Writing Post-Orientalist Histories of the Third World: Perspectives from Indian Historiography

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To ask how the "third world writes its own history" appears, at first glance, to be exceedingly naive. At best, it reaffirms the East–West and Orient–Occident oppositions that have shaped historical writings and seems to be a simple-minded gesture of solidarity. Furthermore, in apparently privileging the writings of historians with third-world origins, this formulation renders such scholars into "native informants" whose discourse is opened up for further disquisitions on how "they" think of "their" history. In short, the notion of the third world writing its own history seems to reek of essentialism. Seen in another way, this formulation can be construed as positing that the third world has a fixed space of its own from which it can speak in a sovereign voice. For many, this notion of a separate terrain is rendered problematic by the increasing rapidity and the voracious appetite with which the postmodern culture imperializes and devours spaces.

   In view of the above objections, it appears hazardous to even pose, let alone answer, the question as to how the third world writes its own post-Orientalist history; and, given the fire drawn by well-intentioned attempts to locate this third-world voice,[1] such an enterprise seems positively foolhardy. I persist precisely because the call for mapping post-Orientalist historiographies also acknowledges that the knowledge about the third world is historical. The

   [1] A recent example is the exchange between Frederic Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad, in which Jameson's well-intentioned but "first-world" gesture drew deserved criticism. See Jameson's "Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capital," *Social Text,* 15 (Fall 1986), 65–88; and Ahmad's "Jameson's Rhetoric of Otherness and the 'National Allegory'," *Social Text,* 17 (Fall 1987), 3–25; and Jameson's reply on pp. 26–27.

attention to the historicity of knowledge demanded by the invitation to chart post-Orientalist historiography, therefore, runs counter to those procedures that ground the third world in essences and see history as determined by those essential elements. It requires the rejection of those modes of thinking which configure the third world in such irreducible essences as religiosity, under-development, poverty, nationhood, non-Westerness; and it asks that we re-pudiate attempts to see third-world histories in terms of these quintessential principles. Thus, the previously mentioned objections, instead of invoking essentialism, unsettle the calm presence that the essentialist categories—east and west, first world and third world—inhabit in our thought. This disruption makes it possible to treat the third world as a variety of shifting positions which have been discursively articulated in history. Viewed in this manner, the Orientalist, nationalist, Marxist, and other historiographies become visi-ble as discursive attempts to constitute their objects of knowledge, that is, the third world. As a result, rather than appearing as a fixed and essential object, the third world emerges as a series of historical positions, including those that enunciate essentialisms.

This essay is an attempt to map the different positions occupied by India in the post-Orientalist historiographies. To do so, however, requires that we begin by defining and situating Orientalism. For this purpose, nothing is more suitable than Edward Said's general definition of Orientalism as a body of knowledge produced by texts and institutional practices.[2] According to him, Orientalism was responsible for generating authoritative and essentializing statements about the Orient and was characterized by a mutually supporting relationship between power and knowledge. As I reflect on Said's analysis, there are three key elements that in my view gave Orientalism its coherence: first, its authoritative status; second, its fabrication of the Orient in terms of founding essences invulnerable to historical change and prior to their repre-sentation in knowledge; and third, its incestuous relationship with the Western exercise of power over what we call the third world. This essay analyzes Orientalism in India with respect to these three elements in order to sketch in what ways and in which contexts Orientalism has survived and changed, and describes histories that can be called post-Orientalist.

ORIENTALISM'S INDIA

Orientalism was a European enterprise from the very beginning. The scholars were European; the audience was European; and the Indians figured as inert objects of knowledge. The Orientalist spoke for the Indian and represented the object in texts. Because the Indian was separated from the Orientalist knower, the Indian as object—as well as its representation—was construed to be outside and opposite of self; thus, both the self and the other, the rational and

[2] *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1979).

materialist British and the emotional and spiritual Indian, appeared as autono-
mous, ontological, and essential entities. Of course, the two essential entities,
the spiritual India and the materialistic West, made sense only in the context
of each other and the traces of each in the other, which suggested that hetero-
geneity and difference lay beneath the binary opposition, although the process
of rendering India into an object external both to its representation and to the
knower concealed this difference. It also made the colonial relationship—the
enabling condition of British Orientalism—appear as if it was irrelevant to the
production of knowledge. As a result, although colonial dominance produced
the East–West construct, it looked as if this binary opposition not only pre-
dated the colonial relationship but also accounted for it. In other words,
Orientalist textual and institutional practices created the spiritual and sensuous
Indian as an opposite of the materialistic and rational British, and offered
them as justifications for the British conquest.

To be sure, the above representations underwent considerable change over
time, but Orientalism's basic procedures of knowledge remained remarkably
stable. They were developed soon after the East India Company conquered
Bengal in 1757. Since the company required that its officers have a knowl-
edge about the conquered people, administrators learned Persian and Sanskrit
and soon began to publish texts. Alexander Dow, an army officer, translated
one of the standard Persian histories into English, *The History of Hindustan* in
1768–71; and N. B. Halhead compiled and translated the Sanskrit *Dhar-
mashastras* as *A Code of Gentoo Laws, or Ordinations of the Pundits* in
1776.[3] With the involvement of more officials—notably, William Jones, H.
T. Colebrooke, John Shore, and Francis Gladwin—this process of learning
Sanskrit and Persian, as well as that of publishing texts and commentaries,
gathered speed and led to the founding of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in
1784. From then on, a number of research journals emerged, such as the
Asiatik Researches (1788), the *Quarterly Journal* (1821), and the *Journal of
the Asiatic Society* (1832). Orientalist knowledge spread to European univer-
sities; and scholars with no direct contact with India, Max Müller in London
and the Romantics on the continent, saw Europe's origins or childhood in
India.[4] In this developing discourse, the discovery of affinities between
Sanskrit and European languages provided the premise for formulating the

    [3] On these Orientalist writers, see Bernard S. Cohn, "Notes on the History of the Study of
Indian Society and Culture," *Structure and Change in Indian Society,* Milton Singer and Bernard
S. Cohn, eds. (Chicago: Aldine, 1968), 7. On Halhead, see Rosane Rocher, *Orientalism, Poetry,
and the Millenium: The Checkered Life of Nathaniel Brassey Halhead* (Delhi: Motilal Ba-
narasidass, 1983). For a discussion of Persian historiography and for more on the early British
treatments of how eighteenth-century British writings dealt with pre-history, see *Historians of
Medieval India,* Mohibbul Hasan, ed. (Meenakshi: Meerut, 1968).
    [4] Wilhelm Halfbass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany: State University
of New York Press, 1988), 69–83. Also, Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions of India,"
Modern Asian Studies, 20:3 (1986), 401–46.

