Book Review: Postmodern Gandhi and Other Essays - Gandhi in the World and at Home By Lloyd I. Rudolph and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph

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In *Transnational America*, Inderpal Grewal offers a forceful and timely critique of neoliberalism and cultural feminism. Using a rigorously theoretical framework, Grewal interrogates the emergence of transnational subjects through the shifting relationships between politics, culture and the market in the last decades of the twentieth century. Focusing on the complex connections between the United States and the production of South Asian identities and subjectivities, Grewal critically unpacks the terms ‘global’ and ‘globalization’. Combining literary analysis and a postcolonial perspective with feminist, cultural, and social theories, Grewal examines the notions of national and global citizenship that emerged from the many feminisms, nationalisms, and consumer cultures that proliferated at the end of the twentieth century. She argues that the idea of ‘America’ and the ‘American Dream’ worked to make ‘Americans’ out of immigrants and migrants without also ensuring their full participation in the nation-state. American nationalism produced a newly globalized neoliberal subject that existed both within and outside of the boundaries of the nation-state.

Central to Grewal’s argument is the assertion that ‘choice’ is fundamental to modern American identity. Grewal analyzes how the discourse of choice is disseminated through consumption and explores the deep cultural transformations associated with the development of new consumer-based technologies, such as the internet. Her interest in the technologies of consumer culture lies ‘not in the technologies themselves, but in how these technologies are both subject-producing and subjectifying’ (p. 31). In doing so, Grewal...
both utilizes and critiques Foucauldian analysis to interrogate the forms of governmentality and disciplinary apparatuses used. She sees an unmistakable link between the subject-producing and subjectifying power of late-twentieth-century neoliberalism and earlier histories of colonialism.

To make this argument, Grewal first examines the cultural production of three novelists, Bharati Mukherjee, Chitra Bannerjee Divakaruni and Amitav Ghosh, who emigrated from India to the United States in the twentieth century. Through their literary work and their identities as migrants to the first world, the authors participate in the circulation of ‘knowledges’ about India and the United States that reinforces the dichotomy that imagines tradition as repressive and modernity as liberating, particularly by ensuring the freedom of ‘choice’. As institutions like the Nobel Prize created the notion of literature with a national identity, Grewal suggests, these three novelists are able to claim their work as ‘Indian’ and ‘Bengali’ even as they write in English. This links their identity to an earlier colonialism, even though, as Asian-Americans, they also help to construct an image of a multi-ethnic America. The authors are simultaneously producers and products of the discourse of American neoliberal nationalism.

Grewal then turns her attention to the sale of Mattel Barbies in India. An examination of marketing strategies reveal that the decision to sell the well-known image of American white femininity to South Asian consumers was not only cultural imperialism but also an expression of India’s economic liberalism of the 1980s. Barbie did not attract middle- and upper-class Indian consumers until the blond-haired, blue-eyed Barbie was dressed in a sari. Thus, while Mattel used the idea of ‘America’ to sell Barbie in India, it was an image of America mediated by the transnationalization of the fashion and beauty industry and the growing number of Indian migrants to the United States. These connections, Grewal argues, assisted in the production of a form of cultural feminism: Indian consumers could choose to purchase a toy image of the ideal ‘American’ woman, even as she was dressed in traditional Indian attire.

The following two chapters explore more explicitly the relationship between Western cultural feminism, nationalism and human rights discourses in creating an ethic of neoliberal governance at the end of the twentieth century. For example, in her examination of the welfare and feminist work of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Grewal uncovers the assumption that Western women have human rights while women outside the West do not. This ‘produced female subjects who saw themselves as “free” in comparison to their “sisters” in the developing world’ (p. 142). This binary follows the discursive patterns of earlier colonial histories and, as Grewal suggests, works as a ‘technology of transnational governmentality’ (p. 157). Similarly, the discourse of human rights also serves to maintain the nation-state and sustain national identities through the control of the refugee crisis, particularly by enabling some women to attain refugee status while denying that status to others.

The final chapter explores American nationalism after 9/11. Grewal takes a look at the way racialized and gendered subjects are ‘created within realms of social life that seem unrelated to state power’ (p. 197). She argues that the worldwide broadcast of images of terror and terrorists juxtaposed the white, male, heterosexual American against the male Middle Eastern Muslim, in effect recuperating in new ways an old category of the effeminate yet dangerous Oriental male. Post-9/11 American nationalism constructed a
racialized and gendered anti-subject through discourses of freedom and choice.

In *Transnational America*, Grewal offers an insightful and provocative analysis of the complex relationship between politics, consumption, culture and power in the creation of global subjectivities. In doing so, Grewal illustrates the usefulness of postcolonial theory as a prism through which to critically explore the entanglement of geopolitics and biopolitics with the disciplinary and governmental technologies that created neoliberal subjects at the end of the twentieth century. *Transnational America* raises important questions for those willing to confront the classed, racialized and gendered assumptions that underpin ‘the global’ in Western politics.

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In the last decade, reports about North Korea have intermittently punctuated the media universe with images of its people and its enigmatic leader (Kim Jong II, who was given a dubious cinematic homage in *Team America* (2004)), and discussion of its military capabilities. It is a country that is also foreign and mysterious to South Koreans, as seen in a recent *New York Times* article by Norimitsu Onishi discussing the stigma of acknowledging North Korean identity and its associations with social isolation, repressive ideology and nuclear armaments. In ‘North Korea Defectors Take a Crash Course in Coping’ (25 June 2006), Onishi feeds the public fascination for the two Koreas by presenting North Koreans whose new lives in South Korea highlight the disjunction between the North Korean world view that seems impossible to their South Korean cousins. But readers, like the South Koreans who encounter these North Korean defectors, are witnessing what may be a new (and to some watchers, final) phase to what had been a matter of national identity formation.

This situation’s longevity and its effects on the population merits an examination of the colonizing efforts that have left the descendants of the original players – Chinese, Japanese and Korean colonists – still resolving the remainders of their actions. Hyun Ok Park presents the political struggle over Korean bodies and economic life as played out in Manchuria, the battleground for Japan’s and China’s ambitions to dominate the late-nineteenth-century East Asia Co-Prosperity Sphere. As Park reiterates in her epilogue, ‘[t]he Manchurian experience illustrates the complex relationship between nationalism and capitalism, which still directs the dynamic processes of transnational migration, citizenship, and sovereignty over one’s own body and labor’ (p. 238). Each of these terms receives adequate attention in this complex study, though the discourse often remains on this theoretical level, which is not necessarily a detriment to experienced readers of East Asian history and politics, and is a great asset to the literature for its close examination of this volatile, tangled, yet crucial part of the China–Japan–Korea relationship dominating the twentieth century. However, the less experienced reader hoping to broaden his/her reading in postcolonial studies in East Asia will likely find a bit more difficulty getting
through some more densely packed chapters without an assist in clarifying the differences between Northern Chinese, Japanese and Korean culture of the time. For instance, we are told about the Kando Administration’s efforts to erase cultural differences between the Koreans and Chinese in their housing preferences, as a means of creating a more homogeneous Manchurian identity. Park tells us that ‘[t]he adoption of Chinese housing was required when they built new houses’ and that all Koreans were required by law to adopt a certain style (p. 115). Unfortunately we do not get a longer look at this fascinating situation, where even a more knowledgeable reader would benefit from a review of such differences at a more detailed level, and of how the political and personal realms together become the crucibles for the new Korean identity in Manchuria. Perhaps a fuller synopsis of the three different social contexts would help, as such information leavens the political analysis and moves it closer toward the examination of ‘social life’ as laid out in the book’s title.

But this is not to say the study has neglected the lived experience of Korean, Japanese and Chinese workers in the ever-shifting colonial structure alternately manipulated by the Japanese and the Chinese, as Park uses literary examples from Korean fiction about Manchurian life in chapters bookending her political and economic analysis. From *Pukkando*, a novel by An Sugil, and ‘Dual Nationality’, a short story by Kim Manson, Park presents glimpses of Korean social life lived under the doubled scrutiny of Japanese and Chinese colonial authorities, giving clear examples of how the colonized body learns to live with contradictions and gives shape to them, as the character Elder Pak in ‘Dual Nationality’ chooses Chinese-style clothing, partners and home architecture as an effort to cement his tenuous hold on his preferred colonist identity and hide his Korean roots. As such examples show, the Korean experience of this precarious political game shows the strain of bodies that play the role of pawns, sent out as representatives of the bureaucratic powers that see homesteads in a bleak landscape as the means to accumulating capital and expanded imperial borders.

Between these two chapters the study explores how triangulated colonial forces manifest, or at the very least attempt to create, a new sense of order in the contested region with its equally contested Korean workers. Many readers of East Asian history are familiar with the triangular trade pattern with the East India Company and its sale of Indian-grown opium to China, and Park’s study asks readers to look at how a similar triangular capitalist configuration affects the Asian body. Such an analysis achieves an admirable balance in discussing the divergent concerns of Japanese colonists, Chinese migrants and Korean peasants (with their ambiguous dual Japanese–Korean citizenship) and in examining the role played by agrarian cooperatives in the Manchukuo state of Manchuria. Park’s statement that ‘[t]he capitalist development of Manchurian agriculture also played a key role in the formation of the cooperatives’ appears to harbor a possible contradiction (p. 139), although the reader is rewarded with a fascinating view into how communitarianism – both as a cultural ideal and as a political ideology for the North Koreans later on – is inextricably tied to the use of capitalistic agricultural land reform as the tool of colonialism whereby cooperative members were eventually expected to become independent farmers for Japan. The cooperatives, modeled after Korean collective villages, characterize the revolutionary Koreans fighting against the capitalistic, imperialistic Japanese. According to Park’s analysis, this
concept grows from the Korean support of the Chinese revolution and its similar efforts to disengage peasants from the deathly grasp of capitalist rulers, and is what eventually creates the ideology of North Korea’s revolution.

