

## INTRODUCTION

### I. TO BEGIN (A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION)

*Postcolonial Lack* is an attempt to reconvene dialogue between two seemingly antagonistic disciplines—postcolonial studies and psychoanalytic theory. Though once collaborative, the relationship between the disciplines today is marked by mutual suspicion and is even borderline hostile. Postcolonial critics, for instance, charge psychoanalytic theory with overwriting the particularities of the non-West in favor of its uniform metaphysics of being, while psychoanalytic critics disapprove of postcolonial's advocacy for the marginalized as puerile identity politics. I believe, however, that there is a critical need for mending this relationship in the context of our neoliberal present. At a time when standard arguments against postcolonial studies either typically emphasize its redundancy in the changed climate of multiculturalism and/or accuse it for being complicit in promoting neoliberal ideologies, I contest that reconnecting the disciplines can make postcolonial studies relevant for the global present alongside making psychoanalytic theory more global.

The primary focus of this book is on arguing how postcolonial studies can collaborate with psychoanalytic theory and become more theoretically rigorous in its analyses of contemporary narratives of Othering, exclusion, and cultural appropriation. Indeed, a lot remains to be done for making psychoanalysis truly global, that is, “to historicize the psychoanalytic object and objective, invade its heredity premises and insulations, and open its insights. . .to cultural and social forms that are disjunctive to its originary imperatives” (Spillers 1996, 76). But that would require a separate monograph. In this book, my concern, limited as it might be, is with postcolonial studies and its lack(s).

The argument I make in this book is simple: in order to remain relevant in the global present, postcolonial studies must move from interrogating the politics of symbolic difference to exploring the excess, surplus, or lack that linger in the wake of exercises of self-representation. Put differently, I wish to see postcolonial studies accomplish the critical task of turning focus away from the symbolic and toward the real. This book demonstrates how the psychoanalytic concepts of the other (*objet petit a*), subjectivity qua desire or/ as lack (\$), and nonbeing as surplus (jouissance) infuse greater analytic rigor into postcolonial interrogations of hegemony, othering, and subject making and how this enables us to consider the function of the real in colonial and postcolonial texts.

Postcolonial studies today has become a tool for either recovering, restoring, and recognizing muted voices or underlining the highly implicated condition of global subjectivity in matters of social inequality and injustice. These related exercises of rescue and rehabilitation of victims from global oppression and the exposition or acknowledgment of personal culpability in sustaining global inequality aim to satisfy two seminal conditions of neoliberalism. First, these appear to take action against or raise consciousness about injustice without taking any real action. Secondly, these keep people feeling good about the self-conscious and self-critical character of contemporary society without, again, requiring people to directly confront the structural or systemic conditions responsible for social inequity. In effect, on the one hand, postcolonial studies today is dominated by a competition for tragedy (i.e., discover who is the most victimized among all victims), anointing in process the victim of history as *the* only authentic subject (of speech). On the other hand, the need for continuous self-scrutiny in order to disavow even the remotest chance of being complicit in or identified with unequal exercises of power (for example, the #NotInMyName campaigns) has led postcolonial studies to focus on retaining particular identities against universalist demands of identity: “As British Muslims we utterly condemn ISIS who are abusing the name of Islam with their acts of terrorism. We call on fellow British Muslims to unite and denounce this evil group and their acts—which are done #NotInMyName” (#NotInMyName: n.p.). These trends have reduced the discipline into a redoubt for identity politics. In this book I ask: What can the discipline contribute beyond recovering, reconstituting, and reintegrating marginal identities. I must clarify, though, that the state of the discipline I am describing here is limited to my experiences of it in the U.S. academy and, at the same time, it is deliberately generalizing in order to be provocative. Routine practices of

unearthing silenced voices and giving them representation in the mainstream have lulled the inherent strengths of the discipline and slight provocation is in order for waking it up from this stupor.<sup>1</sup>

The need to focus on *reconquest of silenced identities* has reached such a feverish pitch in the present that searches for marginal human voices are proving not enough (Abdel-Malek [1981] cited in Lazarus 2011, 255). Inspired by what Badiou terms twenty-first-century messianic environmentalism and the recent turn toward nonhumans and the environment, postcolonialists today are training focus on “rescuing” muted animals and abiotic things (Badiou 2018, n.p.; Grusin 2015). This cozying together of “old” and “new” academic cliques merely adds a layer to postcolonial’s demands for rehabilitating excluded subjects—their insertion into and respectful accommodation within global culture—and for calling out implicated subjects. Caught up in these agendas, postcolonial studies makes the mistake of forgetting what theorists such as Gayatri Spivak and Edward Said often repeated. Namely, reversing symbolic positions—the self versus the Other, the center versus the margin, and the nonhuman instead of the human—only reproduces the existing hierarchy by another name (Spivak 1999, 9). And that domination and our association in domination, direct or indirect, is not simply a matter of ignorance that can be revoked by telling the ugly truths about complicity or by appealing to our morals. We should, rather, recognize these disciplinary orientations as symptomatic of the hegemonic control neoliberalism enjoys over the academy. As long as capitalism models conformity as well as scripts its opposition, postcolonial cultures and its literary, academic, and civil societies are destined to remain interpellated by the West (Nandy 1983, xii).

