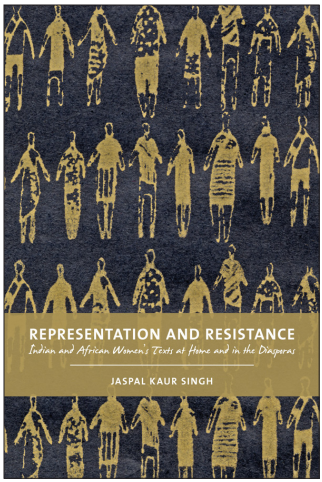

REPRESENTATION AND RESISTANCE: INDIAN AND AFRICAN WOMEN'S TEXTS AT HOME AND IN THE DIASPORAS

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Postcolonial Women Writers and Their Cultural Productions

Examining middle-class female South Asian, Caribbean, and African cultural productions in contemporary postcolonial and transnational spaces, I investigate their fragmented and conflicted voices, formed as they are by oppositional discourses of modernity and tradition, East and West, local and global, and seek to understand how their representational subjects, too, show their ambiguous and conflicted stances in relation to the aforementioned discursive systems. The representations of mad female subjects suffering gender oppression by Western-educated, middle-class South Asian, Caribbean, and African women in postcolonial spaces and the West betray notions of the liberal and neo-liberal stances of these writers as they are formed by modern knowledge systems. Finally, I argue that the collection of mad female voices reveals the cosmopolitan knowledge of the writers, which leads to the continued misreading of their texts. Such misreading adds to the ongoing disempowerment of people in the Global South when their voices are co-opted to further globalization's capitalist agendas.

The continued use of the idioms of modernity by many postcolonial female writers and artists in relation to gender identity and the constructions

of "Third World" subjects is troubling, and indeed dangerous, in our global climate. Some of the representational mad subjects of these female-authored texts who continue to speak in the language of modernity and globalization may be said to contribute to violence against and the continued brutalization of many people, both men and women, in the Global South, as can be seen by the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq. The *burqa*, the *purdah*, and the veil are once again seen as markers of uncivilized nation-states, whose borders need to become porous for the penetrative need of globalization, the rhetoric of which is then couched in (neo)liberal humanist terms and the coterminous espousal of liberation, freedom, and choice.

Ultimately, I will posit a methodology of criticism of these female-authored texts which will encompass the legacy of modernity and globalization on gender relations in postcolonial nation-states and their ideological and representational spaces in transnational diasporas.

In the years since independence from European colonialism, a large body of literary work in English (and other European languages), written primarily by members of the Western-educated, urban, upper- and middle-class elite, has proliferated in many parts of the world, adding to the dominant ideological construction of (postmodern and postcolonial) identity and informing social structures. As can be seen throughout the postcolonial world, the ruling classes then become responsible for the construction of cultural norms and mores in the post-independent, neocolonial spaces. Formed as they are by colonialist ideology and through gendered oppositional discourses, the ruling classes too engage with those same constructions and discourses in their ongoing cultural relationships and formations. Many women, using the female narrative voice to investigate colonial and patriarchal constructions of identity, inhabit these privileged spaces.

It is important to locate postcolonial female narrative voices within these conflicted spaces and learn to critique them through the political and cultural conditions that produced them in the first place. For instance, if a female writer represents the "mad" female subject who is suffering brutal, patriarchal oppression, especially when she is trying to negotiate an individual identity for herself, we have to keep in mind the writer's class and her location when we examine how she addresses such complex concerns. Such concerns, no doubt, need to be raised and addressed in order for social change within existing oppressive institutions to occur, but how and where they are textualized highlights the condition of the

postcolonial female writer and her representational subjects. We need to locate such writings within a particular historical and cultural context in order for a successful postcolonial/transnational/multicultural feminist methodology to occur.

What, then, are the political concerns of many postcolonial female writers? More importantly, as cultural critics, how do we critique their writings successfully? The critique of patriarchal oppression is not something new, and in fact is closely connected with nationalism and nationalist reconstruction during anticolonial movements. Much of early African literature, mostly written by men (see Elleke Boehmer, Carole B. Davies, Chiwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi, Florence Stratton, and Susheila Nasta, among others), deals with colonialism and its social and political implications, while it also emphasizes man's (not humans' or woman's) struggle within it. According to Sheila J. Petty, "The Négritude movement of the 1930s helped recover the image of 'savage' African males who were in need of 'civilizing,'" but did little for African women (22).

Here is an oft-quoted example of Négritude poetry by Léopold Sédar Senghor:

> Naked woman, black woman
>
> Clothed with your colour which is life, with your form which is beauty!
>
> In your shadow I have grown up; the gentleness of your hands was laid over my eyes.
>
> And now, high up on the sun-baked pass, at the heart of summer, at the heart of noon, I come upon you, my Promised Land.
>
> And your beauty strikes me to the heart like the flash of an eagle. (*Prose and Poetry* 105)

While the Négritude poets wrote to counter the representations of "the inherent inferiority of the black race – a myth which provided the ideological rationale for European imperialism – their re-visioning was bitterly contested" (Stratton 40) by African women writers. According to Stratton,

while many other male writers since Senghor (Ousmane Sembène, Okot p'Bitek, Wole Soyinka, and Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example)[1] revised the trope of Mother Africa, "what emerges … is an intertext that dominates the texts, a mastertext that neutralizes the difference in their ideological projects. For underlying the trope that is embedded in all of the texts is the same old manichean allegory of gender we uncovered in Négritude poetry" (Stratton 51). This trope, finally, "elaborates a gendered theory of nationhood and of writing, one that excludes women from the creative production of the national polity or identity and of literary texts" (Stratton 51).

Essentially, Petty, along with Odile Cazenave (2000), Susheila Nasta (1992), Chikwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi (1996), Elleke Boehmer (1992), Florence Stratton (1994), Phillipa Kafka (2003), Charlotte Bruner (1993), Oyèrónké Oyêwùmí (1997), and Stephanie Newell (1997), among others, suggest that mythologizing the African woman as the Great Mother Africa keeps her in a conventional role in the domestic sphere and denies her equal participation in a national vision. Petty argues that "Women's function" in male-authored texts is to "embody the male vision of Africa as a 'nation'" (22). She adds that the Négritude poets' rendition of Africa as "Great Mother" did little for the African woman, and in fact, "the binary opposition of Mother Africa as the past or nation restored versus prostitute as the nation present degraded forcibly links woman to the male quest in the [texts] and defines the boundaries within which she is allowed to function" (22).