belief in an "Aryan race" from which the Europeans and Brahmans were
seen to originate.[5] This search and discovery of European origins in the India
of Sanskrit, the Brahmans, and texts essentialized and distanced India in two
ways. First, because it embodied Europe's childhood, India was temporally
separated from Europe's present and made incapable of achieving "prog-
ress." As an eternal child detached altogether from time, India was construed
as an external object available to the Orientalist's gaze. Second, composed of
language and texts, India appeared to be unchanging and passive. These
distancing procedures overlooked the European dominance of the world that
provided the conditions for the production of this knowledge and that had
constituted this discursive dominance. The India of the Orientalist's knowl-
edge emerged as Europe's other, an essential and distanced entity knowable
by the detached and distanced observer of the European Orientalist.

While essentialism, distancing, and the centrality of the opposition of Eu-
rope and India deployed in the formative phase of Orientalism outlived the
early Orientalists, the specific configurations of knowledge did not. As the
genuine respect and love for the Orient of William Jones gave way to the cold
utilitarian scrutiny of James Mill, and then to missionary contempt, the pic-
ture changed.[6] Sanskrit, texts, and Brahmans were no longer attractive in the
harsh light thrown by the liberal reformers and critics. Instead, they became
accountable for India's lack of civilization, moral obligations, good govern-
ment, and historical change. Such revisions and refigurations of representa-
tions were occasioned by debates over such major policy questions as land
revenue settlements, educational and administrative policies, and the renewal
of the charter for the East India Company.[7] These were occasions when the
ideas current in Europe were most conspicuously applied to India. In the
course of time, the application of Eurocentric ideas added to the stock of
images available for representing India, but the on-the-spot official reports,
Parliamentary inquiries and papers, and detailed surveys during the first half
of the nineteenth century exponentially crowded the representational field.
These became regularized and professionalized in the late nineteenth century,
as linguistic, ethnological, archaeological, and Census surveys and the Dis-
trict Gazetteers emerged. With these, the older India of Sanskrit, texts, and
Brahmans was pushed off center by details on peasants, revenue, rent, caste,
customs, tribes, popular religious practices, linguistic diversity, agroecono-

    5 Martin Bernal, *Black Athena: Afroasiatic Roots of Classical Civilization* (New Brunswick,
N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1987), 227–9, 330–6.
    6 James Mill, *The History of British India* (1817; rpt. Chicago: University of Chicago Press,
1975). On missionaries, see Ainslee Thomas Embree, *Charles Grant and British Rule in India*
(New York: Columbia University Press, 1962).
    7 On how European ideas were applied to India, see Ranajit Guha, *A Rule of Property for
Bengal: An Essay on the Idea of Permanent Settlement* (Paris: Mouton, 1963); Eric Stokes, *The
English Utilitarians and India* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959).

mic regimes, male and female populations, and other such topics. In this enlarged but congested picture, the India of William Jones was less relevant.

The enormous growth, change, and the increasing complexity of Orientalist knowledge was of crucial importance; for, committed as British rule was to a government based on accurate knowledge of facts, changes in knowledge had direct implications for the technologies of rule. For example, when the ethnographic surveys and census operations commenced in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, they broke society into groups, households, and individuals, making them available for piecing together through statistics. Because the society aggregated from the new units was constituted by an apparently objective and culturally neutral classificatory system of individuals, households, occupations, it became available to more extensive administrative penetration. This brought the older debates on the nature of Indian village communities, culminating in Baden-Powell's 1892 publication of *The Land Systems of British India,* to an end. The government no longer considered the indirect systems of rule—consisting of contractual agreements with village leaders as necessary—and it reached down to the individuals configured by their caste and tribal status.[8]

The discursive space for such changes in knowledge was provided by the Orientalist construction of India as an external object knowable through representations.[9] Because the government viewed knowledge contained in official documents as a representation of reality, or in one official's words in 1860, as a "photograph of the actual state of the community,"[10] it was always possible to argue that the photograph did not represent the external reality adequately, thus requiring more adequate representations. This representational model of knowledge, coupled with the exigencies of colonial government, enabled the scholarly field of Orientalism, or Indology, to repeatedly refigure itself. The consequent refiguration, however, did not unsettle the authority of the Orientalist, the essentialization of India, and its representation as an object in binary opposition to Europe. The lines were drawn clearly, with separate authentic and autonomous essences—India and Europe (or England)—clearly reflected in that knowledge. The old Orientalist, buried in texts and devoted to learning Sanskrit and Persian, was replaced by the official, the scholar, and the modernizer. The new Orientalist administered the fruits of modern knowledge and government while being careful not to upset the Indian's presumed outmoded and traditionalist beliefs. Such actions and projections reaffirmed

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[8] Richard Saumarez Smith's "Rule-by-Records and Rule-by-Reports: Complementary Aspects of the British Imperial Rule of Law," *Contributions to Indian Sociology* (new series), 19:1 (1985), 153–76, is an excellent study of this process in Punjab.

[9] See Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions" on the use of representation in Orientalism. Timothy Mitchell's *Colonising Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) contains a fascinating interpretation of representation in British and European knowledge about Egypt.

[10] Cited in Smith, "Rule-by-records," 153.

India's representation as a religiously driven social organism and found that the Indian's disinterest in modern politics and historical change was reflected in Sanskritic Hinduism and popular "animism." This representation allowed the British to see themselves as engaged in managing and changing such arenas as politics and the economy in which the Indian social organism and thought was incapable of operating.[11]

NATIONALIST HISTORIOGRAPHY

The first significant challenge to this Orientalized India came from nationalism and nationalist historiography, albeit accompanied by a certain contradiction. While agreeing to the notion of an India essentialized in relation to Europe, the nationalists transformed the object of knowledge—India—from passive to active, from inert to sovereign, capable of relating to History and Reason.[12] Nationalist historiographers accepted the patterns set for them by British scholarship. They accepted the periodization of Indian history into the Hindu, Muslim, and British periods, later addressed as the ancient, medieval, and modern eras; relegated caste to sections on "Society," that is, to the history of society with politics left out; and reiterated the long and unchanging existence of a Sanskritic Indic civilization.