How can we *rescue* postcolonial studies from its current state? I submit the following: *hystericization of the discipline*; or, what Spivak advocates for upending the master’s discourse, namely, *render it uncanny*. In *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*, Spivak writes:

I have not tried to diagnose Kant’s hidden “beliefs” here. I have constructed a version of a script *within* which his text may be seen as held. To read a few pages of the master’s discourse allowing for the parabasis operated by the native informant’s *impossible eye* makes appear a shadowy countercene. (1999, 37; emphasis mine)

Spivak’s methodology in this passage provides me both the cue to connect psychoanalytic theory to postcolonial studies and the framework with or from within which to interrogate postcolonial’s habitual emphasis on binary oppo-

sition, exclusion, and othering. Put another way, by making the discipline uncanny, I demand it give up its “truth”: that the radical kernel of this discipline is not identity critique or exposition of dominant ideology but, rather, as envisioned in Fanon, it is about examining ontology in relation to historicity. The “problem of history,” that is, of colonialism and imperialism as historical material events, must be examined from the “psychoanalytic and ontological angels,” Fanon had written in his thesis (2018, 257).

I find the division between early and late Fanon, that is, the “psychoanalyst Fanon” and the “political Fanon” or the Fanon of *Black Skins, White Mask* versus the Fanon of *Wretched of the Earth*, rather futile. Even if I do not always agree with Homi Bhabha’s *reading* of Fanon or Fanon’s reading of Lacan, I find attempts to dislocate the “later Fanon”—the Fanon who is more Marxist revolutionary than a witness to colonialism’s effects on individual and collective psyche—overly disappointing. In my opinion, “Marxist” extrapolations tend to essentialize Fanon through a developmental argument. That is to say, early Fanon was naive, too invested in Western science and only through his experiences does he eventually realize true universality of Marx, hence the shift from psychoanalysis to revolutionary Marxism. While some consider this an appropriate historical overview of Fanon’s thinking, I remain skeptical due to the psychologism invoked in this reading of Fanon’s intellectual development not to mention being upset at the unnecessary infantilization of early Fanon. I prefer instead to think of Fanon as a complicated thinker exploring and examining conditions of colonialism from different perspectives. Simply put, I do not seek to privilege one set of his thinking over another and absolutely refuse to frame an argument for the development of this thought in terms of a naive beginning and a mature end. In fact, I consider Fanon’s highlighting of ontology in relation to colonialism as his primary contribution. Put differently, Fanon shows how colonialism unravels the ontological uncertainty of both the colonizer and the colonized by exposing their beings as marked by the space of nonbeing or what exists between the colonial constructions of “white” and “black” identities. The subject emerges as split between these imaginary identities or, more pertinently, inhabits the gulf between these identities. The subject in the colony is not-All, never whole and never supported in history by some essential substance or master signifier. It exists only as a flicker between two signifiers but never in itself.

Peter Hudson offers a useful summary of this particular aspect in Fanon’s writing. Hudson writes,

Torn between two impossibles—to be white and to be black—the first barred and second an impossibility in its own terms as there is no black “being”—blackness produces no “ontological resistance”—“turn white or disappear” sums up the ontological void of the black colonised subject. Made to want to be white, but incapable of this—he is black; and his blackness seen through his own “white” eyes reduces him to “nothing.” The colonial symbolic is so constructed as to give the black subject nothing to hold onto—no orthopaedic support for an identity—just a whiteness forever eluding him and a blackness that doesn’t “exist” in any case. Within the colonial matrix, this is the ontological vortex that is the elementary colonial identity and lived experience of the colonised black subject; and all his compulsive (self-destructive) pathologies, his specific repertoire of “reactional” conduct, have their source in this primary ontological differential. So, fundamentally, colonialism is an ontological differential between white and black subjects; and this orders each and every sphere or sector of colonial society (including the economy). (2013, 264–65)

This understanding of the subject as lack—nonbeing as the signature of radical antagonism that results from colonialism and consequently determines social relations within colonial society—is not just a psychoanalytic perspective on the subject but the subject here represents the cause for the political. In other words, a realization of subjectivity (I or being) as the condition of and as contingent to the state of radical negation or nonbeing can galvanize newer imaginaries of emancipatory action. I say “newer” because the realization of nonbeing as the constitutive condition for all being, colonizer and colonized, helps free anticolonial struggle from the fantasy of reversing power structures. Fanon is quite clear on this point: decolonization does not end with the end of colonial rule or the replacement of the colonizer by the formerly colonized. The assertion of the colonized’s black identity against the colonizer’s white identity is only the first stage of liberation and must be followed by the dissolution of *all* identities in *the night of the absolute*: a new (universal) humanism founded on the suspension of all certainties of being is the true goal of decolonization (Fanon 2008, 112; see also, Ciccariello-Maher 2010). In other words, revolution cannot be limited to reversing symbolic binaries but, rather, must dismantle the system responsible for maintaining these binaries. Colonial experience is isomorphic with the experience of living in capitalism:

both introduce division in society forcing the majority to inhabit the space of in-betweenness or the state of limbo between the unavailable “white” and the impossible “black”—the space between “us” and “them.” By asking, we reintroduce the affective agency of this in-between, unbearable space, or nonbeing, into considerations of postcolonial analyses, I am rooting for reorienting the focus of postcolonial studies toward the instance of the surplus in the mechanisms of othering, difference, and subject making.