Park’s study focuses on the early-twentieth-century conditions leading up to the North Korea we know today, which should give the reader pause. When we consider the ongoing migration of North Koreans into South Korea via China, and the social tensions lurking for Japanese people of Korean descent, Park’s study helps clarify why these uneasy movements and wary assertions of identity continue to be anxiety-ridden, and how colonialism—while definitely a lived experience for its participants, willing or otherwise—achieves a long lifespan in the collective consciousness.

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The Idea of Latin America is a fascinating account of the construction and the continued, though increasingly contested, existence of a place called Latin America. Mignolo’s central thesis questions the whole idea and universal acceptance of ‘Latin’ America, situating the geographical zone as part of the West and simultaneously marginal to it. Latin America has often been regarded as somewhat of an anomaly within postcolonialism, and this book does much to clarify the unique position of Latin America within the discourses and ideas of postcolonial studies. Mignolo’s book is thought-provoking and accessible for both the Latin Americanist and the postcolonial scholar. It offers a number of points of entry, and illuminates the ways in which an understanding of the dual influences of colonialism and modernism in Latin America (which Mignolo sees as indivisible) can inform our understanding of the wider neoliberal project, itself implicitly colonial behind a continued rhetoric of ‘development’, ‘democracy’ and ‘modernization’.

Mignolo adopts a chronological approach to problematizing and unravelling the concept and reality of Latin America and the geopolitics which surrounds it. He aims ‘to uncouple the name of the subcontinent from the cartographic image we all have of it’ and to ‘re-write history following an-other logic, an-other language, an-other thinking’, ultimately contributing to the decolonization of knowledge (pp. x, xx).

The book starts from the premise that the concept of ‘America’ was invented in the early sixteenth century, at a time when the indigenous peoples who lived in that part of the world had their own, different conceptions of time and space. However, it is only recently that Latin America has been recognized as an invention, not a discovery. Throughout his discussions, Mignolo asserts that ‘Latin America’ is not the dwelling place of Indians and blacks, who are beginning a process of reclaiming and reimagining the continent and idea of Latin America.

In Chapter 1, Mignolo talks us through the logic of coloniality, and the way in which this is produced by, and is inseparable from, modernity, arguing that ‘to implement the logic of coloniality requires the celebratory rhetoric of modernity.’ (p. 11). Here, Mignolo draws comparisons with contemporary examples from Iraq, and throughout the book he weaves in insights into the current geopolitical situation – for example, comparing Las
Casas’s catch-all classification of ‘enemy barbarism’ to refer to anyone who was perceived to be ‘actively working to undermine Christianity’, to today’s ‘terrorism’ (p. 20). Mignolo uses this first chapter to outline the establishment of hegemony by Europeans in Latin America, in which Aztec, Inca and Maya knowledges and understandings of the world were marginalized, particularly through racist constructions and categorizations.

Having highlighted the construction and operation of these hegemonic practices and the Europeans’ universalizing tendencies, in Chapter 2 the book concerns itself with revolutions and with the reordering of the modern/colonial world. Central to this is the concept of ‘Pachakutic’, literally ‘the world turned upside-down’, which was the way in which the native peoples of Tawantinsuyu and Anáhuac understood the arrival of the Europeans: ‘violent destruction, relentless invasion and a disregard for their way of life’; a convulsion of all levels of existence and the moment of the founding of the colonial wound of the modern/colonial world’ (p. 53). Mignolo argues that ‘Latin’ America, as opposed to simply ‘America’, actually emerged out of decolonization, and the ‘re-mapping of the world’, as a political project of Creole-Mestizo/a elites who, after independence in Latin America, became a postcolonial elite and established what was in effect an internal colonialism:

The colonial difference that ideologues of the Spanish Empire constructed to justify the colonization of America (e.g., the inferiority of the Indians and the non-humanity of the African slaves) was maintained and intensified by the ideologues of the new independent republics... ‘Latinidad’ produced a new type of invisibility for Indians and for people of African descent in ‘Latin America’. (p. 89)

Mignolo suggests that in the nineteenth century, after independence, ‘Latin’ America became a particularly racial category which, rather than being defined by blood or skin colour, was bound up in the region’s marginal status in relation to southern Europe and southern Europeans. Even being ‘white’ Latin American meant not being white enough, as we see today in terms of Latino/as migrating to the USA.

Towards the end of this chapter, Mignolo introduces the theme of social movements around indigeneity in Latin America, which are beginning to make visible the excluded majority: ‘the legacies of European colonialism in South America are being challenged and displaced by Indian and Afro legacies disputing languages, knowledges, religions, memories’ (p. 94). This sets the tone for the rest of the book which examines the current situation in Latin America – particularly that of Indian, Afro and other minority groups – and the rise of a new left within the region. In Chapter 3, Mignolo considers the challenge that the region of Latin America may pose to established knowledges and practices of modernity/coloniality, as marginalized groups reconstruct a ‘post’ Latin America. He particularly engages with ideas around geographies of knowledge, and with the role of language, especially colonial language, in constraining how the world can be conceptualized by subaltern groups.

Mignolo’s discussion is wide-ranging and in this final chapter he tackles issues of decolonization, interculturalidad, and the geopolitics of knowledge – again drawing in contemporary examples of the current ‘threats’ posed by the rise of Islamic knowledges and by mass
migration from Latin America to the USA. Mignolo advocates a process of ‘critical border thinking’ which may facilitate a remapping of the world, in which many ‘worlds’ – those of mestizos, Afro-Latinos/as, indigenous peoples, and Latino/as in the USA – may coexist together: ‘The explosions coming out of the theoretical, political and ethical awareness of the colonial wound make possible the imagination and construction of another world, a world in which many worlds are possible’ (p. 156).

The Idea of Latin America brings together many diverse perspectives, drawing adeptly on biblical sources, Said’s Orientalism, Subcomandante Marcos, indigenous Latin American sources, and Marxian perspectives, to name but a few. Mignolo provides fresh insight into the (post)colonial position of Latin America, and gives an exciting glimpse into the possibilities for ‘After-America’.

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The Indian Mutiny and the British Imagination.

Charles Dickens is routinely celebrated for his moral vision. Indeed, the prolific number of current films, television and stage adaptations of his writings seems to portray him as an icon of an enlightened ‘Englishness’. On 4 October 1857, Dickens wrote a now (in)famous letter in which he suggested that the inhabitants of India should, at the very least, be threatened with genocide:

I wish I were the Commander in Chief in India. The first thing I would do to strike that oriental race with amazement ... should be to proclaim to them in their language, that I considered my holding that appointment by the leave of God, to mean that I should do my utmost to exterminate the Race upon whom the stain of the late cruelties rested; and that I was there for that purpose and no other, and was now proceeding, with all convenient despatch and merciful swiftness of execution, to blot it out of mankind and raze it off the face of the Earth.

(Storey and Tillotson 1995: 459)

The ‘late cruelties’ that Dickens mentions here, of course, were the events of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. Whether or not he seriously advocated carrying this ‘proclamation’ into effect, Dickens’ comments define a debate ranging from the specificities of the Mutiny to the very essence of British imperialism itself. Should this genocidal fervour be seen as an aberration that was a departure from, as historians like Niall Ferguson would have it, a largely consensual and beneficial set of exchanges, events and relationships called imperialism? Or was an imperative towards violent conflict built into the very structure of not just British imperialism but the politics of liberalism and conservatism, and the very social and material heart of capitalist Britain itself?

These debates about the essence of empire frame, if they are not directly raised by, Gautam Chakravarty’s study of British representations of the Indian Mutiny of 1857. The traffic between historiography, the archive and the literary is the focus of Chakravarty’s argument – a process which achieves what he calls ‘transvaluation’. Further, Chakravarty is interested in accounting for the extraordinary proliferation of the kinds of writing through which a British cultural memory of the empire and challenges to it were constructed. Finally, he attempts to trace some links between this
British imagining of the Mutiny and Indian nationalist understanding and representations of it. The book’s organization facilitates the progress of Chakravarty’s lines of argument. The first two chapters look at the range of debates within British histories of the Mutiny, and the echoes they find in Indian nationalist readings of the events. The third chapter examines the literary romance and its various mutations within British historical and literary writings. Here, Chakravarty also raises the question of how the difference in location between the British settler community in India and the metropolitan community affected the different kinds of writing. The fourth, fifth and sixth chapters contain the core of Chakravarty’s argument – the specific nature of the exchange between historiography, archive and literature. Chakravarty suggests that the dominant strain within British literature of the Mutiny was a remodelling and transcending of the limits of the historical records through tropes and figures such as the preternaturally mobile hero (and just occasionally, heroine), a purportedly ‘thick’ description of the world of the Indian rebels and loyalists, and a certain coding of the events that usurped historical agency from the rebels. Threaded through these chapters and brought out strongly in the epilogue, however, is Chakravarty’s awareness of the existence of other strains within the British imagining of the Mutiny – strains which directly challenged and confronted these dominant ways of memorializing the events.

