

Introductory Notes: Postcolonialism and its Discontents

I

IT IS UNSURPRISING that the contents of this special issue on "Postcolonialism and its Discontents" have come to be dispersed over two issues of *ARIEL*, and that the Introduction to this collection has been fragmented into three separate pieces. For whatever coherence the term "postcolonial" might have promised in its earliest moments—as an intellectual field or academic discipline, as a critical methodology for social analysis, as a pedagogy, or a cultural location, or a stance—the attributes of postcolonialism have become so widely contested in contemporary usage, its strategies and sites so structurally dispersed, as to render the term next to useless as a precise marker of intellectual content, social constituency, or political commitment. Postcolonialism has become conceptually dis/contented—a suitcase blown open on the baggage belt—and whether the present "crisis" over postcolonialism's meaning and its moment will come to be read as the disciplinary manifestation of intellectual paralysis in a cultural and critical movement that might have been, or as a display of intellectual vitality in the production of new and diverse interventionary practices, new modes for resistance and its representations, and new spaces for the formation of "coalitional transformations" (Radhakrishnan 766) is itself one of the over-riding questions being taken up within contemporary postcolonial debate. No *one* speaks for "the postcolonial." No one place contains its diversity and discord.

Our aim in this special issue has not been to cover, or to re-stage, the vast network of debate over disciplinary postcolonialism, for it is clear that the issues that underwrite that network go well beyond the question of a single discipline's onomastics,

field construction, and critical methodology. In the wake of “the Marxist turn” in the 1970s and “the poststructuralist turn” in the 1980s, argue the editors of a recent textbook on human geography, just about every field of academic scholarship has come to “a heightened sense of intellectual experimentation and self-appraisal, a blurring of boundaries and genres, and a determined attempt to reach out beyond the centralisms and parochialisms of the Western academy” (Gregory, Martin, and Smith 5). In the wake of “the increasing globalisation of culture,” argue the editors of a recent scholarly collection on postcolonial critical theory, “matters of colony and empire have moved centre stage in Anglo-American” critical and cultural theory during the past 15 years (Barker, Hulme, and Iversen 1). If the first of these two intellectual currents has produced what Gregory, Martin, and Smith (5) have called a disciplinary “lowering of the capitals” in Philosophy, Science, Theory, and History, and a rigorous questioning of the privileges that are ascribed to these categories, the second of these two currents has generated at least one institutional category—the Postcolonial—which is now in the process of accruing, as Barker, Hulme, and Iversen put it, “the dubious privilege of the upper case,” at least within “Western” universities (2). This irony needs critical commentary, obviously, and much of the contemporary debate over postcolonialism concerns the cultural location—the material situation—of this new academic field and the modes of knowledge and analysis it produces. “Why is it that the term ‘postcoloniality’ has found such urgent currency in the First World but is in fact hardly ever used within the excolonized worlds of South Asia and Africa?” wonders R. Radhakrishnan, in his important essay, “Postcoloniality and the Boundaries of Identity.” “What,” he asks, “is the secret behind the academic formation called ‘postcoloniality’ and its complicity with certain forms of avant-garde Eurocentric cultural theory?” (750).

But the “postcolonial turn” in intellectual labour (if there is one) is not entirely the same thing as “the” disciplinary crisis of academic postcolonialism. Some of the most urgent debates now taking place within and around postcolonialism—and this

across a wide range of cultural constituencies and intellectual movements—concern the extent to which, in Homi Bhabha's words, "the primary conceptual and organizational categories" of modernity itself need to be revisited and revised in order to represent the "new signs of identity," the "innovative sites of collaboration, and contestation" that come into being in the modern postcolonial world. Bhabha's argument is that

the demography of the new internationalism is the history of post-colonial migration, the narratives of cultural and political diaspora, the major social displacements of peasant and aboriginal communities, the poetics of exile, the grim prose of political and economic refugees. . . . The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of *pre-given* ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, ongoing negotiation that seeks to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. The "right" to signify from the periphery of authorized power and privilege does not depend on the persistence of tradition; it is . . . reinscribed through the conditions of contingency and contradictoriness that attend upon the lives of those who are "in the minority." . . . Political empowerment, and the enlargement of the multiculturalist cause, come from posing questions of solidarity and community from the interstitial perspective.