In the 1920s and the 1930s, when nationalism became a mass phenomenon, a professional Indian historiography emerged to contest British interpretations. It is significant that these historians chose ancient India as the ground for this contest. If some of the early Orientalists had seen Europe's origin in the India of the texts, the nationalists saw the origin of the modern nation in that same ancient India; and for such historians, the old Orientalist scholarship's sympathetic remarks on the India of the texts, such as Max Müller's studies, became objective and authoritative statements that affirmed India's great past.[13] Nationalist historians, such as H. C. Raychaudhuri, K. P. Jayaswal, Beni Prasad, R. C. Majumdar, and R. K. Mookerjee, studied ancient emperors and saw the rise of a nation-state in the creation of these ancient empires. Furthermore, as Romila Thapar points out, it was important for this historiography to claim that everything good in India—spirituality, Aryan origins, political ideas, art—had completely indigenous origins. In fact, Southeast Asian cultures were seen as outgrowths of the glorious Indian

[11] Nicholas B. Dirks's *The Hollow Crown: Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987) is a powerful argument against this thesis. See also, Ronald Inden, "Orientalist Constructions."

[12] Compare Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World—A Derivative Discourse?* (London: Zed Books, 1986), 38.

[13] Much of this account is based on Romila Thapar's excellent "Interpretations of Ancient Indian History," *History and Theory*, 7:3 (1968), 318–35, which contains a critical discussion of these nationalist historians. For more on this phase of historiography and on individual historians, see *Historians and Historiography in Modern India*, S. P. Sen, ed. (Calcutta: Institute of Historical Studies, 1973).

civilization, and the period of the Gupta empire (320–540 A.D.) came to symbolize the "Golden Age," when Hinduism prospered, national unity soared, and economic wealth, social harmony, and cultural achievements reached a state of plenitude. Later, the Muslims came (in the eleventh to twelfth centuries), and it was all downhill after that.

This abbreviated account of nationalist historiography does not do full justice to its achievements and complexity. These historians forced debates on sources and brought out much that was unknown, and thus regional histories came into focus. The assumption that all that was valuable in world civilizations originated in Greece was challenged. The Orientalist authority to speak for India was also contested, and Hindu chauvinist interpretations did not go unquestioned. Jawaharlal Nehru's *The Discovery of India*, for example, was marked by an awareness of cultural and historical diversity, and argued that it was "undesirable to use Hindu or Hinduism for Indian culture."[14] Although for him, too, spirituality also defined India's past essence and that the Gupta age represented the blossoming of nationalism, the Hindu revivalist historiography was too parochial for his secular and cosmopolitan outlook. The India that he discovered and presented was a secular entity, not a Hindu nation, that had cradled a variety of religions and sects through centuries, and had acquired a degree of unity while surviving conquests and conflicts. His *Discovery of India* was a documentation of this unity through history; and, for him, the nationalist movement was designed to free this unity so that India could join the world-historical march towards modernity.

Clearly, the differences between Nehru and the nationalist interpretations of Hindu chauvinistic historians were important. There can be no doubt that the concept of India as essentially Sanskritic and Hindu—glorious in ancient times, then subjected to Muslim tyranny and degeneration in the Middle Ages, which made it an easy target for British conquest—had and continues to have deadly implications in a multiethnic country like India. While recognizing the importance of these differences, I also want to highlight that which was common to nationalism as a whole: the assumption that India was an undivided subject, that is, that it possessed a unitary self and a singular will that arose from its essence and was capable of autonomy and sovereignty. From this point of view, the task of History was to unleash this subjectivity from colonial control; and historiography was obliged to represent this unleashing. The nationalists acted on this assumption by questioning the authority of Orientalists. They accused the older Indological knowledge of biases and judged it as being inadequate for representing reality. In its place, nationalist historiography offered more adequate portraits. A good example of this was the interpretation of the 1857 revolt in north India. For British historians, mutiny was the correct term because the revolt was nothing but an uprising of

disaffected soldiers; calling it anything other than a mutiny meant conceding
that it had some legitimacy. In 1909, a Hindu nationalist, Vinayak Damodar
Savarkar, wrote a book entitled *The Indian War of Independence, 1857* and
argued that it was a national revolt.[15] Nationalist historiography's commit-
ment to the idea of India as an essential and undivided entity, and to knowl-
edge as more or less adequate representation of the real, underlay such revi-
sions. In spite of such complicities in Orientalist procedures, nationalism
broke the exclusivity of Indology as a European discipline. In the discourse of
the nationalists, the objects of description did not owe their meanings only to
their opposition to European essences; rather, it was the ontological being of
India as a nation—no doubt barely visible and, for the most part in its history,
enslaved—that was the most evident element in providing meaning to histor-
ical events and actors. So, when politicians spoke of a nation in the making,
they were referring to the task of making the masses conscious of a nation
already in existence as an objective reality.

The nationalist historiography's narrativization of Indian nationalism,
brought to a successful conclusion in the achievement of independence in
1947, represents one trajectory in the writing of post-Orientalist history,
despite its complicity in many of the categories of thought and procedures of
Orientalism; however, burdened with the task of articulating an anticolonial
national view, it could not but be different from Orientalism. Thus, the
nationalists produced impressive scholarship on the "drain" of wealth from
India to Britain, on the deindustrialization of the country by British manu-
facturing interests, the neglect of Indian industrialization, and other such
questions.[16] For this economic and nationalist historiography, as for cultural
and political historians, the subject was always India, and the interests of
the nation were always at stake. Powerful pronouncements of these kinds
established India as an active subject. Therefore, we need to recognize it
as one of the ways in which the "third world writes its own his-
tory." The nationalist writing of history—both before and after indepen-
dence—did not, however, break free from two elements of the Orientalist
canon. First, the nationalists, like the Orientalists, also assumed that India
was an undivided entity but attributed it a sovereign and unitary will that was
expressed in history. India now emerged as an active and undivided subject
that had found its expression in the nation-state and transcended class and

[15] Interestingly, Marx and Engels' writings in the *New York Daily Tribune* on the 1857 revolts
were put together and published in the Soviet Union as *The First Indian War of Independence
1857–59* (Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1959).