Given the intensity of the challenges – military, political, epistemological – posed by the events of the Mutiny, there was an urgent need for the British to both understand the causes of the outburst and narrate the ultimately reassuring story of the containment and defeat of the rebels by triumphant British arms. To this end, British histories of the Mutiny drew on the archival eyewitness writing and attempted to fit this in an explanatory framework that would yield an inevitable triumph of the British civilization. But within this historiography itself, there were several points of tension and disagreement. G. B. Malleson’s early pamphlet, The Mutiny of the Bengal Army: A Historical Narrative, written as the Mutiny unfolded, suggested that what had started as a purely military mutiny had evolved into a full-scale nationalist uprising because of the greed, corruption and maladministration of the civilian authorities of the East India Company. For later historians like Charles Ball and Robert Martin, however, it would be the clash between the progressive reformist force of the East India Company and a moribund, conservative India that would largely account for the Mutiny. Then again, for J. W. Kaye, it would precisely be the excesses of the revolution in social relations brought about by the Company – the ‘progress of Englishism’, as he called it – that was to be blamed. These differences between the historians reflected not only their different temporal and spatial locations, but also real material differences between the imperatives of British settlers in India, the metropolitan state, the East India Company, and metropolitan class dynamics. Chakravarty does a good job of reading the various tensions and ambiguities within the British historiography of the Mutiny as a product of the discrepancy between such imperatives, although he underplays the strength and currency of the popular radical dissenting voices that opposed the ‘pacification’ of mutinous India as well as the central aims of the British imperial project itself.

In addition to the historiographic, the idiom of literary romance and the ideology of Romantic orientalism were the other coordinates of the lineage of British Mutiny
literature. Going back to a clutch of texts from the 1780s to the 1820s that included Beckford’s *Vathek*, Southey’s *Thalaba the Destroyer* and *Curse of Kehama* and Shelley’s *Revolt of Islam*, Chakravarty shows that Romantic orientalism produced an aesthetic of eastern antiquarianism that allegorized the material contexts of colonial political-military paramountcy and extraction of labour and raw materials. By taking the example of a novel like Sydney Owenson’s *The Missionary* (1811), Chakravarty shows how this idiom of a religious, aestheticized ‘East’ that resisted the conversion into modernity would become one favourite kind of British explanation for the Mutiny when it broke out almost half a century later. The various representational strategies of British settler literature, especially the novels published between the 1820s and the 1840s provided another comprehensive resource for British imaginings of the Mutiny. Driven by the imperatives of settler society, this literature was directly opposed to Romantic orientalism in so far it was primarily concerned to ‘discover’ a degenerate and criminalized India. William Browne Hockley’s *Pandurang Hari* (1826) and *The Memoirs of a Brahmin* (1843) and Philip Meadows Taylor’s *Confessions of a Thug* (1839) serve as exemplars of this tradition that chiefly operated in a comic-parodic register and employed ventriloquized ‘authentic Indian’ narrative voices. These mock confessions that seemingly offered a thick description of Indian society would prove to be another favourite resource of the post-1857 British imagination. Chakravarty suggests that there was a further strand within British settler literature found in such novels as William Arnold’s *Oakfield* (1853). This kind of writing was exclusively focused on the settler community itself – on how its ‘progressive’ reformist ideals were periodically thrown into crisis by the reality of India, but equally how it recovered those ideals by exercising innate English virtues. Chakravarty suggests that British representations of the insurgency phase of the Mutiny would draw heavily on the Hockley–Taylor tradition, while those of the counter-insurgency and pacification phases would draw on writings of the Arnoldian kind.

The core of Chakravarty’s book, Chapters 4 to 6, tries to demonstrate how post-Mutiny British literature used these historical, literary and political-philosophical lineages to engage with, modify and transcend the historiographical and archival recordings of 1857. The limits of the latter were of various kinds: in looking for causes they had to admit various degrees of British culpability; in focusing on the immediacy of the events they could not always provide a closure that yielded the triumph of ‘Englishness’; the ‘problem’ of insurgency itself was an admission of the failure of surveillance and attested to gaps in the colonial knowledge field. Chakravarty suggests that to varying degrees the British novels and poetry (he does not consider drama very much in his book) produced a Mutiny narrative that compensated for these limits of historical writing even as they trafficked in it. Novels such as Edward Money’s *The Wife and the Ward* (1859), Flora Annie Steel’s *On the Face of the Waters* (1896), H. C. Irwin’s *With Sword and Pen* (1904), and poems such as Mary Leslie’s *The Moslem and the Hindoo* (1858) and Alfred Tennyson’s ‘The Defence of Lucknow’ (1860) – all strived to make this compensatory move. They did so in various ways – through an idiom of heroism that reinstates an innately virtuous Englishness; by attaching a mobility to their heroes (and sometimes, more interestingly, to heroines) that enabled them to penetrate Indian society and emerge with valuable information, thus redressing the historical failure of British
intelligence; and by reinventing a kind of British benevolent paternalism that imagined the repairing and restoration of ‘Anglo-India’ to its mythical pre-Mutiny harmony.

Chakravarty argues his case with good range and depth of reading. There is room, however, for a few quibbles. First, as mentioned before, I think he underplays the extent of metropolitan popular radical opposition to British counter-insurgency and its effects on British Mutiny writings. Chakravarty scrupulously notes British dissident voices, from Edward Leckey’s *Fictions Connected with the Indian Mutiny* (1859), to W. H. Russell’s Mutiny diary, to F. W. Buckler’s *The Political Theory of the Indian Mutiny* (1922). But he does not try to analyse the relationship between this tradition of dissent and ‘dominant’ historiography and literature of the Mutiny. Popular British debate about the Mutiny was extensive and fractured. Just as Charles Dickens could advocate genocidal retribution, the Chartist Ernest Jones could issue a public call to support the Mutineers against the British army even as the events unfolded from 1857–9:

There ought to be but one opinion throughout Europe on the revolt of Hindostan. It is one of the most just, noble and necessary ever attempted in the history of the world…Naples and France, Lombardy and Poland, Hungary and Rome, present no tyranny so hideous as that erected by the miscreants of the Leadenhall Street in Hindostan. (Saville 1952: 219)

I suspect the relationship between dissent and the ambiguities within British imaginings of the Mutiny was stronger than Chakravarty allows. Second, his section on the relationship between Indian nationalist and British writings of the Mutiny is rather brief and inconclusive. Chakravarty certainly demonstrates the overlaps between British historiography and the writings of Savarkar and Syed Ahmed Khan, but does not consider the Indian narrative and political traditions that also contributed to the latter’s mobilization of the Mutiny. It is not clear where Chakravarty stands on the ‘nationalism: a derivative discourse?’ debate. Third, the book has some unsubstantiated comments. Chakravarty designates nineteenth-century British military expansion as the groundwork for the establishment of a ‘world-system’. This is rather startling given that nowhere in the work done by Brenner, Braudel and Wallerstein does a period as late as the nineteenth century appear as the pioneer moment of the ‘world system’. Normally, we think of the fifteenth or early sixteenth century as the period when the groundwork of such a system was laid. There are similar comments, such as Edward Said’s alleged disinterest in the issues of nationalism and decolonization and Chakravarty’s own opposition to ‘postcolonial speculations’. It can be said that a substantial part of Said’s critical output – that is to say, his work on Palestine – is precisely meditations on and theorizations of decolonization, exile and nationalism. And in the absence of any serious discussion of what Chakravarty means by ‘postcolonial speculations’, it becomes impossible to determine his position with regard to the debate between linguistic-textualist and historicist-materialist tendencies in postcolonial theory. Finally, Chakravarty can indulge in academese – there are only so many ‘redactions’ and ‘aetiologies’ a page can bear!

Chakravarty, however, has read a wide range of primarily materials and has patiently, with no little sensitivity, analysed the memorialization of a formative moment within the
long history of struggle produced by and against imperialism. This alone makes his book a valuable one.

References


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Timothy Brennan’s Wars of Position: The Cultural Politics of Left and Right is a book that is at once bracingly ambitious and regrettably – given the fervor and intelligence on display here – timid. Timid, I say? That considered assessment will no doubt startle readers who put Brennan’s book down feeling pummeled by the rough-house style of argumentation he deploys – jab-jab-feint-PUNCH. So goes the book (more or less). And as it goes, down go with it many that Brennan regards as chief luminaries of cultural theory in the North American academy (such as Foucault). Despite what I have termed timidity (to which I will get at the end), the main mode of address of the book is an invigorating disputatiousness.

Disputatiousness provides the clearest clue to the genre to which Brennan’s impassioned book belongs: not theory, not criticism, not scholarly monograph, but rather the polemic. In its proximate origins, ‘polemic’ is a term generalized out of the early history of Christianity, where it signified aggressive controversies of theology. Update to the twenty-first century, replace religious ‘theology’ with secular ‘cultural theory’, change the institutional context from the Church to the North American academy and what you have is Brennan’s polemical mode of address, as in this passage: ‘I am saying that the ensemble of ethical positions known as theory – revolutionary posture, openly hostile to the American state, and characterized as Marxist by the media – is a dissimulated form of an American religion of the middle way’ (p. 9). Brennan’s purpose is no less than to fight the good fight in a war of ideas.