(The Location of Culture 2-3)

What is under debate here is whether intellectual critique needs to rethink "the economic, social and cultural production of space" and subjectivities (Chambers 110), and whether the political empowerment of certain diasporic, minority, or underprivileged groups might be better enabled by the articulation of new *ways* to represent the "in-between" spaces and subjectivities those groups have come to inhabit in the present postcolonial moment. Aijaz Ahmad enters this debate by saying "no." For Ahmad, the kind of intellectual turn Bhabha is announcing—towards the "dissentual" culture of "theory" that has dominated Euro-American intellectual life after the 1960s—amounts to a "displacement of activist culture with a textual culture" and actually works "to combat the more uncompromising critiques of existing cultures of the literary profession with a new mystique of leftish professionalism, and to reformulate in a postmodernist direction questions which had previously been associated with

a broadly Marxist politics" (1). Ahmad insists on a return to "that fundamental dialectic of our times"—between "imperialism, decolonization and socialism"—as "the necessary backdrop against which issues of nation, nationalism, colony, empire, post-coloniality, and so on, need to be posed, in literary or any other theory" (17, 9-10).

Clearly, this dispute between Bhabha and Ahmad over the use of analytical categories for critique has everything to do with the location of intellectual work and has material effects on the organization of scholarship and pedagogy within postcolonial critical studies in the university. But in no sense, I think, could either Bhabha or Ahmad's position be understood as being "about" postcolonialism in some narrow disciplinary sense. What is at stake in this dispute is not *simply* a scholarly field and its critical methodology but the question of what might comprise an adequate description of contemporary inequalities in privilege and power and an adequate understanding of how those inequalities might come to be changed. Both critics, I think, are engaged in the remarkably difficult project of carrying intellectual labour to a politically generative phase, and it seems to me that those of us who attempt to "do" postcolonial intellectual work, or to "be" scholars and critics within the general field of academic postcolonialism, do little in the service of political emancipation—after colonialism, under neo-colonialism—if we come to read debates such as this one as being important *only* to the extent that they describe a scholarly discipline in which our work has a stake, or if we hear in the contentious clamour of postcolonial critical dispute a voice that counsels us *only* to seek out the silent meditations of intellectual self-reflection and reconstitution, and not to risk the messy productivity of working intellectually towards genuine social change.

We received an unusually large number of submissions for this special issue, and one of our principles of selection for the articles that appear here, and that will appear in the July 1995 issue (Volume 26, No. 3), was a leaning towards scholarly engagements that seemed to envision something politically productive as the end of critical work. We did not attempt to balance the various pro- and anti-postcolonialism(s) that are represented in

the following pages, in order that our “coverage” of the “topic” would appear to be a “fair” one, nor did we attempt to stack the deck with papers endorsing specialized disciplinary arguments the co-editors secretly agreed with in advance. What we were looking for, collectively, was a critical sense of why commentary on “the postcolonial” should *matter*. And so “the diverse, fractious voices of postcolonial scholars” (to use Henry Schwartz’s and Sangeeta Ray’s phrase) that appear in these two issues on “Postcolonialism and its Discontents” engage the topos of “postcolonialism” in a remarkably disunified, dispersed, and fragmented manner, with a view to locating remarkably different kinds of problems—cultural, political, institutional—and remarkably different modalities of social subjectivity and representation. These papers do not present a collective “take” on “the postcolonial” in any of its manifestations. Nor do the differences between these papers represent, collaboratively, the differences in and around any single postcolonialism and the debate that surrounds it.

