restitution is conveyed by showing first that postcolonial women's writings recreate hierarchies of power within themselves (which is their criticism of colonial and patriarchal dominion), and second that other minor postcolonial female literatures, such as Italoophone writings, open up spaces that have been resistant both to feminism and canonical literatures such as the Italian. This space of resistance allows people of "lesser" traditions to acquire agency to express their creativity.

DIASPORA

Because of these cultural transitions, changes in space have become more important than transitions in time. While in modernism the element of time was central (its fragmentation, the celebration of nonlinearity, time as chronology [*chronos*] as different from the personal time in the stream of consciousness [*kairos*]),¹⁶ in our postmodern era, time becomes ancillary to the much more dominant and expansive notion of space. According to Fredric Jameson, our psychic experience and our cultural languages are today dominated by categories of space rather than the modernist categories of time.¹⁷

Space can nowadays be easily manipulated or contracted thanks to technology, forms of transport, and mass tourism, and as a consequence boundaries and territories become blurred. Different spaces begin to overlap with each other as terrains become scattered and fragmented. The notion of memory (as in Virginia Woolf or Proust) is overshadowed by a proliferation of space-bound metaphors that express the existential and emotional distress of uprooted and migrant people. Notions such as diaspora (Avtar Brah, Stuart Hall, Paul Gilroy, Lavie Smadar, Ted Swedenborg, Elazar Barkan), borderlands (Anzaldúa), edges (hooks), margins (Spivak), in-betweenness (Bhabha), rhizome (Deleuze), exile (Said), and nomadic subject (Braidotti) all emphasize theories of space as a way of describing the postmodern condition. But they are also called upon to express the exhilarating and exciting experience of global travelers, privileged cosmopolitans, and jet setters. Within the category of literary diaspora the two senses—distress and elation—seem to merge. Playing out between center and periphery, the literatures of the diaspora naturally highlight many of the conflicts and paradoxes that characterize our "global village," proclaiming affiliation with the global while asserting their representation of the local.

The notion of diaspora is used here not only to detect postnational spaces—which allows people of “lesser traditions” to emerge—but also to trigger many postulates of postcolonialism as a totalizing discourse.¹⁸ Its specificity with respect to other spatial tropes consists in retaining its implications both as a concrete history of dispersal and expropriation (Jewish, African, Indian) and as a transhistorical mode that expresses a cultural and intellectual stance with respect to nationhood, citizenship, and metropolitan assimilation. New conceptual maps need, in fact, to be drawn in order to account for the erosion between the nation-state and new cultural hybrid identities.¹⁹

The old idea of diaspora has become a very viable concept to express the state of minorities and migrants. Thus the notion of diaspora allows to connect concrete past histories of colonization to modern global phenomena of migration. This requires the intersection of postcolonialism with the politics dictated by multinational capitalism.

However, before making this connection, it is necessary to sketch a brief review of the historical nature of the term *diaspora*. Originally the term diaspora referred to the collective trauma caused by the banishment and exile of Jewish communities. In a second stage the word also came to signify the dispersal and genocide of Armenians and the coercive uprooting of African people for slavery. More recently, the term has marked the condition of indentured labor in the previous century. This concerns, for example, Indian people enrolled as a work force, once slavery was abolished, to build railways or to work on the plantations in other British colonies. There are also other forms of diaspora such as the imperial diasporas, trade diasporas (Chinese and Lebanese), and cultural diasporas, as in the case of the Caribbean, which is considered the multi-ethnic site par excellence since different forms of diaspora (slavery, imperial, indentured labor, and trade) have intertwined there.

In our late millennium, diaspora has assumed a postmodern tint. It evokes globalized and transnational forces of world economy, international migrations, global cities, cosmopolitanism and localism, and deterritorialized social identities. It is therefore a term that can account for “multiple subject positions,” as Homi K. Bhabha (1994, 269–72) and Avtar Brah (1996) write, since we need to focus on interstitial moments and processes where difference is articulated. In this respect, postcoloniality and diaspora are synonymous terms since both express aspects of placement and displacement. Postcoloniality emphasizes the global rearticulation of nations and cultures after a condition of colonization, whereas diaspora emphasizes a territorial scattering of national identity throughout human history.