As Brennan makes clear from the outset, his polemic against this religion of the middle way, incarnated in ‘theory’ within the North American academy, concerns belief. Brennan values belief. He has it and, more importantly, recognizes that he does. He opposes what he calls a ‘culture of beliefs’ to a prevailing ‘culture of being’ or, in other words, identity politics. Crucially for Brennan, identity politics is not something intellectual antagonists can argue over, for identity politics naturalizes notions of moral authority: I am a brown man from a postcolony called India, therefore my claims deserve special attention regardless of their content. Brennan will have no part of such thinking. So far we are on familiar, if contested, ground.

More original to Brennan’s argument are three further claims he conjoins to this initial point of departure – that ‘theory’ is surreptitiously identitarian, or ‘centered on ontological politics’ rather than ‘secular beliefs’; that it has been a secret sharer with American liberalism, a position of officially tolerant intolerance; and that it has ‘acted as a buffer or proxy for a social democratic enemy considered too dangerous to represent itself’ (pp. 9–10). It is through an amalgamation of
these three tendencies, Brennan argues, that ‘theory’ becomes a ‘religion of the middle way’.

Though he occasionally forays wider afield, the core of Brennan’s book, then, is a polemic against theory’s radical pretensions. Deflating the hot air balloon of theory takes nine chapters organized into an introduction and two parts. In the first part is revealed theory’s conflicted relationship to cultures of belief. In the second, Brennan explores theory’s deep-seated antipathy to what he calls the ‘organizational imaginary’, that is, its fatal attraction to a vapid anarchism. The substantiation of this two-part argument requires a systematic review, reappraisal, and often brisk dismantling of a series of intellectual interlocutors: Salman Rushdie, Edward Said, Judith Butler, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Julia Kristeva, and so on, through detailed analyses of their works and intellectual contexts.

Throughout there is an engagement with a variety of theoretical positions, but most especially post-structuralism and postcolonialism. The former is of course virtually synonymous with theory, but Brennan argues (he is certainly not the first to do so) that a mutually reinforcing relationship subsists between the two ‘post-’s, so that one feeds the other with concepts and alibis (when absconding from the scene of an ideological crime). As I hope is clear from this brief summary, Brennan’s book is a wide-ranging polemic on the prevailing orthodoxies of the arts and humanities (and a segment of the social sciences) sector of the North American academy – those parts in which ‘theory’ has been taken up with the greatest alacrity.

In his general indictment of theory, Brennan is largely persuasive. Theory has indeed failed to offer a redemptive ‘organizational imaginary’ even while relying on a millenarian rhetoric of redemption. Thus, it has abetted the neoliberal status quo. It is possible to be more charitable (as I would be) towards theory than Brennan is and still agree with his general assessment of the institutional and cultural politics that theory has enabled, or, more to his point perhaps, disabled. Sometimes – for example when Brennan discusses Partha Chatterjee, Ranajit Guha and the Subaltern Studies project – one feels the need for more nuance, more acknowledgement of the material circumstances within which theoretical innovations are often attempted. Subaltern Studies might from the beginning have read Gramsci selectively, and it might have succumbed in recent years to the ‘middle way’ malaise afflicting theory in general; nevertheless, there was a welcome boldness to its early interventions into historiographical debates. Although similar qualifications might be offered to some of Brennan’s other critiques of theoretical trends and orientations, his overall assessment of theory’s legacy cannot be easily dismissed.

Theory came into being during the 1970s partly by calling socialism and Marxism to account for their errors of omission and commission. Thirty years on, Brennan’s book joins other works calling theory to a similar accounting. Surely it is appropriate to ask what relationship theory bears to the aggressive expansion of neoliberal Washington Consensus policies during the years theory’s been on the job within the North American academy. If American hegemony over the world, warmongering, the dismantling of barriers to the concentration of wealth in fewer and fewer hands, the undermining of democratic institutions, if these and similar processes have gathered strength in the last thirty years, what has theory, in its diverse forms, done to contest them? Brennan poses the question with a timely boldness that makes Wars of Position an important book.
And its timidity? This has to do with absences. What might a left cultural politics of renewal look like at this time and in this place? Brennan’s book does not sufficiently answer this question. Clearly, Brennan’s preferred values are social democratic, but he does not identify or develop the policies that go with these values, the discourses in which their content is elaborated in a manner usable at this time and place, and the organizational form that might give these values substance. Another way to make this point would be to note that there is — regretfully, as I have noted, given the passion and intelligence Brennan has brought to the work under review — no transition from a posture of critique to one of enablement, from polemic to eirenec. Perhaps the latter is work for a succeeding book, when Brennan might engage with the humanism that so animated the man to whom this book is dedicated, Edward Said. In the meantime, his polemic serves the admirable and necessary purpose of clarifying the terms of contestation.

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I greeted the opportunity to review this book by Megan Vaughan, an author whose work I have admired for several years, with eagerness. Since living and teaching on the ‘creole island’ of Jamaica, I have been intrigued by the idea of islands as microcosms through which the larger forces at work in the world might be examined. That these insular societies, composed of peoples coming from diverse cultures, bounded by seas and apparently separated from the currents running through the broad expanses of continental societies, might serve as laboratories for viewing big historical questions raised my expectations of what an accomplished historian might do with such a laboratory as Mauritius. I was not disappointed in the result, but I was surprised by the nature of the experiment, the questions asked and answered and those left beyond the horizons of this fine study.

The surprises began with the first three chapters in which the author presents a very competent, if standard, narrative of the colonial history of the island, variously named Mauritius and Ile de France by its Dutch and French colonizers, and then again Mauritius by the British in the nineteenth century. The competence of the narrative was no surprise. However, the absence from these chapters of any systematic treatment of the two main objects of the study — the process of creolization and the institutions of slavery — was surprising.

I was therefore pleased when in the fourth chapter Vaughan began to engage the reader in a close examination of history of the island’s population, first by describing the ‘Roots and Routes’ of ‘those who came’ from elsewhere to create the human building-blocks of the creole society. Then in the next chapter begins yet another surprise. In an incisive and often startling analysis of court cases principally from the eighteenth century, the author designs to dissect the changing nature of race relations, of colonial attitudes and what she terms ‘the dominant narrative of the psychic life of slavery’ (p. 158). Each of the next five chapters begins with a description of a court case whose record illuminates fundamental questions about the nature of the
island’s complex culture and changing values. First, she uses these cases to expose the fraught gender relations and their role in creating Mauritian ethnic identities. Then she turns to cases involving questions of sexuality and love, status, honor and race; creole language and the semantics of slavery; and finally racial mixture and the coming of the French Revolution.

In each of these chapters the initial recounting of the court case is then analyzed using a wide array of theoretical tools and approaches. Additional sources, literary, archival and comparative, are also deployed in creating a kaleidoscopic image of the Mauritian social and cultural landscape. The depth and currency of the scholarship displayed is not so much surprising as awe-inspiring. In the final chapter, the introduction of the sugar plantation complex, the abolition of slavery and introduction of massive labor migration from India under British rule are added as a coda to the eighteenth century body of the work. The musical metaphor seems appropriate for this composition of theme and variations.

One surprise remains. In the last chapter, we are offered a discussion of the process of creolization. The theme that is stated in the title is directly addressed only in the last twelve pages of the book (pp. 264–76). Although the author says that she is introducing this topic ‘again’, I could remember no previous discussion and could find no other entry for the term creolization in the index. Moreover, there was never a direct discussion of the nature of slavery on the island. The book contains none of the standard chapters on slave demography, culture, folklore, music, literacy or religion. Nor is there a direct discussion of slave treatment, living conditions, work regimens, hiring out, punishments, etc. This makes it difficult for the student of slavery (or teacher, in my case) to use the book in drawing comparisons to many of the works on Caribbean slavery or slavery in Africa, areas to which comparisons are quick to suggest themselves.

The absence of a more standard sociological or institutional approach to slavery (or to creolization, such as might be found in Edward Kamau Brathwaite’s *The Development of Creole Society in Jamaica, 1770–1820* (1971)) might be considered a serious flaw in Megan Vaughan’s *opus*. I believe that would be asking for a book that the author did not set out to write. It would be looking a gift horse in the mouth and a remarkably valuable and beautiful gift at that. It is a gift of a highly original, brilliantly crafted, assiduously researched and elegantly written view of slavery and creolization through the wrong end of a telescope; a microcosm of the paradox of an island that is in the mainstream, constantly being touched and occasionally swamped by the tides of humanity, of war and of history washing up on its shores. It is simply a gift horse of a different color.

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Like Marx, Gandhi holds perennial interest for students of Indian modernity. Every few years his life and writings come back into focus, always relevant, no matter what the current academic debate. This time it is a pair of experienced India hands, Lloyd I. Rudolph
and Susanne Hoeber Rudolph, who want to put Gandhi in conversation with postmodernism, thus forcing us to rethink the man and his oeuvre a good three generations after his assassination in 1948. Not all the essays in this collection are new, but it does bring together very usefully a sample of the Rudolphs’ considerable work on Gandhi over the past half-century of their pioneering scholarship about South Asia. It is fitting that the two figures to jointly launch the discussion about tradition and modernity in India with their path-breaking book *The Modernity of Tradition* (1967) should also be the ones to bring it up to date, by insisting that we now look at Gandhi in the light of the philosophical assumptions of postmodernism.