In her paper “Once More with Feeling: What is Postcolonialism?,” Deepika Bahri considers “the ambiguities and dissonances that plague ‘postcoloniality,’” and she offers us this counsel: “let us not be tempted to simplify them for a facile coherence.” This is counsel that the co-editors of this special collection for *ARIEL* have very much taken to heart. But to anyone who has worked with a scholarly journal and who knows the importance of coherence, the dangers of ambiguity and dissonance, at the level of typography, orthography, apparatus, voice, and intellectual predication for scholarly work, a manifesto such as this last one will of course strike terror to the heart, especially when it is advanced so capriciously by a disunified collective of *guest* co-editors. And so, for their remarkable forbearance, and for much else, we must thank with genuine earnestness *ARIEL*’s editor, Victor Ramraj, *ARIEL*’s acting editor during the past year, Patricia Srebnik, and *ARIEL*’s astonishing, profoundly competent, copy-editor, Jennifer Kelly. They kept the wheels on this project while the guest co-editors were so busy making off with the hubcaps.

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II

One of the things that excited me about co-editing this special issue was our critical acknowledgement of the fact of postcolonial discontent. As a card-carrying postcolonial discontent, I, and many others, have been vocal in the critique of aspects of postcolonialism as it has entered in its various manifestations into the academy. For many of us discontents, however, the critique of postcolonialism is not an easy one, for it rarely involves outright repudiation of the field, as we see it in its flaws and wonders. My history as an academic and an intellectual has been deeply influenced by postcolonialism; in many ways I see myself as having developed with it, my first postcolonial glimmerings and attachments having occurred in the mid-1980s, when (to my ageing memory, anyway) postcolonial studies were in fact still marginal, contestatory, and critical: "post" not only "colonial," but here in Canada and many former British colonies, post-"Commonwealth" as well.

Reading postcolonial literatures and studying postcolonial theory, then, was my formative intellectual experience; to a large extent, along with my dabblings in poststructuralist theory, my incursion into the then-new field was to determine the course of my academic career. I can no more leave it behind, despite that profound discontentment, than I can leave behind my other formative world view of feminism. Indeed, much of my dissatisfaction with postcolonialism mirrors my dissatisfaction with feminism; to my mind, however, feminism in many instances has attempted to grapple with the issues that the postcolonial has not, both inside the academy and (especially) outside of it. Perhaps this is what some of our contributors point to in their (or others') dis-ease with postcolonialism, that as an academic and intellectual movement and moment, postcolonialism is itself uneasy with activism, which is not to say, of course, that some of the best critics, theorists, writers of the postcolonial are not activists themselves.

Many, many people have pointed out the dilemmas and complications in the academic institutionalization of radical movements and discourses. Like academic feminism, postcolonialism is rife with contradictions that reside in the often-unquestioned

and rarely contested hierarchies and relations of power in the university or college. Our analyses, often trenchant and astute, of cultural texts, seem so often not to pertain to our institutional texts, discourses, and processes: to our relationships with our colleagues, students, support staff, administrators, and the like. In our institutional lives, we can clearly see and frequently encourage the replication of the very structures on which colonialism and imperialism were based and on which they thrived.

One of the paths I have chosen in my travels through the universities in which I have worked is anti-racism, specifically in my classrooms. Anti-racist pedagogy, whether classroom, collegial, or otherwise institutional, seems to me to be an essential component of the postcolonial, of postcolonial pedagogy. Yet—and this is where my profoundest uneasiness and conflict with postcolonialism lies—the project of anti-racism in many cases seems to be elided by, or anathema to, those of us who “do” postcolonialism. The project of theorizing our pedagogies seems to be marginal even to us, with the consequence that those people and bodies of people who evaluate the postcolonial academic’s progress can say with complete sincerity, “what does anti-racist pedagogy have to do with your research into postcolonial literatures?” While it is easy to attribute this kind of comment to outsider ignorance, I suspect the fault lies equally with those of us who profess the postcolonial without professing the role of race and racism and without resisting the role of race and racism in our methods of teaching, the texts and subjects we choose, and so on. I have certainly argued elsewhere, and often enough, that we postcolonialists must scrutinize the place that pedagogy (postcolonial pedagogy) has in our theorizing of the postcolonial and that we must also *write* about it, talk about it, deprivatize the almost pathological isolation in which we teach, interrogate for ourselves, colleagues, and students how we privilege and institutionalize certain knowledges, critique even the most trivial of our assumptions about good teaching, important teaching, and important learning. The postcolonial academic, it seems to me, must work out her reasons for silence, for certain kinds of grading strategies and types of assignments, for certain modes of transmitting knowledge, for her defensiveness and