Both terms are encompassed in the notion of migrant literature, a literature that is “unhomely,” and this very quality of dispossession—a kind of haunting by otherness—is migrant literature’s great strength (Bernheimer, 1995: 8). However, the mobility of the mind allowed by the phenomenon of migration,

and with it a separation from tradition and obligations, is not a process devoid of pain and alienation. The problem of occupying a cusp between tradition and modernism, past and present, or peripheries and cosmopolitan life, is the quintessential chore of diasporic people. The phenomenon of diaspora calls for reimagining postcolonial area studies and developing units of analysis that enable us to understand the dynamics of transnational culture and economic processes, as we challenge the conceptual limits imposed by national and ethnic/racial boundaries.²⁰

Stuart Hall (1992), for example, describes the result of this process as producing “cultures of hybridity” since cultural identities are emerging that are “in transition,” drawing on different traditions at the same time without assimilation or total loss of the past. Therefore, the growth of these cultures within new diasporas created by the colonial experience and the ensuing postcolonial migrations are very central to the postmodern debate.

However, the critic Kevathi Krishnaswamy rightly warns about the “excessive figurative flexibility (of) the metaphorization of post-colonial migrancy (which) is becoming so overblown, overdetermined, and amorphous as to repudiate any meaningful specificity of historical location or interpretation” (Krishnaswamy, 1995: 128). Krishnaswamy is afraid of too easy a fusion between postmodernism and postcolonialism that would empty politically charged words such as “exile” and “diaspora” of their histories of pain and allow them to be deployed to express a wide array of cross-cultural phenomena. He fears that difference would be reduced to equivalence, and syncretism interchanged with diversity, leveling the subversive subalternity in any and all. However, he agrees that the “figure of migrancy indeed has proved quite useful in drawing attention to the marginalized, in problematizing conceptions of borders, and in critiquing the politics of power” (Krishnaswamy, 1995: 128).

In order to preserve subalternity and avoid simplifications the postcolonial authors analyzed here are positioned within the debate on diaspora according to their contribution to the reproduction of hierarchies.

POLITICS OF LANGUAGE

For the writers who straddle two or more cultures, such as those in the diaspora, the language used for creative purposes is of the utmost importance. The use of one colonial language instead of another in diasporic writings conveys an immediate hierarchical relocation of literature. Writers in English can rely on a broad network and on a vast readership, whereas Afro-Italian writers risk being doubly erased by colonial policy and by neocolonial powers that privilege English in the new global economic transactions.

For our purpose it is very important to remember Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci's concept of hegemony and how it can be applied to the analysis of postcolonial reproduction of hierarchies. The most vexed questions arising from the comparative approach presented here are connected to the use of *alternative* languages as a way of both reframing the globally known category of the postcolonial and outlining dissymmetrical relocations of cultures. Gramsci formulated the notion of hegemony as being achieved via a combination of "force" and "consent" and therefore cutting through social classes.

Some writers and theorists of Marxist orientation have argued that African literature, for example, must be written in indigenous African languages to resist linguistic colonization. One of the most famous cases is provided by the Kenyan writer Ngugi wa Thiong'o who chose to stop writing in English, turned to Gikuyo "to decolonize the mind" (Wa Thiong'o, 1986) from the ideological apparatus of empire, and used the vernacular as a political act of resistance.²¹

For the postcolonial debate the issue of language is a rather irksome one, since it has served as a site of controversy even as it remains postcolonialism's most exciting and stimulating aspect. The focus of this comparison is to show how writers who use different languages, English and Italian, generate different impacts and consequences for the revision of the literary canon, the empowerment of Third World women, and the relocation of cultural centers. These effects occur because language encodes power relations, a vital assumption explored by Gramsci.