Only the first essay, however, directly probes the postmodernist possibilities of various Gandhian concepts. Lloyd Rudolph posits *Hind Swaraj* (1909) as the inaugural text of postmodernism, ahead of its time by several decades. He glosses satyagraha as political action governed by ‘contextual or situational truth’, a formulation he feels resonates with the anti-essentialist and anti-foundationalist discourse of postmodernism. A recent and very fine commentary on *Hind Swaraj* that probed and critiqued its epistemological implications was Sunil Sahasrabudhey’s *Gandhi’s Challenge to Modern Science* (2002). L. Rudolph’s invitation to reread Gandhi in the context of postmodernism is not confined to science and technology, but rather suggests that we consider afresh every major aspect of Gandhi’s thought, including ahimsa, svaraj, satyagraha, sarvodaya, khadi, charkha, pan-chayati raj, and his take on the Bhagavad Gita.

At the launch of this volume in New Delhi recently (spring 2006), L. Rudolph read at length from his second essay, about what he calls ‘the modernist roots’ of Partition. But I found his third essay, ‘Gandhi in the mind of America’, relatively more interesting and illuminating, for the simple reason that in India we know less about Gandhi and America than we do about Gandhi and Partition. This piece explores Gandhi’s reception in a country he never visited during his lifetime, even though he was deeply influenced by its charter of freedom and equality, and in turn left an indelible mark on its modern movements for rights and liberties in the form of his methods of civil disobedience. Diverse images of the Mahatma – from guru and saint, to naked fakir, to fraud, to *Time* Magazine’s ‘Person of the Century’ – make a fascinating account of Gandhi’s career as a cultural icon. Through the writings of Americans like Martin Luther King, Arthur Koestler, Erik Erikson and Clifford Geertz, among others, he became a personification of India’s political and spiritual values and eccentricities. Today the Americans are at least as responsible for Gandhi’s currency as a civilizational symbol, positive and negative, as the British were before them.

In the fourth essay, the two authors revisit the social space of the *ashram* and interpret it as Gandhi’s contribution to the construction of an egalitarian public sphere in twentieth-century India. This new kind of democratic and non-hierarchical public sphere that admits women, lower castes and the unlettered goes some way towards filling the vacuum left by what D. R. Nagaraj (1993) called ‘the disappearance of the village’ – the very same vanishing village which L. Rudolph says was common to the experience and understanding of Gandhi, R. K. Narayan, M. N. Srinivas and Satyajit Ray. Like the fast-disappearing village, the Gandhian *ashram* is a site where the public–private distinction is not rigid, affect has as much place as rationality, family ties are central, and the non-literate may
legitimately participate in associational life. Unlike the village, however, thanks to Gandhi’s progressive thinking, everyone in the ashram must labour, and both the constraints and the privileges of caste are removed.

Part Two of the book, comprising four older pieces first included in The Traditional Roots of Charisma: Gandhi (1967, 1983, 1987), is surely the finer half of the collection, written with the precise combination of insight, lucidity, brevity and brilliance that characterized the essays of the Rudolphs’ late colleague, contemporary and friend at the University of Chicago, Bernard Cohn. This quartet of essays does not have reference to high theory – no postmodernism, no Habermas, for example – but nonetheless it successfully lays out some of the meanings of ideas and practices that were key to Gandhi’s politics: ‘the fear of cowardice’, ‘the new courage’, ‘self-control’, ‘political potency’ and ‘this-worldly asceticism’. Perhaps there is something to be said for the closeness that the Rudolphs must have felt for Gandhi and Gandhi’s India in the 1950s and 1960s – a kind of immediate connection to the man and his political legacy that has become irreversibly attenuated over time, not just for the Rudolphs but for the entire subcontinent. Anyone would be hard put to locate Gandhi in contemporary India, notwithstanding the sophisticated theoretical resources at the disposal of consummate scholars like the Rudolphs. These earlier essays are polished in every sense – the four new essays, by contrast, have far too many endnotes and sometimes show signs of hasty or insufficient copy-editing, which the publisher must do everything to rectify in subsequent imprints.

At all events, Gandhi continues to be relevant, and the Rudolphs continue to put forth the kind of scholarship that has earned them their rightful place as the doyens of political science in post-independence India.

Reference


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In his study entitled Shamanism, Colonialism and the Wild Man: A Study in Terror and Healing (1982), Michael Taussig refers to one of Roger Casement’s rubber stations as a ‘theater of cruelty’ (p. 40). Ironically enough, the viewer is shown a photograph of such a place, with its sturdy, whitewashed building and neatly-dressed workers standing around it, and a caption that states this is the station called ‘The Enchanted’. Perhaps Taussig drew upon the wishfulness of this economic gesture for his discussion of how this corrupt theater of human power dynamics is also the staging area for the work of image production, a place to transform one’s self-image into an idealized civilizing force.

Jane Lydon, a postdoctoral fellow at the Centre for Australian Indigenous Studies at Monash University in Melbourne, has in turn taken this image of Casement’s ‘enchanted’ staging area of power and revises the concept of the station as represented through late-nineteenth-century and early-twentieth-cent-
tury photographs of Coranderrk, the largest, best-known and most visited Aboriginal station in Australia. In a reversal of Casement’s use of the economic imperative to shape and control native working bodies with an eye toward creating a modern figure of mimicry, Coranderrk and similar Aboriginal stations used the indoctrination and control of indigenous people, whose numbers diminished due to disease and intermarriage, to create an economy based on nostalgic vision. The goal had been, at the start, to control Aboriginal bodies and the reproduction of their culture in order to show the tribal members’ abilities to adapt to new practices, as seen in Lydon’s discussion of the famous crocheted collar sent to Queen Victoria. But this goal transforms into the creation of an Aboriginal museum, where places like Coranderrk became the problematic incubators of ‘authenticity’ as deemed suitable by the white station managers and the increasingly assimilated (read: Christianized) tribal members.

Lydon’s use of photography challenges the visual mimesis that Taussig calls a ‘transformation wrought by reality’ by examining how the colonial masters performed the ‘colonial mirroring of otherness that reflects back onto the colonists the barbarity of their own social relations’ (Taussig 1987: 134). She looks more closely at the way colonial mirroring is performed through staged photographic tableaux, through the collusion of the Aboriginal subjects and the white station masters. In her endeavor to do so, the work shows the tensions inherent in the collision between history, anthropology, cultural studies and art history. Her publisher categorizes this study as an offering in ‘Anthropology/Photography’, but this designation does not fully acknowledge the critical tensions that arise in the various chapters, forcing the reader to see how it is a fractured kind of mirroring at times. Because Lydon’s photographic subject is the Aboriginal body envisioned by British colonization, Eye Contact also crosses into the areas of history and body politics. What results from multiple crossings of disciplinary boundaries is an exciting interpretation of the Aboriginal body shown in the photographs, as well as the white bodies not shown in the photographs.

In support of her thesis that ‘images provide a starting point for exploring indigenous meanings’ through the Aboriginal body, Lydon provides numerous examples of individual portraits, group portraits and staged tableaux (p. 4). The reader may be surprised and possibly overwhelmed by the numerous photographs to be analyzed in some of the chapters, which may be Lydon’s way of showing the frequency of such images. The image of Ellen, the thirteen-year-old girl of the Jajowrong tribe who wins fame for sending her crocheted collar to Queen Victoria, is an example of a personage whose images proliferate. While Ellen’s accomplishment provides readers with a memorable demonstration of how tribal members ably adapted to the British colonizer’s culture in order to accrue social and political capital, it is the image of Mr Green, the beloved stationmaster, staging the founding of the Coranderrk station with station residents that works to support Lydon’s assertion that the photographs show a ‘self-conscious awareness of [the tribal members’] public profile and agency in white society through the mass media of the press and commercial photography’ which in turn ‘enabled residents to develop the “sophisticated” approach to politics and representation that always surprised outsiders and that they often attributed to external white intervention’ (p. 39). One salient factor in these photographic collaborations, according to Lydon’s work, seems to be the vision of the white
photographer, which receives more attention than the Aboriginal perspective on their participation in these activities. In a sense the text itself suggests that this active agency on the part of the Aborigine may be harder to support in a direct sense; but we are asked to see this does occur in contrast to prior hostile interactions where ‘eye contact’ was not made with the white person’s camera.

This point, however, that the tribal members collaborated with the stationmasters and other white visitors to create these images of Aboriginal life, seems to be less effectively made, through close readings of photographs in conjunction with historical accounts, until we arrive at Chapter 4, ‘Works like a clock’. This chapter discusses postcards produced by photographer Nicholas Caire from 1902 to 1914, depicting traditional activities recreated by Coranderrk residents. The analytical success in this chapter lies in Lydon’s careful examination of these internationally circulated images, such as those depicting the corroborees, which were reluctantly staged with significant alterations by station residents, some of whom were now a few generations removed from the regular practice of the male dance, some who had grown accustomed to European dress and could not conceive of being paid to undress, and others whose Christian beliefs caused them to see this as a movement backwards in the maintenance of their tribal image. These instances of ‘obvious staging’ become tourist souvenirs ‘gently mourning these remnants of a doomed race’ (pp. 199, 202).

Caire’s images perform the act of capturing the moment of death, if we consider Roland Barthes’s conceptualization of photography’s function. The last chapter, ‘Coranderrk Reappears’, shows us the after-effect of the photographic record for everyday people with connection to the former station. Photographs undergo a transformation as they turn from the moribund evidence of a doomed race into the vibrant souvenirs of Aboriginal lineage and bloodline. Here Lydon shows us the present-day heirs of these photographic archives doing the analysis themselves. At the same time, Lydon’s analysis asks us to consider what is traditional when two cultures meet, and how that appears in a still image. Where does one culture end and one begin? It is a matter of enchantment or magic, in a sense, when these boundaries are hard to distinguish and when the encounter creates a new entity that defies naming and embodiment.