ignorance on certain occasions, for her position on advocating for students and colleagues alike, her position on what constitutes academic freedom, “proper” scholarship, and the like. Quite simply, not enough of us do that well—unlearning colonialist, racist, nationalist attitudes is not a simple task and is perhaps doubly complex for those of us who have a vested interest in doing postcolonial work, as if that naturally exempts us from the real work required for that unlearning. It is as if we, too, have accepted that learning is based on a model of consumption, that to be a postcolonialist is to have jumped instantly from darkness to enlightenment without the long and difficult work—the research, if you like—that is, in fact, required.

With this in mind, I wonder how many of us examine our students’ progress through the academy as both allegories and histories of colonialism; in Canada, how the position of “international students” is racialized through that history, in terms of funding, our often-unexamined attitudes about them, ESL (English as a Second Language) examinations, their choice of research areas, even their freedom of movement from nation to nation. It is here that we tend, even as we profess the importance of history and of historicizing, to become resolutely ahistorical, and in the fine tradition of liberal individualism, to see these events as individual cases, as problems with personality conflicts, and as aberrant—at any rate, as something in which we cannot intervene.

Postcolonial scholars, at all places in the academic hierarchies, *must* intervene, must take on the anti-oppression work that, to my mind, is an integral part of the postcolonial project. Such work discomfits and discomforts many of us and involves indeed a certain amount of risk, a certain blurring and redefining of boundaries that many of us hold very dear to our sense of academic selfhood. As Rey Chow points out, very uncomfortably for me, the hold of white supremacy can be seen on both sides of the debates around “political correctness”—debates, again, that are easier sometimes to ignore than to contest. I suggest, too, that we intervene as postcolonial pedagogues by critiquing, for example, in our classrooms (and outside of them) the particularly entrenched ideologies of multiculturalism that, particularly in

Canada, where it is established as an official political discourse and policy, are so effective that any anti-racist work in the university classroom must involve a discussion and unpacking of multiculturalism as a form of racism. Both Deepika Bahri and Kalpana Seshadri-Crooks discuss these issues in the US context, and their own critiques serve as useful starting points for positing a pedagogical strategy for a solid critique not only of multiculturalism but of many of the concomitant debates about equity, affirmative action, representation in various cultural texts (see Sara Mills and Vijay Mishra for complex and important arguments about postcoloniality and popular culture), academic freedom, and the like.

As many have suggested in these essays on postcolonialism, the field, perhaps more accurately called now a discipline, can at times be (and is often perceived to be) monolithic and universalizing, recapitulating the very colonizing strategies it seeks to critique; certainly those of us who practise it are often guilty of not allowing for plurality and specificity, guilty, in the tradition of multiculturalism, of merely tolerating dissenting views while guarding our own postcolonial territory. Or, as with multiculturalism, there are many who dabble in the field, hungry for song-dance-food-costume, who create of postcolonialism a secondary specialization, without sufficient regard for theoretical, political, and cultural homework.

I suggest that part of a shift in thinking might be a rhetorical one. At what point did *postcoloniality* become the discipline of *postcolonialism*, an -ism that competes with others for attention and for validation? If postcoloniality, like postmodernity, is conceived of as a cultural condition, a state of being, then the other “-isms”—feminism, anti-racism, racism, and so on—are very clearly strands, not merely within a narrow intellectual project, but within a larger cultural project. Here, I may be idealistic—predictable counterpoint to postcolonial discontentment and cynicism—what use, after all, in playing with the master’s words in his house? As students of imperialism, however, we know that discursive resistance is real resistance, and that identity politics often circulate in and through our languages.