[16] R. C. Dutt's *The Economic History of India*, 2 vols. (1901, rpt. London: Routledge and
Kegan Paul, 1950) is the classic of this genre. For a detailed treatment of this line of nationalist
historiography, see Bipan Chandra, *The Rise and Growth of Economic Nationalism in India*
(Delhi: People's Publishing House, 1966). For a debate on the "deindustrialization" question,
see M. D. Morris *et al., Indian Economy in the Nineteenth Century: A Symposium* (Delhi: Indian
Economic and Social History Association, 1969).

ethnic divisions, rather than being the inert object of Orientalist representations. Second, India was given an ontological presence prior to and independent of its representations which followed the procedures of Orientalism. Nationalism's confinement within the Orientalist problematic should not be surprising. As Partha Chatterjee argues, the nationalists opposed colonialism in the name of Reason through their claim that India's ancient history had followed, if not pioneered, a universal spirit leading to the nation-state, republicanism, economic development, and nationalism that reaffirmed the cunning of Reason; and their assertion that a "backward" country like India could modernize itself, if liberated from colonial slavery. The latter reaffirmed, however, the projects of modernity, making India ideologically incapable of transcending the Orientalist problematic.[17] Nationalism hijacked even Gandhi's antimodern ideology in its drive to create a nation-state devoted to modernization and turned him into a figure revered for his ability to appeal to the "irrational" peasants and for the mystical bond that he was seen to have with the masses. That historiography became a part of this project should cause no wonder. History, as a discipline, was, after all, an instrument of the post-Enlightenment regime of Reason; and the Indian nationalist historians, being Western-educated elites, were its eager proponents.

THE REFIGURATIONS OF ESSENTIALIZED INDIA

Nationalist historiography so discredited some of the specific representations of Orientalism that the image of a sensuous, inscrutable, and wholly spiritual India no longer enjoys academic prestige. More important, it made histories centered on India as the norm. The postwar decolonization, anticolonial sentiments, and upsurges against neocolonialism also created a congenial political and intellectual climate for an orientation based on India. This orientation was institutionalized in the United States by the establishment in the 1950s of study programs on the South Asia area. Scholarship founded on this basis did much to bring new evidence on history and culture to light by historians who moved rapidly from the study of imperial policies to "realities on the ground," and social and cultural anthropologists who broke new grounds in the analysis of caste and village society. Implicit in these moves, however, was the search for an authentic India. With colonial rule finished and cultural relativity ascendant, the research centered on India assumed that an authentic history and culture unaffected by the knower's involvement in the object of knowledge could be recovered. This research naively assumed that its valorization of India freed the scholar from colonial discourses, released to write, as it were, on a clean slate. Acting on this assumption, the knower could once again be construed as separate from knowledge, thereby overlooking that this position itself had a long history; but because this scholarship did not take

[17] Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought*, 30, 168–9.

cognizance of this history, it obviously could not reflect upon the conse-
quences of its belief that the scholar was external to the object of inquiry. As a
result, the operation of a whole battery of interests (academic disciplines,
ideologies, institutional investments) was concealed, and old ideas reappeared
in new guises. This was true, for instance, of the concept of a caste-driven and
other-worldly India, which was reformulated as "traditional India" by mod-
ernization theory in the 1960s. In the post-colonial context, the reappearance
of such essentializations had two implications. First, insofar as a focus on
India and cultural relativity enabled the represented object to appear as a
vibrant and independent entity, the nationalist project was endorsed. Second,
the attribution of this identity-in-itself made an Orientalist refiguration also
possible. Anthropological studies of the 1950s and the 1960s illustrate these
two tendencies and are worth considering because they came to command a
prominent place in South Asia area-study programs quite early, preceding the
recent liaison between history and anthropology by at least a decade.

   Unlike the traditional Orientalists, anthropologists studied people instead of
texts and observed culture in action rather than studying its textual remnants.
Moreover, as a discipline that specialized in scrutinizing the other, it was
particularly suited to pursue studies centered on India. Studies of caste by
anthropologists and, to a lesser extent, historians influenced by them became
the most prominent aspect of this scholarship.[18] Louis Dumont argued that
caste, after all, was a vital part in envisioning the essence of India, and this
was also the assumption in the vigorous debates and theorizing about its
place.[19] After the publication of Dumont's *Homo Hierarchicus* in English,
very few could resist the argument that caste was the centerpiece of Indian
society. Even Marxists, who had always had some trouble dealing with caste

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[18] The list is huge, but for some representative examples, see Frederick J. Bailey, *Caste and
the Economic Frontier* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1957), and M. N. Srinivas,
Social Change in Modern India (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1966). David G.
Mandelbaum, *Society in India,* 2 vols. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970) summa-
rizes and cites much of the scholarship on caste. Fine historical studies of caste include the
following: Ronald B. Inden, *Marriage and Rank in Bengali Culture: A History of Caste and Clan
in the Middle Period Bengal* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1975; Frank F. Conlon, *A
Caste in a Changing World: The Chitrapur Saraswat Brahmans, 1700–1935* (Delhi: Thomson
Press, 1977); and Karen I. Leonard, *Social History of an Indian Caste: The Kayasths of
Hyderabad* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

[19] Louis Dumont, *Homo Hierarchicus* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); McKim
Marriott, "Hindu Transactions: Diversity Without Dualism," in *Transaction and Meaning:
Directions in the Anthropology of Exchange and Symbolic Behavior,* Bruce Kapferer, ed. (Phila-
delphia: Institute for the Study of Human Issues, 1976); and Michael Moffat, *An Untouchable
Community in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). Although Dumont's
work no longer enjoys the influence that it did in the 1970s, his formulation that ritual hierarchy
defines India continues to draw adherents. For example, Donald E. Brown's *Hierarchy, History,
and Human Nature* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1988) employs the Dumontian essen-
tialization of caste and hierarchy to explain the absence of "real" historiography in India.

in their analysis of Indian society and history, were forced to take note and could no longer dismiss it as superstructural or as "false consciousness." For others, Dumont's all-encompassing theory provided a very elegant framework for explaining the forces of continuity, if not "unchangeability," in Indian history. All this is not to imply that studies on caste did not yield important insights. On the contrary, they did explode the older myths about the un-changeability of the caste system, show its links to economy and polity, and trace patterns of social mobility.[20] Imbued as these works were with a great deal of empathy for India, their depictions of vibrant realities fell in line with the nationalist celebration of India's autonomous and unitary subjectivity.