As can be seen from the above argument, the ideological inscription within the discourse of patriarchy that romanticizes women as the Great Mother in control of traditional cultural practices in the domestic sphere effectively closed off the public spaces for their reinscription. Therefore, the representations of women – first in colonialist and then nationalist texts, in limited terms – reinforced power relationships that became characteristic of many patriarchal cultures in colonial, postcolonial, and neocolonial spaces.

Additionally, as Carole Boyce Davies argues, colonial institutions chose males over females for education, and "then too, the sex role distinctions common to many African societies supported the notion that Western education was a barrier to a woman's role as wife and mother and an impediment to her success in these traditional modes of acquiring status" (2). In fact, with few exceptions and for a long time, girls were kept away

from formal and especially higher education. Therefore, first the colonial administrators and then the nationalists used existing cultural practices to ensure secondary positions for women in (post)colonial African societies, argue many African feminists.

As Elleke Boehmer notes, "Nationalism … found in existing social patterns the models of hierarchical authority and control, all with the blessings of earlier colonialists and indigenous patriarchy" ("Stories" 7). Women who participated in anticolonial struggles expected to benefit from the social reconstruction that took place in a post-independent era, but found that they had to wage another struggle against men – the same men alongside whom they had fought for national independence. Thus, women found that "Mother Africa may have been declared free, but the mothers of Africa remained manifestly oppressed" (7).

According to Boehmer, "The dilemma is that where male nationalists have claimed, won and ruled the 'motherland,' this same motherland may not signify 'home' and 'source' to women" ("Stories" 5). Additionally, and more importantly perhaps, Boehmer claims,

> To "Third World" women and women of colour these concerns speak with particular urgency, not only because of their need to resist the triple oppression or marginalization that the effects of colonialism, gender and male-dominated language create, but also because their own tactics of self-representation are often usefully adopted from the older and more established nationalist politics of "their men." ("Stories" 5)

In this milieu, women have felt they must rewrite their (her)stories, and to do so, they have to resist, recreate, and re-empower themselves. As Boehmer suggests, "Where women tell of their own experience, they map their own geography, scry their own history and so, necessarily, contest official representations of nationalists realities" ("Stories" 11). Or do they?

Such struggles, as well as the persistent inequalities, are represented in many postcolonial women's texts. However, the reception of these texts in the Western academy reinforces the colonial ideology that defines these cultures as backward and in need of continued civilization. Such texts persist in fostering notions, perpetuated by colonialist writing, that characterize many cultures as inferior to the West and still in need of its

paternalism, which takes neocolonial forms through the rhetoric of globalism. How these texts are read and disseminated needs to be part of literary criticism, otherwise myths of enlightenment and humanist ideology continue to be fostered in the West and in Western academia.

The writers and artists from South Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean that I will examine in this book, namely Mariama Bâ, Myriam Warner-Vieyra, Tsitsi Dangarembga, Bharati Mukherjee, Aparna Sen, Agnes Sam, Gurinder Chadha, Farida Karodia, Nisha Ghanatra, Meena Alexander, Deepa Mehta, Shani Mootoo, Samina Ali (a.k.a. Zainab Ali), and Mira Nair, question social and patriarchal practices. As colonized nations have been repeatedly represented by colonialist discourse as feminine, requiring "paternal governance,"[2] nationalism too repeated the same symbolism during nationalist movements to represent woman. As women wrote to counter such representations, the ideas of "*motherlands, mothercultures, mothertongues*" (Nasta xix, original emphasis) became appropriate tropes for re-imagining. According to Nasta,

> Clearly mothers and motherlands have provided a potent symbolic force in the writings of African, Caribbean and Asian women with the need to demythologize the illusion of the colonial "motherland" or "mothercountry" and the parallel movement to rediscover, recreate and give birth to the genesis of new forms and new language of expression. (Nasta xix)

Nasta is particularly aware of women's "unwritten stories" that are "just beginning to become all that they can be" in their search for self-identity (xix).

What of the writers' class then? In examining postcolonial writers, Ania Loomba refers to Aimé Césaire's assertion that Marxist thought must be revised because the division between people was not class but race, and she relates a similar problem that exists within feminist and gender studies.

> Women's oppression was … seriously under-theorised within Marxism… The crucial question – how does the oppression of women connect with the operations of capitalism (or other

> economic systems)? – remained unanswered till feminists began to interrelate the economic and ideological aspects of women's oppression. The question of race and colonialism demanded rethinking for similar reasons. (26)

For colonized races, the focus was the interrelation between economic and the cultural, or ideological, aspects of oppression. As Partha Chatterjee asserts in his essay, "Colonialism, Nationalism, and the Colonialized Woman: The Contest in India": "Nationalism … located its own subjectivity in the spiritual domain of culture, where it considered itself superior to the West and hence undominated and sovereign" (Chatterjee 631). This space was the spiritual or domestic realm. Thus, if women, who have been reconstructed by nationalist ideologies, resist the idea of new woman, what idiom do they use? How do they critique nationalist reconstructions?

For African postcolonial women, one aspect that complicates a necessary feminist critique is that it "presents the double challenge of critiquing the scholarship produced by African men for its gender blindness, while sharing the concerns of African male colleagues with the imperialist, colonialist and racist connotations of mainstream constructions of Africa" (Charmaine Pereira 28). Pereira adds that "considerable dilemmas for feminists arise when 'African culture and traditions' are viewed as the subjects of contestation, as is often asserted by masculinist scholars once feminists challenge hegemonic relations" (28). Thus a conflict arises, and African women writers can no longer be sure about their critical stance: should they criticize "those features of 'culture' and 'tradition' that oppress women and affirm aspects of the same 'culture' that uplift women or that have social value but have been distorted by global agendas" (Pereira 29)? Such distortions are particularly troubling, especially when they are disseminated in the Western world and the Western academy by so-called "Third World Feminists."