The field of the postcolonial is enormous and complicated, more than many of our other literary fields and specializations.

It is of necessity political; and, for myself, the politics inherent in it must in part define it. As with other political debates within the academy, I fear that we postcolonialists permit ourselves to accept the politics of ignorance, and the perpetuation of ignorance-as-knowledge, especially in our classrooms, especially when the issues we face and debate are controversial and emotional. The first step in my postcolonial pedagogy is to own up to ignorance, to point out that the will to know is not conducive to understanding, in essence, to humble myself and my students into recognizing how our ways of knowing, thinking, and reading are defined by their own limits. Easier said than done, when the discourses of freedom, individuality, and tolerance sustain a cultural ignorance that is sometimes astounding and always frightening. Easier said than done, when the enormity of the task of cultural critique works directly against the interests of our disciplinary areas and assumptions.

Take, for instance, my experience, with four other professors and 16 teaching assistants, team-teaching a large first-year English literature survey course, at the end of which students castigated the teaching team for being too political, too focused on single agendas (I was nominated as the “racism and colonialism” person). What was far more difficult in the end to respond to (I can be quite articulate when I need to be about the political and intellectual necessity of such “narrow” agendas) was, in fact, the naturalized disciplinary assumptions of the students—assumptions held not only by first-year students, as we know. I fell prey to the fear of many English professors when a student charged that our favourite “issues” were not textual—why did we not *simply study the text*? Although a colleague on the teaching team suggested that for her (and for me) these issues *do* inhere in the texts, and form our reading strategies, I was still flummoxed and suffered a moment of true disorientation: what, in fact, did the student *mean* when he suggested that what we should do is “only” look at the texts, and where could I, on the last day of the term, even begin to tackle that question? Part of the failure, obviously, if it was a failure, was that in fact we set up the students to expect “only” texts through our teaching methods (mostly lecturing), the ways we structured the syllabus, assignments, and exam, the

ways we graded, the hierarchy of the professorial teaching team, graduate teaching assistants, students, and so on. Structurally and conceptually much of the course supported what the students already expected to be true of “English,” and I, for one, lost a great deal of pedagogical courage as soon as I was faced with 200 students and was under the scrutiny of teaching assistants and colleagues. I did not practise postcolonial, feminist, or anti-racist pedagogy as soon as I was outside the familiar context of my own, private, doors-closed classroom.

This somewhat lengthy anecdote functions, I hope, to suggest what I see as the biggest hurdle to overcome in establishing postcolonial studies as a truly intellectual, liberatory project. The atomization of our academic practices, the institutional imperative to elide what at times must be obvious to all of us—that the academy is based on relationships that are identical to and indeed a consequence of the imperialist impulse—is what we must tackle in our postcolonial work, in order that we can never deny the real impact of postcoloniality, never relegate it to a simple reading of texts, never find ourselves theorizing in the service of our vested interests, theorizing against those who challenge us, never deny that current social and institutional oppressions, and active resistance to them, have to be an integral part of what it means to be a postcolonial intellectual. Until this occurs, even for myself, my discontentment with the postcolonial, even as I define myself and my intellectual activity around and through it, will remain profound.

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III

An advertisement that has been printed widely throughout Canadian media in the early months of 1995 depicts—sometimes in black and white, sometimes in jade and blue—a framed engraving of China’s Great Wall undulating from right to left towards a small tower. Below the image of the Wall’s bricks there is a small square filled with a dragon whose sprawling tail and limbs construct perhaps the most over-conventionalized figure of the Orient, familiar through everything from silk scarves to Chinese restaurant menus. What is most striking is the caption, in large

