

After examining the constructions of unhappy, elite heroines in some Indian novels in English and suggesting that there is no easy correlation between an adequate home (domestic or national) with an adequate sense of the self, even for the elite, George introduces in her last chapter the notion of the immigrant genre, suggesting that “contemporary literary writing in which the politics and experience of location are the central narratives should be called the ‘immigrant genre’” (171). She characterizes this genre by its disregard for national schemes, its use of multigenerational casts of characters, its narrative tendency towards repetitions and echoes, its detached reading of homelessness, and its excessive use of the metaphor of baggage. Here once again the ambivalences of George’s project surface. On the one hand, she identifies in immigrant genre a logic that affects all twentieth-century literature and on the other she sees in it only literary texts produced from the location of Third World immigrants into the First World. This can be observed again in the argument that carving out immigrant literature from postcolonial literature would expand rather than contract it. This expansion can result in erasing differences, though this would be contradictory to the intentions of the project of *The Politics of Home*. Unless the immigrant mode is seen as a dynamic of distance and proximity to homes, as a critical element rather than as a genre, it can project on to all twentieth-century writing attributes possessed by one particular and rich section within it, namely, global literatures in English. I would doubt if much of the writing in regional Indian languages, for example, would belong to the immigrant genre even if much of them may occupy a home marked by the dynamics of immigration. I feel there are marked differences in strategies and stances, particularly in the case of baggage or relation to the genealogy of writing in which the writers from former colonies place themselves.

George’s conclusion perhaps points to a more flexible stance—what she calls “thinking affectionately and critically about the politics of home” (201). It is this aporetic articulation of an investment which involves affection and critique, proximity and distance that might characterize immigration as a critical element, as a mode of self-relation, rather than as a genre.

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Padmini Mongia, ed. *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. Delhi: Oxford UP, 1997. Pp. 407. Rs. 550.

In the introduction to this book, Padmini Mongia points out the problematics of the term “postcolonial.” Viewing it as an interactive process of texts, practices, and historical influences, Mongia demonstrates how the term postcolonial eludes neat definitions. The essays in the

anthology span several years and are divided into three sections. Mongia claims that these divisions are tentative because the essays can be grouped in a different way given their overlaps and continuities. The extract from Edward Said's *Orientalism* (published in 1978) is foregrounded as an important historical marker in spawning the debates surrounding the term postcolonial. Said argues that Orientalism is a discourse which the Europeans needed in the post-Enlightenment period to produce and manage the Orient socially, economically, and politically. He further claims, that the West by shaping the Orient, controls and disseminates knowledge about it. Such an understanding of the term posits a central motif which is reworked and critiqued in the other essays of the anthology—namely, the question of postcolonial theory's methodology and its "Object of Study." Mongia, however, alerts us to the fact that her aim in this anthology is not to reach a consensual understanding on what constitutes the postcolonial but to engage in the debates surrounding the term, "to see contemporary postcolonial theory as a 'sign that should be interrogated, a locus of contradictions'" (3).

In a theory built around contradictions—in language, representational modes and politics of location, to name three—the essays by Rey Chow, Paul Gilroy, and Benita Parry underscore the marginalization of ethnicity and race in postcolonial theory even as these are given seeming importance through a Western repackaging which commodifies the "other." The essays by Ruth Frankenberg, Lata Mani, Chandra Mohanty, and Sara Suleri further highlight how gender too is subsumed in postcolonial theory by a larger ideological nexus which pits the West against the East, blurring issues of race, sexuality, and cultural specificities. If Bhabha's essay questions the representational mode of the "other," Hall's explores how cultural identities are formed.

Arguably the most critical essays which interrogate the "Object of Knowledge" in postcolonial theory are by Aijaz Ahmad, Dipesh Chakrabarty, and Gayatri Spivak who variously warn us about the politics of location and the constraints of the sites within which this knowledge is shaped, produced, and deployed. Ella Shohat in her essay examines the term postcolonial and its strategy to depoliticize and universalize.

Speaking from another perspective, Barbara Christian, Biodun Jeyifo, and Rosemary Jolly talk about the homogenizing tendencies of Western theory, which applies certain hegemonic standards in reading literature from other cultures. The consistent move in the book is to explore what constitutes a postcolonial text. Stephen Slemon's essay addresses this issue. He suggests the inclusion of ex-colonial settler literature under the rubric of the postcolonial.

It is fitting that in a book that is focusing on postcolonial theory, essays about the role of capitalism in the commodification of post-

colonial theory should be included. Two such essays are by Kwame Appiah and Arif Dirlik. Appiah argues that the “post” of postcolonial theory and postmodernism are spaces created by capitalism to market cultural products. Dirlik states that even the postcolonial intellectual is complicitous in feeding into the goals of the capitalist frame of postcolonial theory.

One of the useful aspects of Mongia’s book—other than her introduction in which she outlines the major debates and discussions around postcolonial theory in the Anglo/American tradition—is her selection of articles which investigate problems of race, gender, and location within it. Almost without exception, the essays in this anthology are intellectually rigorous and provocative. Most of them have been published before in literary journals and books in the West and have already contributed in an important way to the debates on postcolonial theory. However, what is a little disconcerting (and this is despite Mongia’s claim that the anthology does not intend to give a comprehensive account of postcolonial theory) is the fact that the key articles that are presented as central to the debate are all by writers located in the West. This is intriguing especially because the essays in the book have critiqued consistently the politics of location and institutionalization of postcolonial theory by the West. Furthermore, Mongia’s caveat—that postcolonial theory in one context need not be relevant in another—is belied by the bafflingly broad title of the book, *Contemporary Postcolonial Theory* and by the global audience (from New York to New Delhi) that the book addresses. Overall, Mongia’s book succeeds in providing a good introductory overview of contemporary postcolonial critical approaches in the Anglo-American tradition.

TAISHA ABRAHAM



S. Shankar. *A Map of Where I Live*. Asian Writers Series. Portsmouth: Heinemann, 1997. Pp. 224. \$14.95 pb.

Shankar’s debut novel, *A Map of Where I Live*, is a compelling narrative that explores the place of the Indian middle-class male’s experience with migration and his search for identity. The novel consists of two juxtaposed narratives: the first is the journal of R.K., a young historian recently returned from the US, who tries to reassimilate into South Indian middle-class life, and the second is the memoir of Valur Visweswaran, also a historian, who narrates his fantastic voyage to Gulliver’s Lilliput. In the summer of 1992, both Visweswaran and R.K. have returned from their travels abroad and currently reside in Krantinagar, a suburb of West Madras; both men are profoundly alienated from the middle-class culture of Krantinagar.

R.K. begins his journal as an attempt to “explain the events of his life” (8). As he ponders the possibilities of a career in law, he is asked