The attribution of cultural and social essences was, however, also open to Orientalist recuperation. The obsessive focus on caste, for instance, served to affix it as the one essence of India. In doing so, it shared the Orientalist project of constituting India as the other—an other whose difference from self recuperated the latter as selfsame, autonomous, and sovereign. This was a far cry from the avant-garde ethnographic surrealism of Paris in the 1920s, when the other had corroded the reality of self.[21] The Paris of Louis Dumont in the 1960s, on the other hand, represented *homo hierarchicus* (India) in affirming the reality of *homo aequalis* (West). What was taken to be Dumont's distinct and crucial insight—namely that caste was a religious hierarchy that encom-passed the economic and the political—turns out to be not all that different from the colonial view that India's essence lay in social organisms separated from the sphere of power.[22] In this respect, Dumont's work, the most cele-brated and authoritative postwar anthropological scholarship on India, illus-trates the vulnerability of essentialism to Orientalist refiguration.

These post-decolonization refigurations and recuperations in the scholarly field, particularly in anthropology, ought to be seen as materializations of a context marked by what may be called developmentalism. As new nations emerged from the shadow of colonial rule, the older project of colonial modernity was renovated and then deployed as economic development. As such a new nation-state, India looked upon science and technology as univer-sal forces and deployed them in transforming its society. The boom in postwar anthropological fieldwork and studies began and then pushed forward this reformulation of modernizing projects by providing a social-scientific knowl-edge of "traditional" social structures and beliefs targeted for modernization. The subdiscipline of economic development within the field of economics

[20] See, for example, *Social Mobility in the Caste System of India,* James Silverberg, ed. (Paris: Mouton, 1968).

[21] James Clifford, "On Ethnographic Surrealism," *The Predicament of Culture* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988), 117–51.

[22] Compare Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown,* 3–5. For other critiques, see Arjun Ap-padurai, "Is Homo Hierarchicus?," *American Ethnologist,* 13:4 (1986), 745–61; and "Putting Hierarchy in Its Place," *Cultural Anthropology,* 3:1 (1988), 36–49.

also emerged during these decades to formulate and further the modernization project by furnishing knowledge on the ways that existing economic institutions worked and by outlining strategies that could transform them. The area studies programs united these social-scientific fields with Indolological pursuits in creating knowledge which was no longer bounded by the old East–West definitions. Drawing regional rather than the old Orient–Occident boundaries, these area studies provided a distinct, yet subtler understanding of cultural relativity, although they could not provide post-colonial scholarship with the means to escape nationalist and Orientalist essentialisms. Indeed, it was precisely the lens of cultural relativity that, as Johannes Fabian points out, made the world appear as culture gardens separated by boundary-maintaining values—as posited essences.[23] Furthermore, the erection of these boundaries visualized the separateness of the subject from the object and defended anthropology's claim to represent an external other. In this regard, professional training and expertise allowed the researcher to claim that participant-observation protected the observer's externality that had been compromised in fieldwork. Conditioned by these methods of denying involvement in the construction of its object of knowledge, neither anthropology nor area studies could escape the nationalist and Orientalist recuperations of their essentialisms. These entities became represented as "traditional" beliefs and structures, which were posed in opposition to modernization and were useful both in formulating culturally sensitive development projects and in evolving the "appropriate" technology. To be sure, the methodological conventions devised and the questions posed by anthropology, development studies, and area studies cannot be reduced to some crude political determination: We can trace the particular configurations of these fields to the discussions and debates within them; rather, my point is that these scholarly conventions and questions helped in configuring the postwar context of developmentalism—insofar as they highlighted the essences (for example, Dumont's essentialization of ritual hierarchy) that could be evaluated for their adaptability to modernization.

POST-NATIONALIST FOUNDATIONAL HISTORIES

It is a tribute to the resilience of the modernizing project inaugurated by Orientalism that the legitimacy of its proponents was challenged before its hegemony was threatened. Thus, nationalism accused colonialism of deliberately failing to live up to its own promise; and Marxists, in turn, viewed both colonialism and nationalism as structurally incapable of fulfilling the tasks of modernization in the colonies. In Marxist analysis, the notion of India as an undivided subject, separated and observable in relation to an equally un-

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[23] Johannes Fabian, *Time and The Other: How Anthropology Makes Its Object* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983), 47.

divided Europe, was suspect because it denied the class relations underlying
these entities. These class relations led to an unequal and uneven development
that neither colonial rulers nor their nationalist successors could overcome;
so, the Marxists regarded the nationalist representation of India as an un-
divided and autonomous subject as ideological. A somewhat similar critique
has been developed by social historians oriented toward world history. In their
accounts, India is released from the restricting lens of national history and is
placed in the larger focus of world history. Although the emergence of a
professional Marxist historiography of India preceded the rise of world-histo-
ry analysis in the late 1970s and early 1980s by roughly two decades, the two
can be treated together because both interpret India in terms of a world-
historical transition, despite the many differences between them. With their
shared emphasis on political economy, they hold questions of production
systems and political control to be of paramount importance in specifying the
"third worldness" of India.

In the Marxist case, the issues relating to political economy were, above
all, expressed by social classes. The consequent advocacy of class histories—
often contesting Marx's writings on India—cracked the image of an un-
divided India. While other scholars approached India from the institutional
context of an academic discipline, Marxists adopted the perspective of en-
gaged critics, which enabled them to adopt a combative stance vis-à-vis the
disciplines of Indology and South Asia area studies. Convinced that nonclass
histories suppress the history of the oppressed and stress consensus over
conflict, Marxists wrote contestatory histories of domination, rebellions, and
movements,[24] in which they accused others of biases and claimed that their
own biases were true to the "real" world of class and mode of production. In
place of the notion of a homogeneous Indic civilization, the Marxists high-
lighted heterogeneity, change, and resistance.[25] The postcolonial Marxist
historiography, in particular, replaced the undivided India of the nationalists
with one divided by classes and class conflict; but because its inquiries were
framed by a narrative about the transition of the mode of production, this
scholarship viewed the activities of classes within the context of India's
passage to capitalism (or, more accurately, to an aborted capitalist moderniza-
tion). Take, for example, the Marxist readings of the so-called "Bengal

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[24] The notable examples include: P. C. Joshi, ed., *1857 Rebellion* (Delhi: People's Publishing
House, 1957), which tried to reclaim the 1857 revolt as a moment in popular revolutionary
movement; A. R. Desai, ed., *Peasant Struggles in India* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1979)
interprets revolts and movements spread over two centuries as part of wider struggle of the
dominated; and Irfan Habib's masterly *The Agrarian System of Mughal India* (London: Asia
Publishing House, 1963), which argues that the peasant revolts led by the local notables plunged
the Mughal empire into a paralyzing crisis in the eighteenth century.