bright lettering against the dark sky; it reads, "Wall Street." This superimposition of the financial centre of New York City, and therefore the metonymic representation of American capital, onto Orientalist figurations of the far east transforms the ancient Chinese landscape into the latest opportunity for investment. Further, the advertisement, which by now the reader might have guessed is offering mutual funds, promises entry to the growing economies of the Indo-Pacific world, and if its representations seem to appeal to the nostalgia of a past age—preferring a feudal landscape and an archaic dragon to, say, the skyscrapers of contemporary Singapore or Hong Kong—the text promotes investment opportunities that cut across traditional divisions of first/third world, developed/undeveloped countries ("from China and Japan to Australia and India"). In the new world of multinational finance, both national boundaries and earlier global divisions are equally subordinate to the maximization of capital.

In its crude and simplistic figures, the advertisement nevertheless goes some way to representing, or, better, to foregrounding the difficulty of representing, the new global system that more than any crisis in legitimation threatens the older order of nation-states. At a time when the largest multinational corporations control more capital than the national government of Japan, when the powerful European Union seems utterly unable to protect its own cultural productions from an overwhelming onslaught by American film, video, and television, when countries are unable to protect the self-sufficiency of their national economies from the effects of transnational speculation, there would seem to be no doubt that the Enlightenment nation-state, whose development dominated modernity, and whose model often lingered on in longings for emancipation from colonization, has become a fragile and besieged entity. Indeed, Fredric Jameson locates the sheer difficulty of representing the emergent forces of globalization as one of the urgent problems in cultural constructions and, I would add, one of the most persistent "discontents" of postcolonialism: how is it possible, he asks, "to think a system so vast that it cannot be encompassed by the natural and historically developed categories of perception with

which human beings normally orient themselves" (2)? The strategy of an earlier generation that designated "Three Worlds," the "First" developed and industrialized, the "Third" undeveloped and poor, appears to be an increasingly inadequate representation, not only because it is less and less obvious where countries and groupings might be situated in the implicit hierarchy of the "Three Worlds" but also because the gap between wealth and poverty seems more and more to be characteristic of the internal relationships within so-called "First World" countries. In *National Culture and the New Global System*, Frederick Buell comments on the eclipse of three-worlds theory and the formulation of a new model:

the notion that the world is somehow interconnected in a single system, has emerged, expressing the perception that global relationships constitute, not three separate worlds, but a single network. . . . the single system has come to be perceived as more and more complex, increasingly centerless, and featuring a multiplication of interacting parts that are increasingly fragmented and unstable.

(10)

Buell's argument draws on the reconceptualizations proposed by Immanuel Wallerstein in *The Modern World System* (1974), *The Politics of the World Economy* (1984), and *Geopolitics and Geoculture* (1991). In this body of writings, world-systems theory suggests that capitalism's development since the sixteenth century has imposed itself across national boundaries, even deflecting the challenges of "Third World" nationalisms into neo-colonial economic domination of emergent states. While it is true that any argument that attempts to grasp the globalizing forces of capitalism must be vigilant against the risk of obscuring particularities that are crucial for mapping local political strategies, it is also true that conceiving of the world as a system facilitates an awareness of the interconnections that cut across the most disparate situations. The investigations in this and in the July 1995 issue of *ARIEL*—think of Peter Hulme's suggestion that America needs to be included in the "postcolonial," the different but overlapping perspectives on migrancy developed by Sangeeta Ray and Henry Schwarz and by Revathi Krishnaswamy, the reflections on postcolonialism and indigenous people by Victor Li, the exploration of narratives of diaspora by Vijay Mishra—are interventions

that attempt to think through disparate configurations of the postcolonial world. The “local knowledges” constructed here make no claim to offer overriding conclusions or to theorize more than a specific and contingent instance, but the issues examined cut across a wide range of global situations.