Gramsci analyzed the political character of language and accents. Language conveys power differences, and this is made apparent, according to Gramsci, in the attempt of the dominant class to create a common cultural climate through the imposition of a national language. Linguistic hegemony involves the articulation of signs and symbols that tend to codify and reinforce the dominant viewpoint:

Thus, Gramsci argued that there existed a close relationship between linguistic stratification and social hierarchization, in that the various dialects and accents found within a given society are always rank-ordered as to their perceived legitimacy, appropriateness, and so on. Accordingly, concrete language usage reflects underlying asymmetrical power relations and it registers profound changes which occur in the cultural, moral, and political worlds. . . . Gramsci also felt that the maintenance of regional dialects helped peasants and workers partially to resist the forces of political and cultural hegemonies.²²

Transferring Gramsci's discourse on Italian regional accents (with particular reference to his native Sardinia and the Italian South) to world languages, we can detect the profound political character of postcolonialism as a mainly

Anglocentric discourse. It also highlights the role of the English language as the most powerful protractor of the imperial hegemony. The British Empire was, in fact, not only the most expansive as far as settlement and penetration was concerned, but also the one with the greatest linguistic impact. Imperialism has laid the groundwork for globalization by making English the lingua franca for international exchange. The role of English as the world's leading language is not only to be attributed to the extensions of the British Empire and its minutiae enterprise in the organization of schooling and institutionalization in English, but also to the neo-imperialist role of the United States, technically speaking also a former British colony. This intersection between colonial aftermath and capitalistic neo-imperialism has definitely established English as the normative international language (with all its ideological implications) and thereby rendered the other languages minorities (called "dialects" in Gramsci's analysis). This is demonstrated by the monolingual discussion which has taken place around postcolonialism. Not only is the language of the "empire (that) writes back to the centre" (Salman Rushdie: 1982: 8) English, but the literature analyzed for the demolition of the Western canon is also in English. However, the postcolonial asset is widely differentiated as far as colonial aftermaths and linguistic heritages are concerned. Using the English language as a medium of communication, for example, definitely provides more possibilities than using other minor, formerly imperial languages such as Portuguese, Italian, or Dutch, to offer few examples. Within the postcolonial discourse of resistant thinking the literatures expressed in English grant themselves the privilege of attracting wider interest, a global readership, and the support of international publishing houses located in strategic cosmopolitan centers such as London, New York, New Delhi, and Toronto. These possibilities go hand in hand with the garnering of flashy international literary prizes (such as the Nobel Prize, Booker Prize, Commonwealth Prize, Pulitzer Prize, and Neustadt Prize for Literature²³) and the corresponding media coverage and critical reviews. The locations that use English are not only the ex-colonial centers but also neocolonial ones, like the United States.²⁴

In India, for example, despite the strength of nationalism, English continued as a literary language after independence, and it remained the official language along with Hindi. Although the use of English is mainly confined to the middle classes, it can cross regional boundaries to address a national—albeit élite—audience. Yet, many argue that English has effectively been "Indianized" or "nativised" through the incorporation of vocabulary, idiom, and even syntax from the regional languages since most writers are bilingual or trilingual. The "E" English, as the Queen's English is called, or Standard Received English (SRE),²⁵ has been transformed into many "englishes," and the small "e" is used to identify all the forms of english spoken in former colonies and around the world. In India it becomes Indian-english, or Hinglish (Hindi-English), or

Benglish (Bengali-English), or Englees (basic English). This is the silent subversive strategy adopted by Anglo-Indian writers to get rid of the label “Made as England,” Rushdie’s pun to express the uncritical cultural adhesion of the Indian élite to the British model. Furthermore, many people in India prefer to use English rather than Hindi as a vehicular language. The latter is, in fact, imposed by the central government in Delhi upon the many other regional languages such as Urdu, Bengali, Tamil, Malayalam, Telegu, or Marathi. Therefore, paradoxically enough, English, the language of the masters, acquires a resistant and subversive function within India since it is used by the minority groups against the hegemonizing role of the central state.

However, English not only has a subversive function within India but also within the British literary canon. This proliferation of “englishes” mimic, as Bhabha would say, the language of the master, depriving it of its original political and ideological supremacy. Through the abrogation and appropriation of the English language Anglo-Indian writers enact a strategy of cultural decolonization. The very survival of Royal English as such becomes tied to certain classes as opposed to the more lively and creative use of English among the so-called social marginalities who through linguistic adaptation and metamorphosis reinvent the very notion of the English language. This reinvention can be seen in the explosion of literature in English from Scotland, Ireland, and Wales.