[25] D. D. Kosambi's works on ancient India mark the beginning—and remain stellar exam-
ples—of a professional Marxist historiography of this genre. See his *Culture and Civilization of
Ancient India In Historical Outline* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965).

renaissance'' during the first half of the nineteenth century, when brilliant Bengali reformers had defied conventions and produced new visions of Hinduism. Long heralded as the beginning of a new India (with one of the earliest reformers, Ram Mohun Roy, called "the father of modern India"), Marxist reinterpretations stressed the failure of this project.[26] Arguing against the widespread belief that this "renaissance" was entirely a Western influence, the existence of an indigenously born rationalism was discovered and shown to turn conservative through contact with the West. As for the modernity inspired by the West and promoted by the "Bengal renaissance," these scholars contended that, in the absence of an organic class to serve as its basis, the reformers could not but fail in their project. In short, the "renaissance" represents the case of aborted or colonial modernity. Without belittling the value of these reinterpretations, I think it is fair to say that the construction of India in terms of this and other failures represents a foundational view. While it highlights the paradoxes of "renaissance" in a colonial context, the interpretation of these events as aborted or failed modernity defers the conclusion of the modernization narrative but does not eliminate the teleological vision. We are thus led to see the "third worldness" of India in its incomplete narrative and unfulfilled promise, which invites completion and fulfillment.

   A somewhat related interpretation has emerged also in recent social history writings that place modern Indian history in a world-historical framework. Like Marxist historiography, these social histories have dislodged the undivided and essential India of the Orientalists and nationalists. From the works in this genre, the Indian nation appears as a recent and tenuous creation whose artificiality, shown by the earlier "Cambridge school" historians in the intrigues and stratagems of the nationalists,[27] is quite evident in eighteenth-century history. Descriptions of that century by these social historians decompose India into coasts which look outwards and face the Indian Ocean, and hinterlands composed of regional systems of social and political interests, trade, and agriculture. Coasts and hinterlands connect and disconnect, fragment and rejoin; but the multiplicity of interests and perspectives disallow the articulation of a unitary India. C. A. Bayly's study is perhaps the most complete and original work in this genre.[28] His work revises, with a wealth of

   [26] See Sumit Sarkar, "Rammohum Roy and the Break with the Past," in *Rammohun Roy and the Process of Modernization in India*, V. C. Joshi, ed. (Delhi: Vikas, 1975), 46–68; Barun De, "The Colonial Context of the Bengal Renaissance," in *Indian Society and the Beginnings of Modernization c. 1830–1850*, C. H. Philips and Mary Doreen Wainwright, eds. (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1976), 119–25; and Asok Sen, *Iswar Chandra Vidyasagar and his Elusive Milestones* (Calcutta: Rddhi–India, 1977).

   [27] See John Gallagher, Gordon Johnson, and Anil Seal, eds., *Locality, Province and Nation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973); and David Washbrook, *The Emergence of Provincial Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1976).

   [28] *Rulers, Townsmen, and Bazaars: North Indian Society in the British Expansion, 1770–1870* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

detail and insights, the older notion of eighteenth-century India as a period of chaos and decline into which the British just stepped in to pick up the pieces. Instead of explaining the conquest as the victory of a technologically superior and stronger Britain over a backward and weaker India, he offers a persuasive account of how tendencies within the north Indian society interacted with the East India Company's activities in creating an empire. Stressing parity rather than disparity in technological level and economic organization, he analyzes the British conquest as a conjunctural combination of social, economic, and political conditions and interests. In this story, the rise of the Indian nation appears not as an eruption of a previously existing entity but rather as a historical creation attributable to the transformation of the late eighteenth-century empire into a classic colonial relationship by the mid-nineteenth century.

There is no denying the richness of Bayly's narrative and the importance of its revisionist insights. Other studies have added support to this story, and a more explicitly Marxist elaboration of this interpretation has been offered;[29] and although it differs from the Marxist accounts on many substantive issues, it provides a more fully developed and substantiated version of the transition story than that formulated in the older Marxist accounts. Whereas the Marxists write from the position of engaged critics and thus stress domination and struggle, historical sociology underplays conflict and traces the development of structures. We have the echoes here of the now familiar contrast between agency and structure. More significant than this contrast, however, is their common immersion in foundational historiography. For both of them, writing history implies recapturing the operation of classes and structures, with the usual caveats about the historian's biases and ideology. I do not mean by this that this historiography makes simple-minded claims to objectivity, and I do not intend to get bogged down in a sterile debate over subjective versus objective accounts; rather, when I call this form of historical writing foundational, I refer to its assumption that history is ultimately founded in and representable through some identity—individual, class, or structure—which resists further decomposition into heterogeneity. From this point of view, we can do no better than document these founding subjects of history, unless we prefer the impossibility of coherent writing amidst the chaos of heterogeneity. Any change in historical writing becomes primarily a matter of interpretive shifts—new concepts replace old and unworkable ones. This vision excludes a critical return to the scene of writing history and carries an objectivist bias with it, however provisional. Take, for example, the narrativization of Indian

[29] For example, David Ludden, *Peasant History in South India* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985); and Muzaffar Alam, *The Crisis of Empire in Mughal North India: Awadh and the Punjab 1707–1748* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1986). For a Marxist version of this narrative, see David Washbrook, "Progress and Problems: South Asian Economic and Social History," *Modern Asian Studies*, 22:1 (1988), 57–96.

history in terms of the development of capitalism. How is it possible to write
such a narrative, but also contest, at the same time, the homogenization of the
contemporary world by capitalism? How can the historians of India resist the
totalizing claims of the contemporary nation-state if their writings represent
India in terms of the nation-state's career? The second question is now easier
to handle for most people because nationhood can more easily be shown as
"imagined" and fictive.[30] The decomposition of the autonomous nation into
heterogeneous class, gender, regional, linguistic, and cultural divisions is
easy to show.

   The refusal of foundational categories that construct the theme of global
modernity, however, has proved difficult, but the tenuous presence and the
very historicity of class structures that anchor the transitional narrative cannot
be fully acknowledged without the rejection of the stability occupied by the
theme of transition in the discourse of historians. Without such an acknowl-
edgement, the Marxist and social historians can only envision that India's
"third worldness" consists of its incomplete or underdeveloped develop-
ment. India, which is seen in this history as trapped in the trajectories of
global modernity, is doomed to occupy a tragic position in these narratives.
Such a vision cannot but reproduce the very hegemonic structures that it finds
ideologically unjust in most cases, and occludes the histories that lie outside
of the themes which are privileged in history.