Perhaps the conjuncture where the global system has been most open to investigation can be located in the theorizing around “migration” and “migrancy” by John Berger, Homi K. Bhabha, Edward Said, and others. The situation of the migrant, occupying multiple spaces and languages, becomes a powerful concrete figure for the more abstract forces crisscrossing the globe; in Bhabha’s words, the postmodernist interrogation of identity finds “a graphic historical and cultural specificity in the splitting of the postcolonial or migrant subject” (“Interrogating Identity” 5). While a transnational merchant class and migrant labour have existed since antiquity, there can be no doubt that this global traffic in bodies has intensified to such an extent as to transform the populations of many of the world’s countries. At the same time, it is important to realize that the presence of the colonized in effaced, often barely visible traces has always marked the material constructions of his or her labour appropriated by the colonizer. As Stuart Hall comments, the increased immigration from the West Indies to Britain has only made visible a transfer of labour power that has been an ongoing process throughout centuries. In Hall’s wry formulation, even that most English of institutions—afternoon tea—owes its existence to the labour of the colonized:

I am the sugar at the bottom of the English cup of tea. I am the sweet tooth, the sugar plantations that rotted generations of English children’s teeth. There are thousands of others beside me that are, you know, the cup of tea itself. Because they don’t grow it in Lancashire. . . . (48-49)

What Hall makes clear is the inscription of the work of the colonized (sometimes a free-market exchange, sometimes bonded labour, sometimes slavery) within the self-construction of the colonizer, a marker that indicates that the visible presence of migration and dislocation is less a new phenomenon characteristic of recent history than a long persistence of relations within colonialism.

Let me conclude by evoking the words of the Canadian poet Kaushalya Bannerji, writing of the network of identifications that structures the postcolonial world. Her poem “Oka Nada” alludes to a specific incident, the lengthy confrontation during the summer of 1990 between the Mohawk nation at Oka, Quebec, and the provincial police, and, eventually, the Canadian army. That the “Oka crisis”—so named by the media—was sparked off by the attempt to transform a Mohawk sacred burial ground into a golf course is at once concretely specific (where else could such conditions converge?) and vastly global (is it not an allegory for the relentless transformation of land to instrumental use, in this case the highly profitable recreation industry?). The title of Bannerji’s poem is a pun on the title of the Canadian national anthem, “O Canada,” and therefore a stark comment on a country that treats the sacred places of its citizens in such a way, but the separation of the two syllables that form the Spanish word *nada* (“nothing”) sets in motion other affiliations. The allusion to Spanish is a reminder that Canada’s self-construction partly takes shape against the Latin “other” of Central and South America; it is also a prompt to remember the initial conquests of the “new” world from the fifteenth century onward. As Bannerji writes,

I am from the country
Columbus dreamt of.
You, the country
Columbus conquered. (20)

Here the identification of the immigrant South Asian speaker with the First Nations people of Oka (misnamed “Indians”) rests on a shared positioning—imaginative and material—with the project of European conquest. This alliance, however, is not without unease: the final lines of the poem, “Earth, my witness/ my home, this native land” (20), reiterate the opening words of the national anthem (“our home and native land”) while questioning the homogeneity of the anthem through the specificity of a speaker who articulates the affinity and complicity of the space she inhabits. As a woman of colour she shares the position that systemic racism assigns to First Nations people; as a South Asian she is also marked by British imperialism; as an immigrant to a settler colony she communicates the discomfort of be-

ing part—however unwillingly—of First Nations' dispossession. The political alliances into which she seeks to enter are always-already constructed by the traverses of capital and imperial systems; they must none the less be entered if counter-hegemonic and counter-discursive resistances are to be elaborated. Of all of the discontents of postcolonialism, this recognition that politics inhabits a difficult and complex terrain of multiple positionings and acknowledged complicities calls for a self-reflectiveness attentive to the entanglement of emancipation and containment. The tangled intersections of Bannerji's poem, however, are a fascinating reminder of the suggestive possibilities for oppositional politics in the present conjuncture.

It should be obvious that this collection of articles is not intended to provide any "final word" on what is a spiritual, ongoing dialogue about "postcolonialism and its discontents." Rather, we hope that the issues raised here will provoke reflections and engender further discussions that can be continued within the pages of *ARIEL*.

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