This analysis of the “englishes within” has shifted the center of the debate from the monopolistic function of British English to other imperial languages. The success of the Indian Women Writers tradition, for example, has directed attention towards the emergence of new forms of literary antagonism that were more hidden, since they concerned writers who were less articulate and less capable of standing up for their own rights. The shift in Indian diasporic literature mentioned here, from minor towards major literature, has allowed Indian writers to increasingly reterritorialize their identity by deterritorializing that of the dominant group. For example, the work of Hanif Kureishi around race and post-coloniality explores the complex mechanism of politics, sexuality, culture, race, and capital in the British-Pakistani diaspora, articulating his hybridity and deconstructing the concept of Britishness. The achievement of major status of some postcolonial literatures—read “Anglo-Indian literature”—has left the position of minority status vacant. This has been filled by those struggling minorities (other postcolonialities, other women, other ethnicities) who, thanks to the successful struggle already carried out by previously minor postcolonial literatures that have become major, can now shine in reflected light and claim a literary authority of their own.

It is therefore time to analyze how other minor colonial languages, such as Italian, are affected by the emerging postcolonial literature. The different linguistic policy followed by the Italian government during its colonization

of the Horn of Africa and the modalities of decolonization in those countries partly explain the huge gap between the time of Italian colonization at the beginning of the twentieth century and the emergence of the Italian postcolonial literature only at the end of the same century, fifty years after independence. The diffusion of the Italian language at the institutional level was hardly encouraged during the period of colonialism. Schooling in Italian was furthermore prohibited for the natives after they reached the fifth grade. So unlike the British prolonged educational system in India, the Italian system imposed the language only at a superficial level. In contrast, in Eritrea, the *colonia primogenita* (first born), which had structurally been under Italian influence since 1880, the use of Italian was wide spread and even today elderly people speak it with great fluency. After the defeat of the Italians in Africa in 1941, Eritrea became a British protectorate, and in 1962 after a much contested and fatal U.N. treaty, it was annexed to Ethiopia as one of its sixteen provinces. The Mengistu dictatorial Marxist regime completely eradicated the use of the Italian language in Eritrea, since it symbolized Eritrea's independent status (a nation that was created by the Italians through the colonization of territories historically belonging to Ethiopia) and Eritrea's sense of cultural superiority, which was in partly due to the Italian infrastructural investments in the area. Therefore, there is no continuity in the Italian linguistic colonial legacy, especially for the younger generations who are those who usually migrate to Italy. This history explains the belated emergence of an Italian postcolonial tradition. Immigrants from the Horn of Africa must often learn the language from scratch, and thus a consistent and self-confident tradition can only be expected from a second or third generation of immigrants, as was the case in the United States with the emergence of an Italo-American literary tradition.

Writers from Africa have just begun to write down their existential experience in Italian, often using French as an intermediary language. The fragile identity which characterizes these Afro-Italian writings is destined to slowly change the character of Italian literature from monolingualistic towards multilingualistic and multicultural. Derogatory terms like *vu cumprà* (would you like to buy), referring to immigrant sellers on the Italian sidewalks who cannot speak without an accent, are destined to be replaced by a plurality of accents, not only from the south, as Gramsci's resistant strategy proposes, but from many other cultural heritages.

The goal of this book is therefore to bring to light how hegemonic structures recompose themselves within the postcolonial debate, and to show how the shift in power continues to privilege some cultures to the detriment of others. Hidden within the subversive discourse of postcolonialism are structures of power that need to be detected and analyzed. Hegemonies are relational, and within the postcolonial debate, which distinguishes itself by its oppositional politics, its anti-

hegemonic struggle, and democratization process, there are hierarchies of power. These reproduce themselves not only in the relation between center and peripheries, colonizers and ex-colonized, but also among margins, among minorities, and among different peripheries and different ex-colonized subjects, producing not a leveling of hierarchies but, on the contrary, a relocation of hegemonies.