TOWARDS POST-FOUNDATIONAL HISTORIES

The preceding account of how the "third world writes its own history" makes
it clear that historiography has participated in constituting shifting positions.
The nationalists, who were opposed to the Orientalist representation of India
as a separate and passive other, gave it autonomy and a national essence.
Cultural anthropology and area studies programs in the postwar period, partic-
ularly in Europe and the United States, orientalized this essence in terms of
the cultural concept and left an undivided India intact. Marxists and social
historians broke up this entity in terms of founding class and structural sub-
jects, but narrativized India in contemporary hegemonic terms. If nothing
else, these multiple positions suggest how the third-world subject escapes
being fixed. Lest this recognition of nonfixity be appropriated as another form
of fixing, I hasten to add that the gesture that frames the endorsement of
heterogeneity refuses the language of fixing. By way of elaborating and
concluding my account of the post-Orientalist Indian historiography, I will
refer to Edward Said's *Orientalism* as an argument for an antifoundational
history and discuss examples of attempts in this direction.

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[30] Compare Benedict Anderson's *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and
Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983). The brilliance of its insights is somewhat marred
by a lapse into sociological determinism and by its overemphasis on "print capitalism."

Several scholars have noted that Edward Said's work rejects an essentialist reversal of Orientalist constructions.[31] He does not envision the task of post-Orientalist scholarship as consisting of substituting the "real" Orient for the "myth" of the Orientalists; rather, his work articulates a post-Orientalist interpretive position that would trace third-world identities as relational rather than essential. This rules out a mere inversion of the Hegelian dialectic so that, instead of the Orientalist's assertion of the Occident's primacy, the self–other opposition could be used to assert the autonomous presence of the Orient. In its place, a post-Orientalist historiography visualizes modern India, for example, in relationships and processes that have constructed contingent and unstable identities. This situates India in relationships and practices that organized its territory and brought it under an international division of labor, assembled and ordered cultural differences into a national bloc, and highlighted it as the religious and spiritual East opposed to the secular and materialist West. I am not suggesting that Indian historiography is yet to study these relational processes. On the contrary, as my account has noted, the Marxist and social historians, for example, have shown in considerable detail that the global history of capitalism has articulated the identity of modern India; but such historical writings do not explore and expose the alterity which underlies this identity—other than calling it precapitalist, protoindustrial (or feudal and semifeudal, as opposed to capitalist), unfree labor (as opposed to free labor), and traditional (not modern).[32] This strategy cannot historicize the emergence of a modern, colonial-capitalist Indian nation because it does not displace the categories framed in and by that history. The historicization of this process requires (as Said, for example, accomplishes in his study of the Orientalist essences) unsettling these identities, disrupting their self-same presence.

The most prominent example of such an attempt in Indian historiography is to be found in the volumes of the *Subaltern Studies:* a series of fiercely combative historical accounts written by a group of Indian and British Marxist historians scattered between India, Britain, and Australia—almost all of them having had first-world academic training or experience.[33] Arguing that much of the existing historiography reproduced the colonial, nationalist, and Marxist teleologies, the *Subaltern Studies* group aims at recovering the history of subaltern groups. In doing so, it disrupts, for example, the nationalist narrative that considers all colonial revolts as events in the becoming of the

[31] Compare James Clifford, "On Orientalism" in *The Predicament of Culture,* 255–76.

[32] My forthcoming *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) shows how the free–unfree opposition appropriated and reorganized different forms of labor.

[33] *Subaltern Studies, vols. I–V,* Ranajit Guha, ed. (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1982–85). The reference to national origins and to the "first world" site of academic training and experience is not meant to be invidious; rather, my intention is to show that national origin is not a necessary requirement for the formulation of a post-Orientalist position.

Indian nation and contests the older Marxist accounts which see these epi-
sodes as preludes to the emergence of full-fledged class consciousness. In
carrying out this project, several essays in the series employ the familiar
"history-from-below" approach. Furthermore, the teleological effects of the
Hegelian dialectic that they employ, as well as the notion of recovering and
restoring the subaltern that they use, do not mesh very well with their struc-
turalist decoding of the sign systems.[34] These limitations, however, should
not be allowed to obscure what is truly novel and theoretically refreshing in
their work—the deployment of the concept of subalternity. This concept is
particularly defined and used the most fruitfully in the work of Ranajit Guha,
the editor of the series,[35] who views subalternity as an essential object in
place of class—an effect of power relations and expressed through a variety
of means—linguistic, economic, social, and cultural. This perspective, there-
fore, breaks the undivided entity of India into a multiplicity of changing
positions which are then treated as the effects of power relations. The dis-
placement of foundational subjects and essences allowed by this also enables
Guha to treat histories written from those perspectives as documents of coun-
terinsurgency—those seeking to impose colonial, nationalist, transitional
(modernizational) agendas. Writing subaltern history, from this point of view,
becomes an activity that is contestatory because of its insurgent readings.

   From the constitution of subalternity as effects, as identities dependent on
difference, it should be clear that the *Subaltern Studies* project shares some of
the structuralist and post-structuralist critiques of the autonomous and sov-
ereign subject. In fact, the influence of French and Soviet structuralist semiot-
ics is quite explicit in some of the writings. Indeed, a recent collection
consisting of selections from several volumes aims at making an explicit
connection with Michel Foucault's writings.[36] Not withstanding these con-
nections, the Subaltern project is somewhat different because while it rescues
the subaltern from the will of the colonial or nationalist elite, it also claims
autonomy for the subaltern consciousness. However this tension is ultimately
resolved in their forthcoming studies, the significance of their project lies in
the writing of histories freed from the will of the colonial and national elites.

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   [34] Rosalind O'Hanlon's "Recovering the Subject: *Subaltern Studies* and Histories of Re-
sistance in Colonial South Asia," *Modern Asian Studies*, 22:1 (1988), 189–224, argues per-
suasively that an essentialist and teleological thinking also exists in their work. For an "against
the grain" reading that attempts to capture what is novel and contestatory in the *Subaltern
Studies*, see Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,"
in *Subaltern Studies, vol. IV*, 330–64.
   [35] See, in particular, his *Elementary Aspects of Peasant Insurgency in Colonial India* (Delhi:
Oxford University Press, 1983).
   [36] *Selected Subaltern Studies*, Ranajit Guha and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, eds., with the
Foreword by Edward W. Said (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988). The last section in
this volume, for instance, is called "Developing Foucault."