Reference


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The two books under review here, Cinema of Interruptions: Action Genres in Contemporary Indian Cinema and In Black and White: Hollywood and the Melodrama of Guru Dutt are valuable additions to the burgeoning
Indian film criticism industry, flourishing especially among diasporic scholars. Both books draw from auteur and genre theories. Like Lalitha Gopalan’s book, which is a generic study of action films, Darius Cooper also studies Guru Dutt’s cinema within the generic framework of melodrama. Considering the relatively small body of criticism on the equally small but significant oeuvre of Guru Dutt, the monograph by Cooper is most welcome.

Locating Indian popular cinema within the global system of popular cinema, Gopalan argues that Indian films, even if they borrow generic styles from Hollywood, alter them to constitute a national cinema through ‘a constellation of interruptions’: song and dance sequences, intervals, and censorship. Gopalan draws on Hindi and Tamil action films of the 1980s and 1990s on the basis of cinephilia to illustrate her point. Laura Mulvey had alluded to the idea of the song and dance sequence as an interruption in her classic essay, ‘Visual pleasure and narrative cinema’. According to Mulvey, ‘[t]he song and dance sequences interrupt the flow of the diegesis in mainstream film [which] neatly combines spectacle and narration’ (1989: 19). The assumption here is that the object of analysis, namely, the film, is a text. Subsequent studies that focus on film viewing as an experience that goes beyond the text have foregrounded the pleasure of the viewing experience. Thus song and dance sequences are interruptions, with pejorative connotations of disturbing, annoying, unwelcome, and so on, if we treat film as a text; but if we scrutinize film viewing as a total experience, then the song and dance sequences turn out to be an integral part of the filmic experience rather than an interruption. Gopalan extends Mulvey’s thesis to show that song and dance contribute to the spectacle, which is a part of film along with the narrative, and that there is ‘pleasure in these interruptions, not despite them’. She argues that although song and dance sequences imply temporal and spatial disjunctions, they have a structural function in the film. Gopalan’s cinephiliac love for these sequences makes her stance celebratory, and she goes on to show through close readings of texts, with eidetic details of plot, how the film-makers also celebrate them as indigenous, local and national conventions.

The pleasure derived from genre films is further doubled by anticipation, Gopalan asserts, through an interruption specific to Indian films, i.e., the interval, which is ‘a halfway pause in the narrative’ and meant to be ‘a device to organize the narrative structure’. In her chapter on film-maker J. P. Dutta, Gopalan considers his distinctive cinematic style to demonstrate the ways in which he uses local conventions within the rubric of universal genres such as the Western and gangster films. The exclusion of Border (a film only fleetingly referred to) from detailed analysis in a chapter that takes up several of Dutta’s films, seems to me, however, an egregious omission. Commercially, it was perhaps Dutta’s most successful film. It lends itself well to Gopalan’s thesis that Indian popular films borrow generic styles from international cinema (in this case, the war film) and alter them through interruptions. Border deploys several conventions of war cinema from the West but also uses song and dance sequences to evoke nostalgia for the family. The interval is structured around the gendered ideology of war discourse. Post-interval, the narrative is evacuated of female characters, who feature only in flashback, facilitating the creating of homosocial bonds, central to the genre of war films. We may only conjecture that perhaps the problematic politics of Border was uncomfortable for the author to deal with in a
chapter which otherwise eulogizes Dutta as auteur – a trait endemic to auteur studies, which usually sidestep ideology.

The author identifies censorship, with perspicacity, as yet another interruption necessary for the generation of pleasure. In her chapter ‘Avenging women in Indian cinema’, Gopalan takes up films such as Pratigha (‘Retribution’) and Zakhmi Aurat (‘Wounded woman’) to show that the fear of censorship is a priori to film-making. Therefore, certain strategies, such as withdrawal of the camera, which she refers to as coitus interruptus, are cultivated to bypass censorship. However, Gopalan seems to assume that censorship comes only from one source: the state. If we examine the recent past, we find extra-constitutional powers asserting themselves to decide what the public should see. Tinnu Anand’s Major Saab (1999) had to be screened for senior army officials for their approval before it was released in theatres. Bandit Queen (1994), a film studied in the book, also ran into censorship problems from Phoolan Devi on whose life the film is based. Protests by particular groups against Deepa Mehta’s Fire (1998) and Water (which she had to abandon in India) also constitute one kind of censorship. Individuals and groups then appropriate from the state the right to determine what can and what cannot be shown on screen, thereby calling for a broadening of our understanding of censorship. One needs to examine, thus, whether the possibility of such alternative sources of censorship are also factored into the film-making process.

In a rather unusual move, the conclusion, more like a prologue to a probable future book, foists upon the reader an entirely new theme of digital technology, and analyzes two films, Hey Ram and Alaipayuthey (‘Waves’), not discussed earlier. However, Gopalan ends by tying this up with her main argument about interruptions and how these will have to be modified in the context of rapidly evolving global technology.

Gopalan repeatedly stresses the global exchange of narrative styles in international cinema. But we must admit, of late, there has been more than just a healthy borrowing of styles. There have been Hindi films in the recent past that have blatantly copied from Hollywood films. (Shashilal Nair’s Ek Choti si Love Story (2002) from Krzysztof Kieslowski’s A Short Film About Love, and Sangharsh (‘Conflict’) (1999) from Jonathan Demme’s The Silence of the Lambs are just two of several instances.) What the author celebrates as ‘exchange’ thus raises important questions of creative originality, copyright laws and ethics. Besides, barring some rare examples, like Moulin Rouge borrowing from Hindi cinema, the ‘exchange’ is, more often than not, unidirectional.

In his essay ‘Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture’, W. J. T. Mitchell says:

the history of cinema is in part the history of collaboration and conflict between technologies of visual and audio reproduction. The evolution of film is in no way aided by explaining it in terms of received ideas about the hegemony of the visible. (2002: 242)

*Cinema of Interruptions*, like most works in recent reception studies, has certainly taken ‘the visual turn’, to the complete marginalization, the erasure even, of the audio component of the film-viewing experience. Dialogues in Indian popular films have always remained central to the narrative. Bordering on rhetoric, the loud and shrill style of dialogue delivery in Indian films is part and parcel of the experience of action cinema. In fact, the success of the film *Sholay*, discussed in some length in the book, may be attributed to a large part to
its dialogues. Audiocassettes of the dialogues sold as briskly as tickets to the film. However, the author restricts herself entirely to the visuality of popular films.

Gopalan uses a strange orthography for English translations of Hindi words, i.e., *koun* for *kaun* (who), *hae* for *hai* (is), *ghadi* for *gaadi* (vehicle). Except for one flaw where the author wrongly attributes *Desire, Deceit and the Novel* to Gerard Genette on pages 103 and 203, the book contains meticulous notes including dates of websites visited. The extremely small font size makes an otherwise enjoyable and challenging read somewhat tiring, and a sprinkling of typographical errors mars the publication.

Darius Cooper’s book on Guru Dutt is divided thematically into six chapters, which is a more interesting division than a film-based one. Restricting himself to the well-known films of Guru Dutt, Cooper offers detailed textual analyses of the films, combined with some understanding of cinematic grammar. He analyzes the ways in which certain important categories like nation and family are constructed in the genre of melodrama, which provide the frames to read Dutt’s cinema. In the first chapter, ‘Nation and family in Dutt’s melodramas’, he explains, ‘I would like to trace this transition [comedy to tragedy] in relation to the emerging Indian nation, the most significant backdrop against which his melodramatic vision is played out’ (p. 8). This transition from comic to tragic is linked to the shift from post-independence euphoria to disillusionment with the nation in a rather obvious manner. Also, a polysemic term like ‘nation’ is treated as a given.

In his introduction, Cooper states his intention of analyzing Guru Dutt’s cinema in the light of Hollywood melodramas of the same period. But beyond this, we do not get a rich generic study in the rest of the book. Although the song-dance-melodrama of Hindi cinema draws largely from the Parsi theatre, it is true that Hollywood musicals have also inspired Hindi cinema. The richness of similarity could have opened up exciting possibilities of pitting one against the other for purposes of studying the cultural specificities in the midst of generic resemblances, and the ways in which these shape the production of meaning in films. However, Cooper returns briefly to the study of melodrama in the last chapter, on songs in Guru Dutt’s cinema.

The remaining chapters provide extended textual analysis of Dutt’s films with plot details of *Pyaasa, Kaagaz ke Phool* and *Saheb, Bibi aur Ghulam*. For instance, in almost every chapter we are told of Nikki and Kalu’s meetings in the garage in *Aar Paar*. The close readings do have their moments of insight, such as when Cooper describes the end of the film through the leitmotif of the bracelet: ‘When Jaba’s fingers clasp his, a new kind of generative bracelet is inscribed round their joint grasp’ (p. 41).

In his chapter on *Kaagaz ke Phool*, Cooper voices the opinion that the audience rejected the film as they could not identify with what he terms its ‘morbid realism’, whereas the happy ending of *Pyaasa* made it a successful film at the box office. Hindi cinema has as strong a tradition of films with jinxed lovers and unhappy endings as with happy endings. Some of the former were not merely successes in their time but have gone on to acquire cult status (*Devdas* comes to mind). In the light of this fact, Cooper’s contention seems to stand on unsteady ground.