Therefore, within the postcolonial discourse the issue of language is of paramount importance in establishing lateral thinking that avoids easy forms of replicating literary canonization and cultural colonization.

MINORITY LITERATURE

How many people live today in a language which is not their own?

—Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka, Toward a Minor Literature*, 1986, p. 19

Deleuze and Guattari's influential essay "What Is a Minor Literature?"²⁶ (originally published in 1975) offers a valuable strategy for the assessment of the relocations of hegemonies in literature. It provides a way of evaluating the writings of immigrants with respect to the major tradition since they "live today in a language which is not their own" (p. 19). This minor status, which becomes major, is due to their ability to reinvent tradition and to challenge the major groups by inviting them to "become a nomad and an immigrant and a gypsy in relation to (their) own language" (p. 19).

Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of minority literature is a powerful tool for the debate on postcolonialism because it positions literature politically. In fact, the term *minority literature* accounts for what Gramsci would define as a political positionality, according to which minority is not 'given' but constructed. Consequently, as Stuart Hall also argues,

political positionalities are not fixed and do not repeat themselves from one historical situation to the next or from one theatre of antagonism to another, ever 'in place', in an endless iteration. Isn't that the shift from politics as a 'war of manoeuvre' to politics as a 'war of position', which Gramsci long ago, and decisively, charted?²⁷

This achieved awareness leads us here to explore the issues of gender and location in a diasporic perspective as an example of Deleuze and Guattari's claim that "minor literature doesn't come from a minor language, it is rather that which a minority constructs within a major language" (p. 16). In this regard postcolonial writers become part of a minor literature, if we consider the British literary canon as major. As a result of different linguistic and colonial policies the emerging

Afro-Italian tradition assumes the role of a minority literature within the context of Anglophone postcolonial literatures and is therefore subversive towards the dominant postcolonial canon.

In order to apply Deleuze and Guattari's conceptualization of minority literature to this postcolonial reappraisal, it is necessary to shift their analysis of Kafka (and his relation to German literature) to Italian migrant writings. Reading Afro-Italian writing within a minority literature framework highlights its double binding relation with respect, first, to the Italian canonical literature and, second, to other postcolonial established literature, such as the Anglo-Indian literature discussed here.

The condition of Italophone writings, in fact, positions itself according to different axes of minority status. As Deleuze has emphasized, "minority" is not an expression of less value but is a figuration for resistance and subversion within the establishment, a position which is inhabited or must be searched for in order to be able to express creativity and innovation.

According to Deleuze and Guattari

the three characteristics of minor literature are the deterritorialization of language, the connection of the individual to a political immediacy, and the collective assemblage of enunciation. (p. 18)

Deterritorialization refers both to the position of the writers (outside their homeland and using a language not their own) and to their extreme modes of expression (either excessive and inflated, in the manner of James Joyce, or sparse and intensified, in the manner of Franz Kafka). The *emphasis on politics* affirms that in a minor literature individual dramas become political rather than Oedipal as in a great literature. *Collective values* refers to the writer's terrain where utterances reflect a community's usage, rather than being sharply individuated.

We might as well say that minor no longer designates specific literatures but the revolutionary conditions for every literature within the heart of what is called great (or established) literature. (p. 18)

Deleuze and Guattari based their theory on the study of Kafka, who was a dislocated Jew writing in German and living in Prague. In this sense Kafka is representative of minor literature because his language is "affected by a high coefficient of deterritorialization" (p. 16). The element of deterritorialization for Prague Jews was dictated by the impossibility of their writing other than in German, which marked their distance from their primitive Czech territoriality and from the German mainstream. Furthermore being Jews and writing in German also meant their deterritorialization from Hebrew and from a religious and ethnic belonging. It is in this sense that Prague German "is a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor use" (p. 17).

For Deleuze and Guattari Kafka constitutes the quintessential example of a minor writer since he positioned himself on the margin of the great tradition of German literature in order to express another consciousness and another sensibility from “within” the German language, a language which even when “major is open to an intensive utilization that makes it take flight along creative lines of escape” (p. 26). Deleuze and Guattari plead, therefore, for a writer who should become a “stranger within his own language” since “There is nothing that is major or revolutionary except the minor” (p. 26). Deleuze and Guattari compare the appropriation of the German language by the Jews with what the blacks in America today are able to do with the English language.