Nasta claims that "an entrapping cycle begins to emerge" for postcolonial female writers:

> In countries with a history of colonialism, women's quest for emancipation, self-identity and fulfillment can be seen to represent a traitorous act, a betrayal not simply of traditional codes of practice and belief but of the wider struggle for

> liberation and nationalism. Does to be "feminist" therefore involve a further displacement or reflect an implicit adherence to another form of cultural imperialism? (xv)

Conflicted as they are, can postcolonial women, constructed through oppositional discourses of colonial and nationalism, of modernity and tradition, of male and female, First World and Third World, give voice to their own unique perspectives, or are they struggling to find a voice in the dominant narrative spaces through discursive strategies that still use the same trope of liberalism and emancipation bequeathed to them by colonialism? As woman becomes the metonymy of a nation, what becomes of the woman?

"Famously contradictory" and "Janus-faced," asserts Boehmer, the nation is "protean, adaptive and affiliative rather than derivative, taking on different forms at the hands of different groups and classes … [and] continues to exert a hold on emergent geopolitical entities in quest of self-representation" (4). What of the "libratory potential" (Boehmer *Stories of Women* 4) for women? How do they rewrite in order to imagine themselves as important players and as historical actors in the formation of the nation? If the nation is Janus-faced and contradictory, what of the constructions of women as nation? And, more importantly, what of their representations?

> On the face of it, progressive, self-assertive women appear caught in a dilemma, in that the ideology that promises self-expression, liberation and transformation through political action is characterized by their simultaneous marginalization, and that nationalist resistance has often been resolved in a revivalist direction, reifying traditional gender difference. (6)

Boehmer, noting the "relative silence of the dominant postcolonial thinkers on the subject of nationalism, and of women's roles in nationalist movement," suggests that writing by women "provides diverse possibilities of self-conception for a people: not a single shining path to self-realization, but any number of symbolic fictions, as many modes of redreaming as there are dreamers in a nation" (17). Yes, it is important to dream. Many

postcolonial feminists redream. As Meg Samuelson asks, "Emerging from the nightmare of apartheid, how can we not want the rainbow nation? How can we not want the miracle of national reconciliation? How can we deny that we have entered a redemptive state" (11)? Yet, and here is the important and complex question: "At the same time, in this persistent patriarchy that performs physical, psychic and discursive violence against woman, how can women not want to evoke a feminist discourse that cuts across national boundaries" (11)? So, how can women redream if that dreaming is only accessible in the dominant language, trapped as subjects within a particular ideology? Is this redreaming mostly accessible for transnational and cosmopolitan subjects? And if they dream and write, can we, as postcolonial critics, uncover their hidden and subconscious biases for a complex reading?

Let us examine Francophone African literature for a moment. In early feminist novels, "up to the 1980s, the protagonist had spoken in a biographical or semiautobiographical mode: Speech bore witness to her difficulties, particularly the suffering she experienced as part of a couple, part of a polygamous social structure, and confronted with issues of sterility" (Cazenave 4). In the second phase, "feminine speech has become more aggressive, more insistent, within an autorepresentative mode that has become more and more complex" (4). Cazenave calls the mode of the later phase the "mechanism of rebellion" (4). This mechanism has allowed women's voices a space within the dominant narrative. "Through an audacious exploration of forbidden areas of sexuality, desire, passion, love – but also mother-daughter relations and the questioning of reproduction and obligatory maternity as the qualities defining womanhood – they guaranteed themselves access to areas of language that until only recently had been exclusively the domain of men" (4). The writers in the second phase have narrative voices that are "willful, combative, and full of a new energy" and by creating characters that are "typically marginalized in African society," women writers have "created a privileged gaze and a greater space from which to freely express criticism of their society" (Cazenave 10).

By marginalizing themselves voluntarily or involuntarily from hegemonic social spaces, the women characters "find themselves in a paradoxically privileged position that allows them to be introspective and to conduct elaborate analysis of society" (Cazenave 12). They show "rejection of motherhood," and the African woman "comes out in revolt against social and familial pressures, and in particular against excessive power

of the mother-in-law and the implicit obligation to bear children" (13). Finally, Cazenave's work examines "the prevalence of violence, abjection, suffering, and horror in women's texts, considering their impact and their therapeutic value within a writing that is cathartic in nature" (13).

Additionally, regarding women writers, Boehmer notes that "Postcolonial women writers have questioned, cut across, upended or refused entirely the dominant if not dominatory narrative of the independent nation. They have placed their own subjectivities, sexualities, maternal duties, private stories and intimate pleasures in tension with conventional roles transmitted by national and other traditional narratives" (*Stories of Women* 4). While these female writers write to "redream" (Boehmer 17) and recast, or write for catharsis, their reception has been variously problematic in this era of globalization. When women who, in trying to counter colonialist and nationalist misrepresentations, try to rewrite their (her)stories, certain Western or Westernized feminist criticism highlights only the oppressed condition of Third World women in domestic spaces in its misguided notions of sisterhood and common patriarchal oppression, which is then appropriated and used by certain factions in their quest for globalization and market liberalism. The idea that gender oppression will surely end if we open up the markets and spread notions of liberal democracy is resonant of imperialist, colonialist, and neocolonialist discourses. Ideas of liberation and emancipation are still ambiguous, and are used in a post–9/11 world by U.S. imperialists for their own purposes, as can be seen from the examples of Afghanistan and Iraq.

For a successful postcolonial feminist critique of these texts, however, how they question and address such concerns must depend on the cultural, social, and historical contexts, as well as on the race, class, caste, and national identity of the authors and of their representational subjects.

At this juncture, therefore, it is important to ask how postcolonial (South Asian, Caribbean, or African) feminism is different from international and transnational feminism. First, let us look at African feminism. As opposed to many other forms of feminisms, Davies argues that African feminism recognizes a common struggle with African men in anticolonial and neocolonial contexts:

> An African feminist consciousness recognizes that certain inequalities and limitations existed/exist in traditional societies

> and that colonialism reinforced and introduced others. As such, it acknowledges its affinities with international feminism, but delineates a specific African feminism with certain specific needs and goals arising out of the concrete realities of women's lives in African societies. (9)

In looking at women's oppression, postcolonial feminism does not simply apply Western feminist notions of liberation and reject traditional cultural and familial practices; instead, it examines social institutions and their practices for selective acceptance or rejection.