The last and best chapter on song and dance in Guru Dutt’s films captures vividly the ‘pleasure’ derived from a Hindi film song.
Cooper refers to some Hollywood musicals here, and also effectively shows how the life of a Hindi film song extends beyond the time and space of the auditorium. Cooper, being a poet himself, has a feel for words and rhythm which results in well translated quotes from the songs. Unlike Gopalan’s book, there is some focus here on the aural pleasures of song and dance sequences.

The author’s habit of appending a quote to his own analyses appears to be a chosen critical method throughout the book. After a detailed exegesis of plot or episode, just when the reader is waiting for the author’s reading, a quote from some critic or the other with a mandatory footnote can be quite frustrating. For instance, ‘Dutt’s melodramas repeatedly dramatize “the impossible burdens and expectations placed on the family” during this period’ (p. 16). The quote from Landy is not an earth-shattering one by any means. Except for one factual error on page 10, where the author dates the defeat of India by China as 1961 (the war took place in 1962), the book is carefully edited and well produced, with an attractive cover. However, the lack of an index and a bibliography is disappointing.

References


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This work is a compelling study of the roles of slavery and abolition in the origins of finance capital in the British Atlantic empire. The work is an interdisciplinary tour de force, with superb scholarship on slavery, modernity, the Enlightenment, postmodernism and contemporary literary theory. It is one of the finest comparative studies of the philosophy of history and liberation struggles that I have read. Baucom is particularly insightful on Kant, Hegel, and Benjamin’s philosophies of history.

The jumping-off point for this extraordinarily complex work is the history of the slave ship Zong. Loading 440 Africans at the slave forts of the Guinea coast, the ship took nearly three months to reach the Caribbean. Claiming a grave scarcity of water even though the ship had sighted Jamaica, the captain ordered 133 slaves thrown overboard. One climbed back aboard. Ten jumped rather than be thrown into the sea.

The owners claimed insurance on the deliberately drowned captives. The insurance company refused to pay. The case went to court in London and the owners won. The case was appealed and the owners won again – but the judge in the case, Lord Mansfield, ruled that the ten who jumped could not be counted as jettisoned and insured cargo. Their choice to jump made them – in the eyes of the court – something more than fungible objects.

Baucom cites numerous historical facts like these throughout his work. An example is the case of the Zong’s owner’s son who hanged himself in the Liverpool house he inherited from his father on 21 April 1807, the year the slave trade was abolished. The slave trade was the family bank’s mainstay.
However, Baucom is not only an historian but a literary theorist in full cry. He calls his discourse a kind of ‘errantry’, not in the sense that he’s setting out to make mistakes but in that he sees himself ‘in imaginative flight across the world’ (p. 312).

Baucom does make mistakes. In line with other histories, he claims that 132 Africans perished. But his tally of the incidents of murder over three days in November and December 1781 adds up to 122 enslaved persons rather than 132 (p. 129).

Nonetheless, Baucom’s ‘errantry’ is in no way Quixotic, but is an ‘interested questioning of modernity and the world’ (p. 313). The mainspring of that questioning is the imagination. Baucom speaks of the ‘promiscuity of the imagination’. The imagination is not simply responsible for literary creations, but also the invention of credit, insurance, stocks, bonds – all mere slips of paper propped up by congeries of social contracts. As Baucom puts it, in the eighteenth century ‘the imaginary value of stocks, bonds, bills-of-exchange, and insured property of all kinds increasingly trumped the “real” value of land, bullion, and other tangibles’ (p. 16).

Of particular interest to Baucom is the exercise of imagination in the philosophy of history, especially that of German philosophers like Kant and Hegel. With Marx, these German idealists see history as the history of progress. Baucom investigates how ideas of progress and facts of slavery can coexist under the shining light of Enlightenment reason.

As Orlando Patterson has pointed out, slavery has been with us since the beginnings of history. The Enlightenment, however, witnesses the invention of capital. Humans as purveyors of labor become capital and so subject to abstract valuations of capital. Ethics drops out, replaced by an ontology of labor and an epistemology of financial abstraction as a real substrate. In Baucom’s view, the Zong case defines

not only a struggle between competing theories of right (the slaves’ right to human dignity and the slavers’ right to trade), but one between competing theories of knowledge, a struggle between an empirical and a contractual, an evidentiary and a credible epistemology. (p. 16)

Kant’s idea of humans as subjects of infinite value is trumped by capitalism’s valuation of humans as fungibles, objects whose financial value can be denominated or ‘dollarized’.

Baucom traces resistance to slavery to an ethics of sympathy, best represented not in the philosophical abstractions of Adam Smith, but in the anti-slavery literature of the late eighteenth and early twentieth centuries. Smith insists that ‘[i]t is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer that we come to conceive or be affected by what he feels’ (p. 240). But he concedes that we can do this ‘through the imagination only’ (p. 246).

The task of the imagination is to create sympathy through instruments like the 1840 inaugural World Anti-Slavery Convention. At that conference Henry B. Stanton, president of the American Anti-Slavery Society, proclaimed:

The civilized world must erect a wall of fire around America, which may melt down the hard heart of the slave-holder . . . One influence which we desire to bring to bear for this purpose is the literature of the world. We are in America a reading people . . . We come to England and say give us an anti-slave literature. (p. 210)

Baucom’s most ambitious claim in the philosophy of history is that the slavery of the eighteenth century extends across the
nineteenth century and becomes intensified in the globalization of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. With other theorists, Baucom claims that ‘neither history nor slavery are, in the colloquially figurative sense of the word, “history”. History is never, in this sense, “history”, never something that is purely past, done, finished with, distant, all worn out’ (p. 330).

Baucom in some measure models his philosophy of history on that of Walter Benjamin. Both thinkers advance the paradoxical insight that the labor of an engaged philosophy of history is not to free the present of the violence of the past but to discover in the very brutality of what-has-been the responsibility and promise of a transverse, relational now-being. (p. 317)

Benjamin argues that this use of the philosophy of history can be redemptive. Baucom is less sanguine. Unlike others who suggest that we can let the past go if we can tell it, Baucom thinks the past will never go away:

Time does not pass or progress, it accumulates, even in the work of forgetting . . . even in the immense labor it takes to surrender what-has-been, or to make reparation on it, or to address its ill effects. That the law has changed is immaterial to this fact. (pp. 330–1)

Abolitionist literature helped to change our laws. But the twenty-first century presents us with slavery by other means: ‘this fatal Atlantic “beginning” of the modern is more properly understood as an ending without end’ (p. 333).

The book’s interdisciplinary nature demands much of the reader. Its long and convoluted sentences are taxing – ten- or twelve-line sentences are not uncommon, in the style of German idealism. The text uses footnotes rather than APA format, so one must go through the footnotes to review the literature Baucom brings to his work. The index is slim and does not include references to key terms like ethics, epistemology and ontology. The few typographical errors are surprising in the face of the work’s quality. In the end, these are minor complaints.

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Herman Gray’s new book Cultural Moves is a sociological tour de force. Similar to his previous book, Watching Race: Television and the Struggle for Blackness, Gray continues his focus on ‘America’s commercial image culture’ as a means to better understand the contemporary American racial order. Although Cultural Moves is about African American struggles over identity, recognition and representation, it is also about the ways in which African American culture has moved beyond a preoccupation with inclusion and representation to creating new possibilities and communities for blackness to develop and reside (i.e., Afrofuturism). To this end, Gray questions conventional assumptions about African American recognition and visibility in America’s commercial culture, arguing that culture, as a political terrain, still matters.

Gray begins his discussion with an examination of how African Americans have deeply
influenced America’s national cultural institutions. He argues that over the past two decades much of African American culture has become canonized – that is, African American cinema, theater, literature, music and scholarship have become integral to the national identity of the United States. Gray points to the resurgence of African American studies at prestigious universities like Harvard University and Columbia University, the emergence of black public intellectuals (i.e., bell hooks, Cornel West, Michael Eric Dyson), and the institutional recognition of jazz at Lincoln Center as evidence for this claim. As a result of the greater cultural visibility and institutional recognition, Gray begins to question the black cultural politics of old, those of the civil rights generation. Since we have entered the post-civil rights period (and what he also calls the post-network period), the politics of blackness have given way to new cultural logics and technologies, thus requiring a different kind of cultural politics that move beyond recognition and visibility. The limits of inclusion are clear in a globalizing world that celebrates difference and where inequality and the struggle for social justice persist.

In many respects, Cultural Moves is about the end of the innocent notion of the black subject. Blackness, unmoored from its fixed state, is recovered as a political category, in which much is at stake. According to Gray, ‘black representations from hip hop to cinema ... [are] no longer preoccupied with neutralizing or escaping the controlling and judging gaze of whites’ (p. 187). Gray is critical of ideas of essentializing forms of blackness and celebrates the creative mixing of tradition and culture, as well as the appropriation of dominant discourses toward rebellious aesthetic and political ends.

To support his argument that despite certain institutional maneuvers and canonization black culture is increasingly complex, he devotes detailed treatment to what he calls the ‘jazz left’. The ‘jazz left’, those who have embraced change and difference, have not succumbed to canonization; rather, they have expanded the artistic horizons of jazz on both a local and global level. For Gray, there is no unified black community, blackness is an open signifier complicated by the divisions of gender, sexuality, class, and process of globalization. In other words, to speak of blackness today is to speak of cultural entanglement and hybridization. To this end, Gray remains watchful of ethnic absolutism and racial particularity.