The relocation of postcolonial literatures should be interpreted as being part of a minority literature that is locked in the impossibility of writing otherwise and the necessity of turning English into a deterritorialized language. It is what Deleuze and Guattari envisage as the intense utilization of language such as Joyce did with English and Beckett did with French. While Joyce operated through exhilaration and overdetermination, thereby bringing about all sorts of reterritorialization, Beckett proceeded with dryness and sobriety, pushing deterritorialization to such an extreme that nothing remains but intensities (p. 19). Many postcolonial literatures could be reinscribed along these lines of how excessively or aridly they appropriate English.

However, Deleuze and Guattari’s theorization of minor literature falls short. The intricacy of gender-related issues in the appropriation of language and the political accountability of ethnic groups forced to express themselves in the so-called minor language is not a process devoid of pain and alienation. The celebration of all minorities as productive and creative runs the risk of an irresponsible radicalism that homogenizes the differences among them and levels them into a mass of struggling groups of all the same value. Deleuze and Guattari do not glamorize minorities, nor do they reduce the complexity of the concept of minor literature to a static and fixed notion. Minor literature is a dialogic process; it is that element of subversion and uneasiness within language that eventually creates “great literatures,” expropriating the mainstream literatures from their throne of canonicity.

It is nonetheless necessary to highlight the relativity within the concept of minor literature because what can be minor in a certain context can become major in another. Some literatures, defined as minor and deterritorialized, can operate as dominant and colonizing towards others: according to Anne McClintock, “While some countries may be ‘post-colonial’ with respect to their erstwhile European masters, they may not be ‘post-colonial’ with respect to their new neighbors” (1995: 13). McClintock refers to East Timor, a Portuguese colony which fell straight into the claws of Indonesia after independence and was recognized by the U.N. as an official separate state only in 2002. In her admonition on translating Third World texts Spivak also warns that “what seems

resistant in the space of English maybe reactionary in the space of the original language" (1992: 188). The focus here is on the relationship between minorities, with the unstated implication that to be minor is glamorous. As this assumption is not always conscious and visible, it is important to argue for a relocation of cultures and literatures in which certain persisting hierarchies of power are highlighted and assessed.

This privileging of minority status is apparent in the critical acclaim and commercial success that writers in English from the territories of the empire are achieving. They overshadow the traditional British canon to such an extent that Britain has rushed to include writers such as Salman Rushdie and Ben Okri as part of the mainstream of British literature. The effect is to deny them the element of subversion and competition that they would have if they were seen as minor or postcolonials. Making them part of the canon can only bring to light the emergence of other subaltern groups who are called upon to fulfill the role of minority. If certain writers are recognized as British, they have undergone not only a process of canonization but also of normalization. It is in this light that other postcolonial literatures, which are part of Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literatures, will be here addressed. Postcolonial literatures in Italian, for example, show the process of reterritorializing the Italian language from a position as outsider. The revolutionary impact of these writers from the ex-colonies is just beginning to show its mark.

What should have been an equal position of minority, on the basis of the experience of colonization, of migration towards the country of the colonizer, and of appropriation of language, becomes instead a highly dissymmetrical field. The hegemony of English as a vehicular language makes a dominant relation that makes the writing from the Italian colonies both dispossessed and deterritorialized: first, towards the Italian language and literature that these authors have adopted in their migration and second, towards English which is the language to be tackled and the literature to be referred to when aspiring to a wider international audience.

This layering of minority status in literature can be brought into perspective by the gender issues that cut across differences of colonialism, language, and literature. Even though sharing the same gender does not make women equal, there are still some vital elements that connect women across nationalities. This is especially evident when women try to articulate their experience of migration from former colonies towards new Western cosmopolitan centers. The differences are due to their individual diversity and to their rather different backgrounds and histories. However, issues related to writing as a postcolonial dislocated woman, their being "out-of-country and out-of-language," as Rushdie would phrase it (1981: 4), link their diverse local and personal experiences through a universal anxiety that transcends individual differences.