For example, many postcolonial critics maintain that it is not necessary to completely reject all Western constructs and notions of feminism but that they must question certain concepts. Postcolonial feminists must be selective in rejecting or accepting notions of Western feminism, and they must write in order to name themselves rather than simply serve as native informants whose sole purpose is to enlighten an Other (Spivak, "Three Women's Texts" 264). Many postcolonial women writers are careful when they examine constructions of identity in relation to racism, classism, sexism, and (neo)colonialism for redefinition. Postcolonial transnational feminism tries to reconstruct the idea of what it means to be a feminist. Davies explains:

> The term "feminism" often has to be qualified when used by most African and other Third World women. The race, class and cultural allegiances that are brought to its consideration cause the most conflict. Yet, although the concept may not enter the daily existence of the average woman, and although much of what she understands as feminism is filtered through a media that is male-dominated and male-oriented, African women recognize the inequalities and, especially within the context of struggles for national liberation, are challenging entrenched male dominance. (12)

If, however, as Ogunyemi suggests, "feminism has been represented as offensive, and therefore, no respectable African woman writer openly, actively, and consistently associates herself with the ideology," why are they

writing about women's oppression in monolithic ways (5)? African women writers' intent, according to Ogunyemi, is to "improve the quality of Nigerian, and not just women's lives," and since the "majority of the oppressed are women," then the idea is that they must necessarily write about women (5). Although Ogunyemi acknowledges that colonialism and neocolonialism are to be blamed for women's inferior status in Nigeria, she argues that "it would be distorting the facts … to put all the blame on the white man's coming, for the controversy is steeped in contemporary representations of myth and is rooted in geography" (6). Such discussions invariably allow tyrannical colonizers and oppressive regimes to justify genocide or continued exploitation. It is as if to say it is justifiable to destroy a family due to sibling rivalries. Additionally, Ogunyemi sees in women's texts "power clashes that *eternally* plague gender relationships" (emphasis added, 6).

Yet, if one is to read postcolonial women's texts to uncover the *eternal* nature of the power clashes in gender relationships, what ideology are we propagating? Looking at certain African feminists, Oyèrónké Oyêwùmí suggests, "Though feminism in origin, by definition, and by practice is a universalizing discourse, the concerns and questions that have informed it are Western.… As such, feminism remains enframed by the tunnel vision and the bio-logic of other Western discourses" (*The Invention of Women* 13). In women's oppression, there is an interconnectedness of race, class, and sexual oppression, but if we look at gender oppression without looking at the oppressive structures of society in neocolonial spaces, one-sided argument will prevail and equality or change will be hard to achieve. One must look at the literary productions and the historical context that produced them in order to create a critical approach that is textual as well as contextual. As Davies suggests, such a reading will be "textual in that close reading of texts using the literary establishment's critical tools is indicated; contextual as it realizes that analyzing a text without some consideration of the world with which it has a material relationship is of little social value" (10–11). Such a methodology is particularly relevant in the postcolonial feminist criticism of Anglophone texts. Thus, for politically engaged postcolonial/transnational/multicultural feminist criticism, we have to examine why specific cultural definitions of womanhood arise, and for what purposes they are utilized at specific moments in history and by whom.

Additionally, is it useful to continue discussing female oppression in terms of colonial and patriarchal oppression as double colonization? As Oyèrónké Oyêwumí posits,

> It is not colonization that is two, but the forms of oppressions that flowed from the process for native females. It is misleading to postulate two forms of colonization because both manifestations of oppression are rooted in the hierarchical race/gender relations of the colonial situation. African females were colonized by Europeans as Africans and as African women. They were dominated, exploited, and inferiorized as Africans together with African men and then separately inferiorized and marginalized as African women. (340)

In other words, female oppression should not be seen as separate from the colonial situation. Colonialism's impact on women "cannot be separated from its impact on men because gender relations are not zero-sum – men and women in any society are inextricably bound" (Oyêwumí 341). Writers such as Zimbabwe's Tsitsi Dangarembga are particularly aware of the "boundedness" of oppression.

Therefore, postcolonial/transnational/multicultural feminism is careful in examining modernity and its deployment by certain women writers critiquing patriarchies for various audiences. Ultimately, as postcolonial academics and critics in the West, we must ask: How do we read and teach such texts as politically engaged academics and critics? For example, while looking at the "transnational cultural production and reception" of texts by postmodern and postcolonial feminists, Indrapal Grewal and Caren Kaplan critique "certain forms of feminism [that] emerge from [the feminists'] willing participation in modernity with its colonial discourse and hegemonic First World formations that wittingly or unwittingly lead to the oppression and exploitation of many women" (2). They add, "In supporting the agenda of modernity, therefore, feminists misrecognize and fail to resist Western hegemonies" (2). In her article entitled "The Politics of Location as Transnational Feminist Practice," Kaplan states that Virginia Woolf's modernist concerns with space and location in *A Room of One's Own* "intersect with Western feminists' exploration of world space for women in their shared sisterhood" (*Scattered Hegemonies* 137). Kaplan

compares the articulation for this need for "physical space as a matter of material and spiritual survival with the expansion and contraction of colonial worlds," adding that "the claiming of a world space for women raises temporal questions as well as spacial considerations, questions of history as well as of place" (137). Kaplan raises the following questions: "Can such claims be imagined outside the conceptual parameters of modernity? Can worlds be claimed in the name of categories such as 'woman' in all innocence and benevolence, or do these gestures mark the revival of a form of feminist cultural imperialism?" (137). Like Kaplan, I too am interested in the politics of location for postcolonial/transnational/multicultural feminist critical practices and their various uses, and would like to examine the repercussions of such practices. For example, Phillipa Kafka, in *On the Outside Looking In(dian)*, valorizes certain Indian women writers for their attempts at finding their sexualized selves and subjectivities in purely Western terms while quoting copious so-called Indian feminist theorists to support her agenda, and suggests that critics of globalization and neocolonialism (from the left or the right) "ignore gender and sexuality issues and place priorities on resisting globalization" (10). She suggests that to critics of globalization, "gender issues are insignificant" (10). Thus, even critical texts, such as Kafka's, must be placed within a neocolonial space, and to critique them, "it is necessary to focus on the production and reception of feminist theories in transnational cultures of exchange" (Kaplan 138). The question – how are texts by transnational women theorized and received in the Western academy? – is an imperative one to address, more so than ever before. Regarding the production and reception of certain texts, Kaplan notes:

> Too often, Western feminists have ignored the politics of reception in the interpretation of texts from the so-called peripheries, calling for inclusion of "difference" by "making room" or "creating space" without historicizing the relations of exchange that govern literacy, the production and marketing of texts, the politics of editing and distribution, and so on. Most important, feminists with socioeconomic power need to investigate the grounds of their strong desire for rapport and intimacy with the "other." (Kaplan 139)

As the question – can transnational feminists remain in the West without becoming Western? (Shohat 7) – suggests, transnational feminist critical practice must analyze and contextualize the politics of location in female-authored texts to critique the commodification of ethnic cultures.