## II. THE POSTCOLONIAL SAMIZDAT

According to Terry Eagleton, there exists somewhere a secret handbook for postcolonial critics. This samizdat rulebook instructs both neophytes and vested scholars of the discipline in two fundamental rules. The first rule of postcolonialism is to deny postcolonialism. To call postcolonial “bogus” (as Spivak does in *Critique of Postcolonial Reason*) or to excuse one’s self from the label “postcolonial critic” has become the *de rigueur* gesture, according to Eagleton. With every postcolonial book beginning by rejecting the notion of the postcolonial and asserting the impossibility of ever grounding what postcolonialism means, “[t]he idea of the post-colonial has taken such a battering from post-colonial theorists that to use the word unreservedly of oneself would be rather like calling oneself Fatso, or confessing to a furtive interest in coprophilia,” avers Eagleton (1999, n.p.).

The second rule of postcolonialism: “Be as obscurantist as you can decently get away with” (ibid.). To Eagleton, postcolonialists are guilty of writing in styles inaccessible to the general reading public; their avowed sentiments for underlining the communicative gap between the center and the margins, the elite and the subaltern, nothing more than a sham. These ivory-tower academics are in reality capitalism’s trusted vanguard. The secret handbook exists for training postcolonial theorists to substitute cultural frameworks in place of political analyses, thus leaving capitalism unchallenged and students unprepared to question the economic causes for (their) social inequality. As Eagleton sees it, postcolonialism is “a way of being politically radical without necessarily being anti-capitalist, and so is a peculiarly hospitable form of leftism for a ‘post-political’ world” (ibid.).

Eagleton’s concern over the postcolonial underground sounds cannily similar to the neoconservative Stanley Kurtz’s views about Edward Said’s plot to destroy America. In his testimony to the “Subcommittee on Select Education,

Committee on Education and the Workforce U.S. House of Representatives,” dated June 19, 2003, Kurtz charged Said and “postcolonial theory” with weakening American democracy and jeopardizing national security. Kurtz claimed, “Title VI-funded professors take Edward Said’s condemnation of scholars who cooperate with the American government very seriously. For years, the beneficiaries of Title VI have leveled a boycott against the National Security Education Program, which supports foreign language study for students who agree to work for national security–related agencies after graduation.” The boycott has “change[d] the purpose and nature of the program itself, which is to stock our defense and intelligence agencies with accomplished speakers of foreign languages.” This resulted in the September 11 attacks because “transmissions from the September 11 hijackers went untranslated for want of Arabic speakers in our intelligence agencies” (Kurtz 2003, 9–11, 69–78).

Kurtz’s view of postcolonial theory as an organized left-wing infiltration of the U.S. academy which has as its ultimate goal the destruction of U.S. political (democracy), cultural (Western civilization), and moral (Christian) values is analogous to the basic ideological motif of the new conservatives in Europe who believe that failing to overpower the West through the communist revolution, a secretive communist center plotted to gain control of the universities in order to destroy the “Christian ethical foundation” and secure the communist takeover of society. According to these European new conservatives, this underground operation began with the Frankfurt school, and current-day disciplines such as feminism, LGBTQ studies, or cultural Marxism, most commonly, are the natural outcomes of this plan (see Žižek 2018a, n.p.).

I mention these three critiques (Eagleton, Kurtz, European conservatives) because, one, they are symptomatic of the general criticism of the discipline, and, two, because irrespective of the critic’s ideological situation, whether Left or Right, postcolonial studies always finds itself in the crosshairs of some of the most vitriolic censures. The most stinging criticisms of the discipline, however, came from postcolonial academics such as Benita Parry, Arif Dirlik, and Aijaz Ahmad, who through the 1980s and 1990s routinely censured the discipline’s grounding in mid-twentieth-century French theory, especially berating the influence of Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, and Jacques Lacan on Edward Said, Gayatri Spivak, and Homi Bhabha. According to this critique, postcolonial’s *linguistic turn* compromised its ability to convincingly analyze the material conditions of social oppression suffered by real individuals and real communities in the colony and the postcolony. In the last two decades, critics such as Slavoj Žižek and Vivek Chibber have reiterated similar arguments con-

demning the discipline as fashionable nonsense. Žižek and Chibber have both criticized the discipline for *culturalizing politics*, sidelining Marxist thought, and complementing neoliberal identity politics. According to them, the discipline's lack of focus on class and continued fascination with discursive practices of becoming and belonging have rendered it completely incapable of interrogating the current dispensations of global capitalism. Postcolonialism today fails to realize the modalities of ideological oppression inherent in oft-stated ideals of multiculturalism, tolerance, human rights, and democratic pluralism.