According to Gray, black popular culture reminds us that racial identities, specifically blackness, are not given in nature but are constructed, affirmed, denied and ascribed. The creation of these identities occur under local conditions, yet take on hybrid and diasporic dimensions when people involved share symbols of global blackness. Further, blackness should not be viewed simply as the creation of a shared sense of collective identity that transcends boundaries and time, but should be analyzed for the political meanings and effects related to local and transnational struggles.

If the book falters at any point, it is in the use of rather obscure cultural producers, like artists Kara Walker and performer Pamela Z to drive home the point of the complex dimensions of black culture. Although I would doubt Gray’s astute conclusions would change significantly if popular cultural producers were used, his arguments would nevertheless be enriched by both obscure and popular examples. Further, some chapters are repetitive, in turn disrupting the flow of the book and its overall cohesion.

Gray’s prose is not always accessible, although a reader willing to spend time with this work will find it rewarding. While some readers may bemoan the sociological and
cultural studies jargon and analytical concepts, for those concerned with identity, blackness and, more importantly, contemporary cultural constructs of race, Cultural Moves is a must read. Gray’s latest work provides insightful and controversial material for contemplation. In short, Cultural Moves skillfully complements and expands path-breaking work on identity, representation and blackness.

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Described and titled as ‘A Portrait’, this study of the life and times of Frantz Fanon (1925–61), revolutionary theoretician, Algerian FLN militant and innovative psychiatrist, has, perforce, the form of a biography; however, its author states that it ‘does not wish to pass itself off as the work of a historian or a biographer’ (p. 4). Alice Cherki calls her work a ‘testimony once removed’ (ibid.).

This characterization hits the mark given that Cherki was a close collaborator and friend of Fanon from 1955, when she became one of his interns at the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital in Algeria, until his death in 1961. Thus, the study includes a number of personal reminiscences by one of Fanon’s few surviving, and very admiring, contemporaries.

Cherki herself, currently a practicing psychiatrist in Paris, France, is of Algerian Jewish origin. She contributed to and is the compiler of Les Juifs d’Algérie (1992) and various works on psychiatry. Much earlier, in the context of colonial Algeria and the Algerian War of National Liberation, she was a radical, who, having been a youthful member of the Association of Algerian Youth for Social Action (AJAAS) and the Algerian Communist Party, shifted her allegiance to the National Liberation Front (FLN) once the Algerian War began. From a professional point of view, she, like her mentor, became an innovative practitioner of what is called institutional psychotherapy pioneered by Fanon’s mentor, the Spanish anti-Francoist psychiatrist, François Tosquelles, to which Fanon would add elements of sociotherapy.

Thus, Frantz Fanon: A Portrait tells the reader a great deal about the situation of the Jewish community in Algeria as the Algerian War of Independence got underway. It further suggests that the contacts and friendships that Fanon made within this community gave a particular slant to his perceptions of the country and influenced the development of the anti-colonial sentiments he had already acquired as the result, primarily, of his Martinican origins.

In Cherki’s words:

This work seeks to counteract both the unrestrained idealization that holds Fanon to his heroic image and cuts him off from history as well as the powerless and silent reaction greeting bewildering allegations that dismiss Fanon as an apologist for violence and an obsolete figure linked to Third Worldism (pp. 1–2).

Alice Cherki has clearly achieved the goals that she set for herself in writing this book, even if she does leave out some details, the absence of which seems a bit strange. She paints her portrait by laying out and elaborating upon the well-known periods in Fanon’s
life: childhood in Martinique, enlistment in the Free French Forces and disillusionment with the racism he found in the army and in liberated France, medical and psychiatric training in France, early professional practice, growing anti-colonial convictions, and his first publications — notably ‘Le syndrome nord-africain’ (Esprit, February 1952) and Black Skin, White Masks (also 1952). The chapter includes a full analysis of the latter work, particularly Fanon’s objections to the ideas expressed by Octave Mannoni in Psychologie de la Colonisation (1950).

At this point and before continuing her discussion of Fanon’s life, Cherki devotes her second chapter to a tableau of colonial Algiers in 1953. She stresses the unofficial but rigid segregation characterizing relations among the three principal Algerian communities: the Muslim majority, the Europeans and the Jewish community. She speculates that nothing in Fanon’s previous life ‘had prepared him for the incredible reality of a world built on “uncontested segregation”’ (p. 54).

Having set the stage for Fanon’s commitment to the Algerian freedom struggle, Cherki resumes her discussion of Fanon’s life, taking up his posting to the Blida-Joinville Psychiatric Hospital from 1953 until his resignation and expulsion from Algeria at the end of 1956. She stresses the ways in which he revolutionized the treatments offered by this hospital and helped make it a safe haven for Algerian freedom fighters.

Cherki then describes Fanon’s clandestine move from France, to which he returned upon leaving Algeria, to Tunisia where he worked, in several capacities, as a political militant, for the Provisional Government of the Algerian Republic (GPRA) and as a psychiatrist in two successive hospitals in Tunis. She focuses on his role as a senior member of the editorial staff of El Moudjahid, the FLN newspaper, and then as a roving ambassador for the GPRA in certain newly independent black African states, particularly Ghana and Guinea. Two later chapters describe, respectively, the last year of Fanon’s life, after he had been diagnosed with myeloid leukemia in December 1960, and the work, considered his magnum opus, that he wrote over that year, The Wretched of the Earth. Here she is very careful to explain that Fanon’s views about violence were inadvertently distorted by Jean Paul Sartre in his foreword to the work, leading to the impression that Fanon justifies violence when in fact he only analyzes it as an inevitable corollary to decolonization given that colonization was imposed and maintained by violence. While revolutionary violence, according to Fanon, might be liberating, it could never be purifying. In short, Cherki asserts that Fanon ‘was a thinker about violence, not its apologist’ (p. 2).

The chapter that follows assesses the influence of Fanon’s ideas in the twenty years following his death. Although not faring very well in Algeria after Houari Boumédiène’s coup d’état of 1965, Fanon’s writings, particularly Black Skin, White Masks and The Wretched of the Earth, were adopted as basic texts by the Black Power and other leftist movements in the United States in the 1970s. Two final chapters, ‘Fanon today’ and ‘Restoring the tragic (in lieu of a conclusion)’ argue that Fanon’s call for a revolutionary restructuring of Third World society, as expressed in The Wretched of the Earth, rather than being outdated, is acquiring renewed relevance, not only in the Third World but also in the First World, because of the growing oppressiveness and pervasiveness of globalization.

Like other biographers of Fanon — Irene L. Gendzier (Frantz Fanon: A Critical Study, 1973) and David Macey (Frantz Fanon: A
Biography, 2001) – Alice Cherki has tended to write more about the events and the persons surrounding her subject than about the subject himself. Perhaps one cannot avoid this pitfall given that Fanon did not keep any diaries or personal journals other than medical reports about his patients and his interns, and had an almost pathological unwillingness to talk about himself. It seems that many people who had known Fanon well for many years did not know that he had fathered a daughter, Mireille, in 1948, with a French woman other than his wife.

Cherki could have given the reader more information about the woman he did marry, Marie-Josèphe Dublé (Josie), a white Frenchwoman, in 1952, the year that he published Black Skin, White Masks. Given the thesis and the themes of this book, the racial identity of his wife (and also of the mother of his daughter) are relevant details worth citing and commenting. It is also worth noting that Josie converted to Islam in 1957, taking ‘Nadia’ as her given name, an interesting point given Fanon’s professed atheism. She settled in Algeria after independence in 1962 and committed suicide in 1989, following the violent suppression of a series of student and youth revolts that had taken place in the major Algerian cities in 1988. Did these events, which underlined how far the military/bureaucratic government of Algeria had strayed from Fanon’s recommendations for an independent revolutionary Algeria, contribute to her decision to kill herself?

Another matter not mentioned is the question of the involvement of the CIA in arranging for Fanon’s hospitalization, two months before he died, at the National Institute for Health in Washington, DC. According to Irene Gendzier, Olie Iselin, described by Cherki as somebody from the American State Department who visited Fanon at this hospital, was in fact a CIA case officer, stationed in Tunis, who had helped arrange for Fanon’s trip to the United States and then for the repatriation of his body to Tunis and its burial just inside Algeria, near the Tunisian border town of Ghardimaou (p. 166; see also Wyman Walker n.d.).

This scenario raises the question of whether Fanon’s leukemia might not have been deliberately induced (assuming that the technology existed in 1960 for assassinating people by inducing fatal leukemia and other forms of cancer). Fanon, one must remember, had already survived three assassination attempts. One is reminded of the continuing suspicions that the rare forms of cancer that killed Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej, former Secretary General of the Romanian Communist Party in 1965, and Houari Boumédiène, former President of the Algerian Republic in 1978, were induced by clandestine radiation.

But these are small omissions of detail in an otherwise full and fascinating synthesis of the personal, intellectual and ideological development of Alice Cherki’s subject, on one hand, and, on the other, the history both of advances in psychiatry, with which Fanon and his mentors and colleagues were associated, and the political and social history of the Algerian Revolution and other theaters of decolonization. Cherki gives clear proof of the continued relevance of Frantz Fanon’s problématique of emancipation, violence and revolution.

Reference


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