An important question to reiterate at this juncture is: Where are such texts published and consumed? How are such texts read and understood? For example, how do we read diasporic Indian women writers from Africa who deal with issues of displacement and "race redoubling" (as Indians, Asians, Africans, or Blacks) in the United Kingdom, and the United States of America, where ideas of "diversity and multiculturalism as opposed to difference prevail" (Bhabha, "The Commitment to Theory" 34)? How do we read marginal writings, with their cultural border crossings, where meanings, as Bhabha claims, are never complete or are "open to cultural translation" (162–63), especially for Indian women who are negotiating an "ambiguous" territory, all the while retaining or dragging their sense of "Indianness-in-motions" (Appadurai 10)? These questions need to be addressed for a successful postcolonial critical methodology to occur. What is this nebulous national identity, and how do women engage with ideas of nationalism in order to posit gender identity and oppression? My analysis of various feminists' texts locating violence and oppression on the female body is multipronged in that I bring in various constructions, such as gender, race, class, and sexuality, to examine the production and reception of these texts. To examine gender and violence or gender and madness, we have to reach back, far back, into the history of a culture for the analyses to be significant.

While discussing gender oppression and violence in Africa, Amina Mama points out that "The prevalence of so many pernicious forms of gendered violence demands both historical and contemporary analysis.… Imperialism is the major trope of [such] analysis because it is the common historical force that makes it possible to consider an area as large and diverse as Africa as a continent as having general features that transcend the boundaries of nation, culture, and geography" ("Sheroes and Villains" 47). However, in most critical analyses of gendered violence and oppression, this important period is either elided or negated, and African cultures are generically termed heteropatriarchalist and sexist. Yes, gender oppression and violence need to be addressed for cultural and social change to occur, but how and where they are textualized must first be investigated. Such an investigation will highlight the postcolonial condition of female

writers and that of their representational subjects who are negotiating for individual identities; we need to locate such writings within a particular historical and cultural context if we are to have a successful transnational and postcolonial feminist methodology.

As Grewal and Kaplan suggest, it is the "transnational/social/cultural/economic" (*Scattered* 3) consequences of the social and historical changes within a postmodern and postcolonial framework that will engender a more complex understanding of transnational, translocal, postcolonial feminist practices.

What are the cultural, political, economic, and social consequences of postmodernity? Is the continuation of the colonizers' language one of the consequences, and one of the main ingredients in the "nervous condition"[3] of the postcolonial people, especially for those who continue to write and speak in the colonizers' language? Does it mean that the writers are somehow complicit with imperial and neocolonial ideology and continue to identify with their oppressors? What, then, are the implications for postcolonial Anglophone women writers and their texts, whose readership is obviously Western or Western-educated?

Albert Memmi, for example, suggests that due to the psychological transformation of the colonial subject, colonial aftermaths will be long-lasting: "And the day oppression ceases, the new man is supposed to emerge before our eyes immediately. Now, I do not like to say so, but I must, since decolonization has demonstrated it: this is not the way it happens. The colonized lives for a long time before we see that really new man" (88). Thus, colonization, with its knowledge systems, has lasting and ambiguous impact on the psyche of the postcolonial subject, and consequently, on their representational subjects.

Many postcolonial critics, such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o, for example, claim that schooling was imposed by the colonial administrators primarily for the dissemination of European language and culture. The result of such an education was a class of people who learned to think, speak, and write like the colonizers. Ngugi labels such writings "the literature of the petty-bourgeoisie born of the colonial schools and universities.… Its rise and development reflected the gradual accession of this class to political and even economic dominance" (20). While most of this literature was noticeably nationalistic, Ngugi suggests that its brand of nationalism closed off a majority of the people working in anticolonial struggle:

> [The literature's] greatest weakness still lay where it has always been, in the audience – the petty-bourgeoisie readership automatically assumed by the very choice of language. Because of its indeterminate economic position between the many contending classes, the petty-bourgeoisie develops a vacillating psychological make-up. Like a chameleon it takes on the colour of the main class with which it is in the closest touch and sympathy. It can be swept to activity by the masses at a time of revolutionary tide; or be driven to *silence, fear, cynicism, withdrawal into self-contemplation, existential anguish, or to collaboration with the powers-that-be* at times of reactionary tides. (emphasis added, 22)

Reactionary tides can occur in many postcolonial social spaces, whether within the Third or First World, or in transnational diasporic spaces. Ngugi adds that such literature contributed to the self-identity of this educated petty-bourgeois, which gave them a "national" tradition and literature to confront the imperialist in its anti-imperialist struggle. At the same time, however, it constructed itself as central in the dominant ideology by leaving the masses – including, of course, the majority of women – and the working classes out of this construction (26).

Putting this literature in its political context, Ngugi predicts:

> What we have created is another hybrid tradition, a tradition in transition, a minority tradition that can only be termed an Afro-European literature; that is, the literature written by Africans in European languages.… Their work belongs to an Afro-European literary tradition which is likely to last for as long as Africa is under this rule of European capital in a neo-colonial set-up. (26–27)

By situating such literature in its historical and political contexts, Ngugi helps us understand the political conditions that generated this literature and its continued proliferation in the post-independent or neocolonial spaces in the era of globalization.

As in Africa, the result of English education in India was the formation of a class of native elite, "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Macaulay 359) to such an extent that they continue the cultural and literary practices of the West, particularly in this era of market liberalization and globalism. The continued use of European languages in postcolonial spaces suggests that European languages are, indeed, multinational commodities, supporting capitalist ideology *and* the upper and emergent middle classes in many postcolonial nations.