This double whammy—materiality and reality—ensured the divorce between postcolonial studies and French theory, including psychoanalytic theory. But this has since proven unfortunate for two reasons. One, separation from French theory never did manage to put postcolonial studies back on a path to Marx, and two, the separation shifted the discipline toward reparative work and pushed it farther away from radical theoretical imaginations of power, resistance, and otherness. What Žižek notes now as the condition of the discipline is the direct result of forgoing theory. As I have written elsewhere, the diminution of postcolonial studies resulted not from its investment in theory, but, rather due to its separation from theory (Basu Thakur 2015). Specifically stated, having forfeited the initial advantage of its connection to French theory, postcolonial studies suffers from a lack of theoretical rigor and this lack makes it incapable of pursuing qualified arraignments of contemporary maneuvers of self-representation and Othering. With exclusive focus being given to unearthing buried voices—contrastive communities, marginalized cultures, and exsanguinated identities—the discipline has become enmeshed in identity politics.

With the discipline leaning toward vacuous searches for competing victim voices, an unwanted competition has taken over postcolonial research. It is invested in unearthing, weighing, and measuring who has historically suffered more; which communities are the most marginalized; and which victim has the right to stake the strongest claim to historical persecution, trauma, and exploitation. But questions remain about methods used to quantify the different cases of oppression. What makes one community more exploited than the next and what new kinds of Othering are at work within these assessments? Or, to put it bluntly, how is it okay to protest exploitation of women and children in the United States but remain indifferent to, even complicit in, the oppression of Palestinian, Afghan, and Nicaraguan women and children by the U.S. military-industrial complex? Postcolonial studies in America today is that face of U.S./global liberalism which remains content with claiming



rightful angst over historical suffering while being absolutely noncommittal regarding U.S. foreign policy. Seeking rehabilitation, recognition, and reparation for victims—the latter voices included in the syllabus and their plights recorded in new research tomes—postcolonial academic work in the global world does little more than coopt and sanitize potential radical activism within the facile folds of an imagined neoliberal harmony. On the one hand, celebrating victim identity reduces political speech to testimonials of suffering that are to be empathized with and sincerely understood but never allowed translation into direct action against the system. On the other, substitution of political action with appeals and pleas seeking redress from the system responsible for producing the conditions of suffering destroys any scope of true political emancipation for the victims (Dean 2009). Yet a large section of the U.S. academy, including a substantial part of the postcolonial community, appears unmoved by the university's neoliberal turn. To them: *postcolonial is dead!*

### III. POSTCOLONIAL IS DEAD; REIMAGINING POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES

In his passionate defense of postcolonial studies' continued relevance in the twenty-first century, Robert Young argues that as long as othering, exploitation, and hegemonic dominance exist, the discipline remains a crucial "*political project*—to reconstruct Western knowledge formations, reorient ethical norms, turn the power structures of the world upside down, refashion the world from below." In the "postracial" multicultural world, the discipline is needed for interrogating "the hidden rhizomes of colonialism's historical reach" and the muted or not immediately identifiable forms via which processes of self-representation at the expense of the Other continues to unfold in plain sight (Young 2012, 20–21). Young does not dismiss the argument that transformations in global cultures warrant changes in postcolonial studies' analytic praxis, most importantly the need to expand and revise existing understandings of the self-other relation. Unlike the nineteenth century, when alterity was symbolically constructed and selectively appropriated in order to constitute the image of Europe's sovereign self, we now need to add to this reading a theoretical understanding of the other as "not something produced [only] as a form of exclusion but [also as] fundamental to being itself" (ibid., 39). This is especially critical in the twenty-first century when popular opinion is toward celebrating, embracing, and protecting the Other to the extent of homoge-

nizing them. For instance, our neoliberal societies prohibit and disavow any criticism of the Other, claiming the latter's suffering or victimhood should be their only identity. But is this really different from nineteenth-century practices of Othering? Is this not another way for sustaining the subject of the West in the era of globalization? What is the difference between the liberal, tolerant view of the Other and the conservative dehumanizations of people of color, LGBTQ communities, the immigrant, and the refugee? I discuss these questions in the chapters. For the moment, let me say that I consider Young's essay a clarion call to postcolonialists for moving beyond symbolic politics and into the politics of the Real. Or, past Otherness as symbolic to otherness as irreducible, uncanny, and traumatic. The latter manifests the fundamental impasse at the heart of the social and is both constitutive of social relations and disruptive of social communication. Correspondingly, this otherness eviscerates the fiction of the subject as master or the subject-supposed-to-know.

My book takes Young's call seriously. It seeks to theoretically ground his argument about reframing critical dialogue over radical alterity or otherness via what I deem necessary, namely, a *return* to Freudian-Lacanian psychoanalytic theory. I see this move as putting postcolonial studies beyond the cramping politics of symbolic difference and closer toward delivering the *political project* of examining the function and consequences of the antagonism constitutive of the social. For when we accept the emergence of being qua nonbeing or underline the irreparable antagonism structuring intersubjective relations, we return to discussing that which makes politics and discourse possible. Alenka Zupančič teaches us that politics covers up the impossibility of social relation by making the fundamental antagonism appear temporary, a passing impediment in the path of accomplishing perfect social harmony (Zupančič 2016). Commonly, political discourse gives an imaginary position and symbolic meaning to this temporary condition/impediment—it is the Other whose exclusion from the social promises the liberation from all antagonisms. In Nazi Germany this position was occupied by the figure of the Jew; in twenty-first century globalized India it is the Muslims, Dalits, and the seculars. Indeed, the logic of imperial-fascist ideology and the contemporary neoliberal ideology map together on this point—a perfect social state is impossible without the fantasy about the Other's excessive enjoyment. The Other as victim or the Other as the enemy within is excessive for the suffering they have experienced and/or for the threat they contain. Therefore, only by accommodating and/or excising them can a social utopia come into existence.

The “excess” I discuss in relation to the other, however, ruptures this very politics of Othering. I examine the other’s surplus enjoyment that erupts suddenly to throw hegemonic behemoths of institutional classifications and symbolic categorizations into total disarray. Most commonly experienced in terms of the other’s unfathomable desires (what does it want) and the other’s confusing agency (why did it do that), this other is uncontainable, unknowable, and (hence) unsymbolizable. In the face of this other, prescience of selfhood folds into an absence and the subject-supposed-by-philosophy (*one who can know or loves to know*) dissolves or barely sustains subjectivity qua anxiety.

The other inhibiting Othering—the other which impedes or escapes symbolization—fills a lacuna in habitual postcolonial interrogations of the Other as the excluded self-referent (Young 2012, 36). Insofar as the other’s surplus nonbeing unravels social identities as fiction and authority as indeterminate and fragile, discussing this irascible surplus helps reconceptualize the universal in terms of our shared ontological lack. Only when we understand the universal as not founded in a common positive element but a shared excluded one, that is, a universal of negated subjects, are we freed from thinking in terms of symbolic difference—master and the slave—and move closer toward a radical *politics of affiliation* among *all* ontologically divided subjects.

Shifting focus from difference to surplus does not mean ending examinations of the politics of Othering; rather, this shift adds to existent postcolonial interpretations of Othering by highlighting a new set of ethical and political considerations emerging in direct consequence of the other’s irreducible alterity. In wanting postcolonial studies to recognize and mediate its oversight of the other-as-surplus, I wish to see the discipline know its lack. As the book’s title conveys, what postcolonial studies lacks in the twenty-first century and what must be done in order to effectively interrogate past and continuing politics of exploitation, domination, and Othering can be routed through questions of the other’s radical alterity without compromising on interrogating capital and the various discursive mechanisms of Othering.

Rounding off his attack on postcolonialism as “a brand of culturalism, which inflates the significance of cultural factors in human affairs,” Eagleton counsels in “Postcolonialism and ‘postcolonialism’” (1998) that the discipline should actively embrace “openness, dialogism, *a refusal of simplistic binary oppositions, and a due recognition of the mixed, unstable, undecidable, indeterminate nature of things*” (26). His advice for most parts has gone unheeded, as postcolonial analyses narrowed over time into historicist ventures. Responding

to Young's call for reimagining the discipline and taking cue from Eagleton's advice, and in no less measure guided by rereadings of Fanon and Spivak via Lacan, this book underlines the need for routing postcolonial analyses of power relations and social dynamics through the question of ontology. But before this can be done, a difficult conversation must be enacted: How to get old enemies speaking to one another again? Bringing postcolonial studies to dialogue with psychoanalytic theory is easier said than done. Misunderstandings stemming from almost three decades of misreadings and misappropriations from both sides have constructed an insurmountable barrier between the disciplines.<sup>2</sup>

#### IV. SPIVAK'S LOVE LETTER

Spivak captures the postcolonial unease with psychoanalysis in her 1993 essay "Echo." She writes:

I have always felt uneasy about the use of psychoanalysis in cultural critique since it is so culture-specific in its provenance. Like many others, I too have felt that Marxism, focusing on something on a much higher level of abstraction than the machinery, production, and performance of the mental theater, and as obviously global as capitalism, is not open to this particular charge. (*To say capitalism is all over the place is not as universalist as to say everyone has the same-pattern psyche*). . .