How are the continued uses of European languages implicated in the cultural identity of a people? What are the implications of such usage for many postcolonial people as well as writers? Ngugi calls the continued use of European language the "psychological violence of the classroom" and sees the aftermath in the continuation of the imperial ideology long after independence. He claims, "In my view language was the most important vehicle through which that power [of the colonizers] fascinated and held the soul prisoner. The bullet was the means of the physical subjugation. Language was the means of the spiritual subjugation" (9). While political and economic oppression is enforced through physical power, cultural oppression, which is imposed through language, is more subtle but has more lasting effect, and ultimately is more insidious.

Ngugi claims that the introduction of the colonizers' language is like a "cultural bomb" that changes the psyche of the victim. He states that this "cultural bomb" has the power to "annihilate a people's belief in their names, in their languages, in their environment, in their heritage of struggle, in their unity, in their capacities and ultimately in themselves" (13). The "cultural bomb" also reduces their past into a "wasteland of non-achievement" from which they wish to distance themselves while desiring to identify with "other people's language rather than their own" (13). Ultimately, "It even plants serious doubts about the moral rightness of struggle. Possibilities of triumph or victory are seen as remote, ridiculous dreams. The intended results are *despair*, *despondency* and a *collective death wish*" (emphasis added, 3), leading to conflicted psyches and nervous subjectivities.

To continue to speak and write in the colonizers' language indicates that the postcolonial people are not yet liberated and continue to identify with the West's universalism leading to neocolonialism. According to Immanuel Wallerstein, "The African continent was thus confronted in

the process of its incorporation into the capitalist world-economy by an intrusive ideology which not only rejected the worth of the gods who had been Africans but also was pervasive in that it took on multiple clothings: Christianity, science, democracy, Marxism" (*Unthinking* 128).

What forms did resistance to these ideologies take in many postcolonial nations? Wallerstein claims that "Cultural resistance everywhere to this intrusive, insistent, newly dominant ideology took *ambiguous* forms" (emphasis added, 128). Many become complicit with this ideology while at the same time resisting it, which becomes the source of a certain form of cultural and psychological madness. "On the one hand," adds Wallerstein, "many Africans accepted, seem to accept, the new universalism, seeking to learn its secrets, seeking to tame this god, seeking to gain its favor" (128). We see such cases and such ambiguity in many literary texts (Rabindranath Tagore's *The Home and the World*, Satyajit Ray's *Devi: Goddess*, Myriam Warner-Vierya's *Juletane* for example).[4] What of resistance then? What ambiguous form does it take? "On the other hand," continues Wallerstein, "many Africans (often the same ones) rebelled against [the new universalism] … It has long been commonplace to observe such an *ambiguous* reaction" (emphasis added, 128). The assumption, then, is that there is no escape from this "double bind" (128). What language do we use to resist neocolonial power structures and their concomitant ideological underpinnings, especially if we are to escape from this "double bind"? Wallerstein suggests that "if we are to get out of [it], we must take advantage of the contradictions of the system itself to go beyond it" (128). How do we take advantage of such a suggestion? What strategies must we use?

If we continue to engage with the language of a particular ideology, even when we are trying to resist and oppose the West's universalism and the capitalist world-economy, does it not still reinforce "the structure of cultural hierarchy and oppression internal to the system" (Wallerstein 129)? Foucault, too, argues that opposition to the dominant discourse in fact actually reinforces the very system and network of power, and that dissent is allowed to foment with the understanding that ultimately it will be incorporated within the institutions of power (*History of Sexuality* 94). Such consequences and co-optations have long been debated within Women's Studies, Ethnic Studies, Postcolonial Studies departments and programs within Western academic spaces. Initially, these programs were supposed to address resistance and change with respect to the dominant institutional power structures, but they were eventually absorbed and

incorporated within the systems, thus losing any oppositional and revolutionary thrust.

This brings us back to the important question: how do we resist cultural imperialism? If nationalism in many parts of South Asia, the Caribbean and Africa used the same idioms as that of Western universalism in the creation of nation-states, are these nations still not very much part of the "modern world systems" (Wallerstein, *Unthinking* 131), created as they are by the European capitalist world economy? "The operation of the capitalist world economy," according to Wallerstein, "is premised on the existence of a political superstructure of sovereign states linked together in and legitimized by an interstate system" (131). The creation of the colonies with "their political boundaries and structures" initiated the incorporation of the colonial world into the European world economy (131), which still exists in this era of globalization with its concomitant free market rhetoric and ideology. Wallerstein states that only beyond the ideas of the nation-states can India or countries in Africa transform the past constructed by colonialism and nationalism and then "be deeply reinforced as … enduring 'civilization[s]'" (133). Thus, only beyond nationalism, indeed, only in postnational spaces can the polities of the Global South become, once again, "enduring 'civilizations.'"

What of resistance, then? What about the present moment? In *Empire of Knowledge*, Vinay Lal states that if resistance and dissent are "couched in rational, civilized, constitutional, and adult-like language recognized by Western parliamentarian and social commentators" (11), and only then are recognized as productive and therefore, become productive, what of other forms of resistance? According to Lal, there is room for resistance within a given ideology if we use "another apparatus of dialogue and resistance," as Gandhi did when he "abandoned the placard, petition, and parliamentary speech in favor of another form of dialogue and resistance" – using another language of dissent, that of "fasting, spinning, non-cooperation, and even walking" (11). Such resistance can initially be seen as madness or deviancy; for example, Churchill's description of Gandhi as a "half naked fakir" who ought to be trampled to death is well known. At any rate, everyone can be, yes, *can be* a Gandhi and be successful; however, those potentials for self-realization and becoming interconnected and compassionate through the individual path seem to be closed off to most modern subjects.