For the use of feminist psychoanalysis in understanding sexual difference and gendering I feel some sympathy because it is so actively contestatory. But general cultural critique has always seemed to me to be quite another matter. *Without the risks or responsibilities of transference at least implicitly diagnostic and taxonomic, ignoring geopolitical and historical detail in the interest of making group behavior intelligible, and not accountable to any method of verification, the brilliance of psychoanalytic cultural criticism has always left me a bit suspicious.*

*Yet Freud has remained one of my flawed heroes, an intimate enemy.* To his race, class, and gender-specificity I would apply the words I wrote about Charlotte Bronte more than a decade ago: "If even minimally successful, my reading should incite a degree of rage against the gendered/imperialist narrativization of history, that it should produce so abject a script for him." (2012, 219–20; emphasis mine)

For a postcolonial critic to claim interest in Freud is to invite charges of Eurocentrism, of “race, class, and gender-specificity,” Spivak announces in her *love letter* to Freud (ibid., 220). Interestingly enough, a few pages later in that same essay she revises her stand on Freud with help from Bimal Krishna Matilal: “Matilal,” she says, “allowed me to make room for Freud in my intellectual world” (ibid.). But this Freud or Spivak’s Freud is an ethical philosopher (like Derrida) whose primary contribution is recognizing “the aporia between terminable and interminable analyses” or the impossibility of knowledge-production/meaning making (ibid., 220–21). This anecdote of personal conversion notwithstanding, the habitual stance in postcolonial studies has always remained closer to Spivak’s initial rejection of Freud. This has not only led to a foreclosure of Freud or psychoanalysis from postcolonial discussions but also, more disastrously, a disavowal of Spivak as one of the finest readers of Freud.<sup>3</sup>

The story is not too different on the other side. For a Freudian-Lacanian to show interest in postcolonial studies almost always earns the reproach: How can you claim to be a Lacanian if you acknowledge arguments about particularities? “Being Lacanian” implies proving detachment from the particular and siding with the universal. But, in my opinion, the psychoanalytic critique of postcolonial particularity is as banal as the postcolonial critique of the psychoanalytic universal insofar as both misunderstand one another. Neither seems to understand that the universal condition of lack can find diverse, particular expressions or that our particular expressions of alienation extending from feelings of not belonging to our families to not being of this planet are only isomorphic human characterizations of the unutterable experience of being severed from (imagined) wholeness.

Mrinalini Greedharry does an excellent job of summarizing this decades-old conflict between the disciplines. I will not repeat that narrative here, directing interested readers instead to Greedharry’s book *Postcolonial Theory and Psychoanalysis: From Uneasy Engagements to Effective Critique* (2008). By avoiding retelling a known story, the gist of which is already captured in Spivak’s passage above, I am choosing to go directly to my point about the disciplines being what, after Ashis Nandy, I will call “intimate enemies.” But prior to that I wish to awaken readers to the basic differences between existing works that study the intersections between the disciplines and my focus in this book.

To begin with Greedharry, while it is one of the few recent works to attempt a disciplinary conversation between the old enemies—“what psychoanalysis has done for postcolonial studies and what postcolonial studies might do for

psychoanalysis”—her book is more focused on postcolonial theorists who work with psychoanalytic theory (Fanon, Bhabha, Nandy, Kakkar, etc.) and is also not Lacanian in orientation. By contrast, *Postcolonial Lack* is “strictly” Lacanian in its understanding of, as well as examinations of, postcoloniality. Recent works that *are* Lacanian in orientation and focus on coloniality, decoloniality, racial identity, globalization, etc. include Derek Hook’s *A Critical Psychology of the Postcolonial: The Mind of Apartheid* (2012), “Postcolonial Psychoanalysis” (2008), and “Fanonian Ambivalence: On Psychoanalysis and Postcolonial Critique” (2013; co-authored with Ross Truscott); Sheldon George’s *Trauma and Race: A Lacanian Study of African American Racial Identity* (2016); some essays in George and Hook’s coedited Special Issue of *Psychoanalysis, Culture, and Society*, titled “Lacanian Psychoanalysis: Interventions into Culture and Politics” (2018); Jamil Khader’s *Cartographies of Transnationalism in Postcolonial Feminisms: Geography, Culture, Identity, Politics* (2014) and his essay “Žižek’s Infidelity: Lenin, the National Question, and the Postcolonial Legacy of Revolutionary Internationalism” (2013) in Khader and Rothenberg’s co-edited *Žižek Now: Current Perspectives in Žižek Studies*; Ilan Kapoor’s *Celebrity Humanitarianism: The Ideology of Global Charity* (2012) and *Psychoanalysis and the Global* (2018); and, Azeen Khan’s “Lacan and Race” (2018). However, while all these books and essays are mostly Lacanian in orientation, and though obvious intersections exist between Hook’s readings on apartheid and race in South Africa and George’s exploration of African American identity and my book, the latter remains exclusive in its singular focus on the discipline of postcolonial studies. Secondly, except for Greedharry, none of these works attempt to reestablish conversation between psychoanalysis and postcolonial studies as disciplines, remaining partial to using psychoanalytic theory for interrogating race relations in the contemporary world and/or for explaining the postcolonial global condition. I discuss the structure of the book and its textual/disciplinary focus in more detail in section VI of this introduction.