Thus, we are back to the age-old cycle, the cycle of power and ideology. "Modernity insists that even dissenters of modernity should speak in the language of modernity" (Lal, *Empire* 13), so that, ultimately, as Wallerstein posits, we are reinforcing the structure of "cultural hierarchy and oppression internal" (129) to modernity. So to resist and dissent, "We shall have to be more attentive to critiques of modernity, more nuanced in our deliberations on the much celebrated ideas of tolerance, democracy, and freedom" (Lal, *Empire* 12). Otherwise, in the continued use of the idioms of modernity by Western and Western-educated people, "one can see the reinvention of Europe, the center of the world, to which, in Hegelian fashion, all history is fated to return" (Lal 12), leading, of course, to reinforcement of the same oppressive power structures that the formerly colonized have been resisting for decades. And while the wretched of the earth remain wretched and poor,[5] the middle class in India, according to Lal, "delighted equally at the country's new-found nuclear prowess and its enviable software successes, began to fancy as a superpower," are churning out "Indian 'billionaires' – their wealth counted not in billion of rupees … but in billion of dollars" (146), leading, once again, to the cultural and economic hegemony of this class in India. (See, for example, Tarun Khanna.) Such "Indian billionaires" proliferate in post-apartheid South Africa as well. These middle classes then continue to celebrate modernity and are very instrumental in freeing the markets. In an era of globalization and market liberalism, we are contending with literature from such middle classes in the postcolonial world, and for my purposes, particularly the *conflicted* and *ambiguous* female narrative voice from the upper and middle classes who are writing and publishing for a particular audience.

My main concern here is with postcolonial female writers representing resistance to gender identity construction. Conflicted as they are in the use of the very language of modernity which nationalism propagated, they posit even resistance to gender identity constructions in modern terms. Are their voices dissenting, or are they simply the voices of ones co-opted by the West to add "chic" (Lal, *Empire* 14) to the academic disciplines in the name of multiculturalism? For example, Bharati Mukherjee and Meena Alexander are such voices from the margins who, indeed, have become the token representative of the so-called oppressed Indian Womanhood in the Western academy. What other forms of epistemological frameworks exist besides the dominant Eurocentric ones? As the reaction in the Western

world to most postcolonial texts suggests, female writers' quests for liberation and happiness are couched in Western, liberal humanist terms.

Can we uncover another epistemology? Are there other forms of dissent? Lal claims that

> the necessary oppositions are not between tradition and modernity, or between particularism and universalism; rather, the intent is to probe how one set of universalisms, associated with the trajectory of Western reason, came to establish their predominance, and what are those competing universalisms which can claim our allegiance. (14)

Modernity and individualism, seen as universal, are problematic for postcolonial spaces, particularly for those "civilizations where the ground reality and ethical thinking always inclined towards plurality" (Lal 14). Thus, we must find the disjuncture between various epistemologies to recover or reread postcolonial feminist narratives for what Lal terms the "ecological survival of plurality" (158). As postcolonial transnational feminists, we must ignore "Western civilization's desire to scientize its narrative" (Lal 161) and, instead, uncover other competing universalisms and reread ideas of "oppressive" postcolonial cultures through a thorough-going critique of "dominant frameworks of Western knowledge" (15).

This book examines the poetics of resistance to gendered identity formations in the texts of women writers of the African, Caribbean, and South Asian diasporas and their interconnections to India and Africa. How are racial and ethnic identities constructed within such spaces in an era of globalization with its transnational cultural flow? This, in turn, leads to a discussion of how such constructions impact the gender and national identity formation of the diasporic Indian or African female subject.

As Chiwenye Okonjo Ogunyemi claims, "African novels written by women, as counternarratives, fascinate with their inherent *contradictions* as they reveal strength and weakness, beauty and ugliness, *ambiguity* and clarity, in unfolding the politics of oppression" (emphasis added, 4). Additionally, how do diasporic women, who have never been to their "home" country, negotiate for gender identity and empowerment in shifting territories of the First and "Third World" diasporic spaces, when they are first displaced from their "home" cultures and alienated in another?

How are racial and ethnic identities constructed within such spaces? How do such constructions impact the gender and national identity formation of the diasporic Indian or African women?

First of all, I realize that to understand postcolonial South Asian, Caribbean, and African women and the constructions of conflicted psyches and "nervous conditions," I must examine how nationalism constructed the modern woman. Toward that end, this book delves briefly into the history of nationalism and the transformation of the colonized women into the "new" women of modernity. Following that, I focus on the South Asian, African, Caribbean, and diasporic cultural production or "*work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of the modern subjectivity" (original emphasis, Appadurai 3). I consider films as well as fiction, as "[s]uch media transform the field of mass mediation because they offer new resources and new disciplines for the construction of imagined selves and imagined worlds" (Appadurai 3). Finally, I will examine cultural productions coming out of diasporic spaces, such as Africa, the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Canada, where identities are negotiated and reconceptualized in ambiguous and troubled territories by postcolonial women for their self-empowerment.

At present, gender representation and construction in the West and throughout the world remain problematic. So how do postcolonial/transnational/multicultural/diasporic Indian women construct national and gender identity? How do they define gender in cross-cultural spaces where ideas of identity take on special meaning? How are hybrid identities and sexualities represented and received?

Additionally, South Asian and African women, for example, who construct a separate sexual self from that of the idealized and essentialized notion of "pure" womanhood, struggle to depict their identities in troubled First and Third World territories. Given resurgent debates on nationalism in the West since 9/11, moreover, it has also become difficult for them to negotiate identity even in First World spaces where individualism is encouraged. Offering critical thought on issues such as identity politics and representation, this book examines the comparative poetics of African, South Asian, and Caribbean women writers and filmmakers depicting gender identity representation, resistance, and identity negotiation for Indian women in India and African and their diasporas, as well as the reception of these concepts in different spaces.

In institutions of higher learning, where issues of multiculturalism, transnationalism, and feminism are taught interchangeably in efforts toward curriculum diversification, the questions posed above take on critical undertones for a politically conscious criticism. Are feminist political concerns separate from multicultural concerns? More importantly, how can we, as postcolonial/transnational/multicultural feminists, critique postcolonial texts that represent oppressed and powerless Indian women for a Westernized and Western audience? Can we refuse hierarchies of class, race, sexual, and gender-based struggles (Shohat 1)? According to Ella Shohat, "there is the mutual embeddedness between transnational and multicultural struggles, and, instead, feminists must highlight the political intersectionality … of all these axes of stratification" (Shohat 1). In Western academic spaces, we often try to define multiculturalism and transnationalism in terms that either embrace all differences and diversity or simply become exclusionary.