## V. INTIMATE ENEMIES, POSTCOLONIAL STUDIES, AND PSYCHOANALYSIS

Postcolonial studies and psychoanalysis share a similar objective: interrogate the (im)possibility of university discourse and constructions of identity and social relations based on this discourse. What poses as knowledge or discourse is supported by fantastic master signifiers guaranteeing knowledge as absolute

and objective. At one level, these master signifiers symbolize or symbolically assure us of power and completeness. On another level, the desire for the master signifier paradoxically attests to our inability to exist without fantastic objects, ideas, or things covering up the fact of our irreparable ontology. Simply put: we can neither endure knowing nor exist without compulsively overwriting our lack of knowledge. This condition is not descriptive of not having or not being but is, rather, illustrative of being as a condition of lack/non-being. The subject of lack is therefore indeed better rephrased and understood as *subjectivized lack* (Chiesa 2007, 6).

The colonized other (*objet a*) inhabits or constitutes the heart of the colonial sociosymbolic. It underscores the impossibility or absence of any master-signifier, or a prevailing symbolic big Other, guaranteeing the stability of this order. The other's nonbeing is the nonrelation(ship) deadlocking social relations between the master and the slave, the self and the other, the center and the margin(s), while its appearance in the order composes the moment of symbolic collapse. It is not that the symbolic irreparably collapses into an unredeemable heap but this is the moment when the symbolic's indeterminacy stands exposed. The appearance of the other or encountering this other opens up the void constitutive of as well as integral to the social. For what we think ails our being and how we think we know what ails us offer neither the truth about our being nor an identification of the real of our being. Being in this doldrum *is* what makes us human.

It is possible to explain the relation between postcolonial studies and psychoanalysis in another way: both expose the image as *construction*. Beget by fiction—an image of boisterous autonomy—this image, which precedes the social determination of the self in experiences of a violently mutable outside world, remains forever irreducible to the self (Freud 1991; Spivak 2003, 22; Lacan 2006, 75–81). This early image is distant from and incommensurable with the self. In the symbolic or the domain of the ego overseen by the presence of the Other, this primordial image appears as stain—a rupture in the complacent confident symbolic mesh that acts to absorb the subject's falls—and speaks of the universe as flaw and nonbeing as the only condition of existence (Lacan 2006, 694). What transforms this disemboweling primordial image of the real to present it *as lack* or desire is another fiction—the fiction of a big Other authorizing this desire and guaranteeing its potential fulfillment in a deferred space, time, and object.

“Real” reality is conditionally overwritten to appear absorbed in the image of the self. What we claim as the real image (identity) is beset by the logic of our

present-day instagram(mar). We appear on Instagram as real—capturing us in real moments as real selves—when what we are really doing in these moments is that we are posing for the desire of the Other. Put differently, we (always) wish to see ourselves in the eyes of the Other. Sadly, postcolonial studies has ignored psychoanalysis's emphasis on the Other as empty, and accordingly their desire to investigate authentic identities has been hijacked by the desire of the Other. To be a postcolonial we have to remain committed to the Other's desire: we cannot question the dominant neoliberal laws of empathy, tolerance, and pluralism. Anyone questioning whether the other should be characterized homogenously with suffering and homologously with victim identities is promptly chastised for being intolerant, fascist, and Eurocentric. "Eurocentric" as if intolerance, homophobia, systemic oppressions of minority do not exist outside the West or within societies and communities from the non-West. We witness a nuanced ideology here. While such diasporic communities as Indians and Pakistanis in the UK can be charged with acts of bias as "honor killings," refugee populations insofar as they have experienced some form of heightened trauma are always excused from all charges of bigotry or prejudice. This liberal dispensation is yet again another point where contemporary conservative articulation intersects with (neo)liberal discourse. This book attempts to avoid this pitfall by seeking to *return* postcolonial studies to one of its original exegeses, namely, considerations of the radical nonbeing of the colonized other as the unimaginable truth of colonial and postcolonial social relations.

*Postcolonial Lack* claims that in order to remain relevant in the global present, postcolonial studies must move from interrogating the politics of symbolic difference to exploring the other's surplus. That is to say, we (re)turn to critically considering the other's irreducible nonbeing in postcolonial texts about fraught social relations. From others who retract themselves away from violent power struggles, libidinal economies, and capitalist commodity cultures to others that displace the human from its imaginary stewardship over this planet, this book highlights a new set of ethical and political considerations that emerge for studying postcolonial social relations in the context of the other's unbearable alterity. The chapters of this book expound upon how eruptions of the other's nonbeing—the other's surplus enjoyment as well as the other's lack (of desire)—disrupt the sociosymbolic. These are the moments when social relations are unraveled as constitutively marked by deadlocks and antagonisms which lead us toward (un)learning the routine politics and ethics of self-representation.