According to Shohat, "even with the best of intentions, a fetishized focus on African female genital mutilation or on Asian foot-binding ends up as complicit with a Eurocentric victimology that reduces African or Asian agency and organizing" (9). Shohat suggests the "center/periphery" narratives must be disrupted by multicultural feminist critique, especially "when talking 'about' the 'Third World,' [and the] feminist resistant practices within a conflictual community, where opposition to such practices does not perpetuate the false dichotomy of savagery versus civilization or tradition versus modernity" (9).

Many in the Western academy continue to critique postcolonial feminist texts in a reductive, Eurocentric manner to which I am an ongoing witness. As there are so many so-called postcolonial feminist texts that are proliferating in the West in the past few decades, their ongoing examination in simple binaries of East/West, or colonialism and nationalism, abounds. Chetty quotes Shashi Deshpande, who comments that "Indian Literature suffers from a feeling of instability because of the tendency to inflate, ethnicise, exoticise, 'present,' 'explain,' or package India for foreign audiences" (*Indias Abroad* 8). Why or how did it come about that certain writers became "native informants," so to speak? What about representations and ideological constructions – colonialist and nationalists? As postcolonial feminists, critics, and academics, "we must not duplicate the colonial narrative of a rescuing mission" (Grewal and Kaplan 9). Instead,

we must share the "critique of hegemony and the burden of representation" (Grewal and Kaplan 9).

However, my contention is not that feminists cannot communicate and collaborate across racial or class boundaries and borders. As Leela Gandhi posits, "In the course of its quarrel with liberal feminism, postcolonialism – as we have been arguing – fails conclusively to resolve the conflicting claim of 'feminist emancipation' and 'cultural emancipation'" (93). If, as Gandhi claims, "postcolonial theory betrays its own uneasy complicity with nationalist discourses whenever it announces itself as the only legitimate mouthpiece of native women" (95), can "postcolonialism and feminism … exceed the limits of their representative histories" (98)? Thus, once again we are in the middle of the binary logic of Western knowledge systems. We must find other ways of dissent, as Vinay Lal suggests, and refashion liberation and emancipation through competing universalisms and not fall prey to binary logic.

Therefore, when we read postcolonial women's texts, we have to keep in mind that the representation of the identity of the postcolonial woman has to do with the operation of ideology and the gaps and absences the texts produce. The identity of the postcolonial woman is ever-shifting as she is being formed by the ideologies that surround her. Thus, for a politically engaged postcolonial feminist critique, one has to analyze not only what the text reveals but also what it conceals, or what it cannot say: "It is the significant *silences* of a text, in its gaps and absences that the presence of ideology can be most positively felt. It is these silences which the critic must make 'speak'" (Macherey 132). Because the way ideology operates is itself full of contradictions, the text tries to offer a symbolic or enforced resolution. In reading postcolonial women's texts, the feminist critic makes the silences of the text reveal culturally oppositional construction for redefinition of female roles. Although the elite Western-educated women gained substantially in terms of modernization and emancipation through Western education in the material realm, it is important to note that the models of liberation conceptualized by them are limited due to their consciousness and status, which are produced within a given class ideology and within various transnational locales. Their models of liberation, if emulated, will only lead to further *despair* and *despondency* (Ngugi) for the underprivileged and oppressed, especially if Western education and its fruits are dangled as a carrot seemingly leading to happiness and liberation for the oppressed masses in the Global South.

In conclusion, then, let me reiterate that some of the women writers whose work I discuss in this book are particularly aware of the oppressive ideals of womanhood imposed on them during nationalism. They question the idealization of woman as Earth Mother/Motherland or as the pure and self-sacrificing wife. They condemn practices such as arranged marriage, female circumcision, and polygamy. Some of the writers try to associate the notions of patriarchal oppression with cultural colonization and neocolonialism. For many writers, however, raising consciousness becomes complicated with national identities; do they speak and risk being accused of being "native informant," or do they not speak and risk being accused of being ignorant and oppressed "native" women? There are many postcolonial women writers who want to bring about change within the hegemonic structures in a selective way. To reiterate, these writers envision a cultural script and an alternate space, where "competing universalism" and the "ecology of plurality" (Lal, *Empire* 158) exist. Writers such as Dangarembga and Aparna Sen bring into sharp focus the postcolonial condition of their representational subjects; they show how cultural constructions of gender identities are interrelated with cultural colonization in their countries. For example, Dangarembga writes about cultural colonization as a form of "mental disease," a "nervous condition," or as I see it, cultural madness, for both the male and the female subjects. I discuss various forms of madness, cultural and social, where female identity is seen as deviant due to its conflicted nature, defined and constructed as it is in terms of an Other in the postcolonial and transnational spaces. Postcolonial female writers highlight "nervous" female characters, who find themselves the victims of cultural and economic colonization in a globalized world. However, they do not simply replicate masculinist and bourgeois modernist agendas of individualism as Bharati Mukherjee has been accused of doing. Certain African female writers, too, have been complicit with modernist agendas. For example, Ogunyemi argues that female oppression and "the cycle of poverty might be broken, if [the young girl] goes to school long enough to obtain the wherewithal to sustain a fulfilling motherhood"; otherwise she will be "exploited and overworked" (9). My question is: If social, economic and structural changes do not occur, what good is an education for the oppressed?

Ultimately, I show that while some writers conceptualize women's equality in terms of educational and professional opportunity, sexual liberation, and individualism, others, although also limited by their own

class ideology, realize that the paradigm of liberation that focuses only on individual freedom without looking at the larger socioeconomic and political conditions in a postcolonial and global world is rather limiting. This book addresses how many women writers reinscribe themselves to disrupt the dominant narratives through painful and maddening inscriptions, and the narrative space that opens up for reinscription can be incredibly empowering for some; the nervous and alienated subject learns to negotiate its subjecthood and identity within the many shifting positions, such as race, class, gender, and caste, and learns to reconcile the many subjectivities within a given hegemony for collective social change. These madwomen either learn to collapse discursive boundaries and binaries in attempts to create equal alternative spaces (which, even if possible, are in the long run in danger of being co-opted by the dominant power structures and institutions), or negotiate within given hegemonies for empowering subjecthood devoid of modernist agendas. They accomplish the task by refusing to be victims of globalization, while keeping in mind the limited opportunities afforded to other, oppressed women *and* men, who, due to increased penetration of the capitalist world economy, continue to suffer deprivation and are indeed the most disenfranchised of all.