## VI. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

The book is divided into two broad sections, with three chapters composing the first section and two chapters plus a conclusion the second. The first section focuses on rereading postcolonial literature and film by taking into account the function of the other as real. The second section focuses more on how liberal multiculturalism repeats, rephrases, and revisions colonial-era subject-making without appearing to undertake any form of Othering. If anything, these contemporary representations appear conscious, self-reflexive, and not unwilling to dig out their own implicated subject positions. Taken together, the two sections of this book seek “new” ways for ethically engaging with otherness as radical alterity.

The first three chapters explore and interrogate the other’s sudden eruption in postcolonial literature and film. Focusing on the impossible figure of the subaltern (in Mahasweta Devi and Gillo Pontecorvo), postcolonial animals (a relic pterodactyl in Devi, again, and swarms of crabs in Amitav Ghosh), and the failure of cross-cultural communication (in Leila Aboulela and Tony Gatlif), I underline through these chapters the other as impediment; or, the emergence and/or realization of the other’s radical alterity as recognition for the fundamental antagonism structuring all social relations.

Serially put, chapter 1 describes how the other’s (subaltern’s) surplus enjoyment tears a hole in the symbolic logic of dominant hegemony, thus opening up a space for reconceptualizing subaltern freedom. Chapter 2 discusses how animals displace established subject positions by bringing the radical extimacy of a 4.5-billion-years-old planet into intimate focus with our alienated relation to this planet. The third chapter, the most humanly oriented of these three, focuses on love, understanding, and dialogue in order to disclose how human endeavor to memorialize the other through archives only illustrates the impossibility of this task.

The second section illustrates how contemporary celebrations of identity politics, political correctness, and multiculturalist activism ideologically replace discussions of radical alterity with discussions of empathy, charity, and individuality. My comparative discussion of Katherine Boo’s representation of urban precariats in chapter 4 shows contemporary critiques of globalization’s effects on the poor in the global South are nothing but recycled presentations of the imperial fantasy of the third world as endemically corrupt, incorrigibly unchangeable, and politically inflexible. In then comparing Boo with Narayan

Gangopadhyay, a Bengali writer from the 1940s, in whose short story the urban poor appear differently, my end goal is not to erase Boo out of the scene but, rather, to underline my repeated emphases on seriously taking Spivak's critique that reversing binary oppositions is futile. Therefore, instead of criticizing Boo's representations as recycled clichés about the third world, I argue for understanding her unfortunate entrapment in the desire of the Other. I contend that Boo epitomizes the liberal postcolonial Western subject whose desire for politically correct representation of the other marks her out as another victim of identity politics. Due to her racial makeup Boo cannot ethically embrace the other and must always assume the morally sanctified position even when representing the most disturbing or disgusting others.

I carry this argument forward into the fifth chapter where I take up some recent discussions about identity politics. Beginning in my neck of the woods, the unremarkable and stereotyped state of Idaho, I claim first that the Democrat buildup in and competition for the state's 2018 gubernatorial race was underwritten by the *allure of images* or a politics over which candidate has a better (politically correct) image rather than being dominated by important policy questions. I use this instance to segue into discussing how, today, identity politics has ended up producing very different readings of films such as *Black Panther* (2018) and *Gran Torino* (2009). Conceived as a Spivakian exercise in unlearning, this chapter claims *Gran Torino* is a more racially as well as politically sensitive film than *Black Panther*. In the conclusion of this chapter, I return again to Idaho politics. Occasioning a trite exchange between the then Republican congressman Raul Labrador and the now retired Boise State University president Robert Kustra, I underline the emptiness of identity politics and how conversations directed by identity politics, and images associated with this politics, commonly obviate the real issues.

The book concludes with a chapter marked "Conclusion: Particular Universal," which, structurally speaking, should be received as a conclusion though it also works as a chapter specific to the discussions in the second half of the book. More specifically, it focuses on current debates over universalism and particularism and through this attempts to respond to the habitual charge against psychoanalysis, namely, that psychoanalysis passes off its Eurocentric imagination and bourgeois values as universal (Gibson 2003, 130). This charge in recent years have taken shape of the debate between the particular's right to exist against the universal's aggression and has been a pestering, to wit, lingering, issue for cultural and philosophical debates of the last quarter as well as for the more intimate conflict between psychoanalysis and postcolonial

studies. I intervene in this debate, however, not from the psychoanalytic side but through Spivak. Interestingly, Spivak's usual response to the issue is similar to the response from the psychoanalytic side: She bifurcates the notion of universalism dependent on positive master signifiers—male, able-bodied, white-billionaire—to emphasize what “falls out” of signification every time we claim the universal on basis of master signifiers. In other words, as I read them, both Spivak and Lacan, expose the universal as empty. There is nothing that makes the universal *universal*, yet we strive after words and images that would make the universal the all-out success we want it to be when we only encounter the lack(s) of the universal. By showing the master signifier as empty—incapable of reproducing reason—I re-situate in the conclusion of this book what I claim throughout: equality is alterity.<sup>4</sup>