It is this project of resisting colonial and nationalist discursive hegemonies, through histories of the subaltern whose identity resides in difference, which makes the work of these scholars a significant intervention in third-world historiography.

If the recent rise of poststructuralist theories, particularly in the United States, is partially responsible for the recognition of *Subaltern Studies* scholarship, its influence is also evident in the new post-Orientalist historiography. With a somewhat different focus than *Subaltern Studies* and with explicit reference to poststructuralism, this scholarship is marked by its attempts to make cultural forms and even historical events contingent, above all, on power relations. In considering nationalist identity for example, it points to the differences suppressed and the power exercised even as colonial domination was challenged. In studying criminality, it points to power relations at work in classifying and acting upon "criminal tribes" even as threats to life and property were countered; and in examining the nineteenth-century reformist attempts to suppress and outlaw the institution of widow sacrifice (*suttee*), it reveals how gendered ideas were formulated and used by the colonial rulers and Indian reformers even as they questioned the burning of widows.[37] Rather than seeing these events as important because they were so well regarded in the past, it interrogates the past's self-evaluation. It attempts to disclose that which is concealed when issues are posed as India versus Britain; crime versus law and order; and traditional, reactionary, and oppressive treatment of women versus their modern and progressive emancipation. The purpose of such disclosures is to write those histories that history and historiography have excluded.

The emerging historiography, as the above account makes evident, can be located at the point where poststructuralist, Marxist, and feminist theories converge and intersect. In understanding this scholarship, however, it is not enough to trace its links with these theories. Equally relevant is some of the earlier historiography. Take, as examples, Romila Thapar's searching scrutiny of Orientalist and nationalist constructs in her work on ancient India and Bernard Cohn's historicization of cultural forms essentialized during colonial rule.[38] Such earlier work of clearing and criticizing essentialist procedures anticipated the contemporary trend of making cultural forms contingent and of highlighting the complicity of colonial and nationalist knowledge in constitut-

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[37] See Partha Chatterjee, *Nationalist Thought and the Colonial World;* Veena Das, "Gender Studies, Cross-Cultural Comparison and the Colonial Organization of Knowledge," *Berkshire Review,* no. 21 (1986), 58–76; Lata Mani, "Contentious Traditions: The Debate on Sati in Colonial India," *Cultural Critique,* 7 (Fall 1987), 119–56; and Sanjay Nigam, "The Social History of a Colonial Stereotype: The Criminal Tribes and Castes of Uttar Pradesh, 1871–1930" (Ph.D. disser., Department of History, School of Oriental and African Studies, London, 1987).

[38] See Bernard Cohn, *An Anthropologist Among Historians and Other Essays* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1987); and Romila Thapar, *Ancient Indian Social History: Some Interpretations* (Delhi: Orient Longman, 1978).

ing the objects of inquiry. The work by Nicholas Dirks illustrates this point.[39] Like earlier scholars, he also traces the genealogy of a widely accepted idea— namely, that the caste system was primarily a religious phenomenon that encompassed the political; but his argument is framed by contemporary theories in showing that British rule depoliticized the caste system, which then gave rise to the idea that it was primarily a religious entity. Thus, he historicizes the conventional notion of caste by showing its shifting position in a south Indian kingdom. This unstable and changing position of caste and kingdom is accentuated in turn by the repeated interruptions of the narrative and its movement in and out of different historical periods and disciplines. The overall result forces the reader to reflect upon the procedures and rhetoric of the academic disciplines in which the book is located.

This historiography's critical focus on epistemological procedures and institutional interests makes it somewhat different from the *Subaltern Studies,* which targets the colonial or nationalist will. While the former analyzes power relations in the context of academic disciplines and institutions, the latter sees itself disrupting and derailing the will of the powerful. Although both ultimately aim critical reflections upon discursive formations, the emphasis is clearly different. In view of the role that Western academic institutions play in studying and marginalizing the other, it is not surprising that the post-Orientalist historiography targets academic disciplines. It is precisely for this reason also that Indology and area studies in Europe and North America have been less than enthusiastic, if not hostile, to Said's interpretation as disciplines devoted to representing the other. Because the demystification of India as an undivided and separate object calls for the decomposition of the undivided and autonomous West, disciplines instituted to represent the binary opposition are understandably reluctant. Interestingly, it is in those fields not associated with Indology—such as literature—and in institutions without strong programs in South Asian area studies that Said's book has stimulated much new work; but even traditional centers of Indology are beginning to take account of challenges posed by critiques of Orientalism.[40]

The story of Indian historiography that I have been telling has certain evident themes. First, the "third worldness" of India has been conceived in a variety of different ways by historiography. These shifting conceptions testify to the changing history of India and locate historiography in that history, contributing to as well as being a part of it. This rules out the comfort of assuming that India, or the third world, will finally speak in a voice that will render all previous ones inauthentic. Second, the identification with the sub-

[39] Nicholas Dirks, *The Hollow Crown.*
[40] The South Asia Regional Studies Department, University of Pennsylvania, held a year-long seminar in 1988–89 entitled "Orientalism and Beyond: Perspectives from South Asia."

ordinated's subject position, rather than national origin, has been the crucial element in formulating critical third-world perspectives. Of course, as subordinated subjects, Indian historians have obviously developed and embraced the victim's subject-position more readily; but because the experience and expression of subordination are discursively formulated, we are led back to the processes and forces that organize the subordinate's subject position. Third, the formation of third-world positions suggests engagement rather than insularity. It is difficult to overlook the fact that all of the third-world voices identified in this essay, speak within and to discourses familiar to the ''West'' instead of originating from some autonomous essence, which does not warrant the conclusion that the third-world historiography has always been enslaved, but that the careful maintenance and policing of East–West boundaries has never succeeded in stopping the flows across and against boundaries and that the self–other opposition has never quite been able to order all differences into binary opposites. The third world, far from being confined to its assigned space, has penetrated the inner sanctum of the first world in the process of being ''third-worlded''—arousing, inciting, and affiliating with the subordinated others in the first world. It has reached across boundaries and barriers to connect with the minority voices in the first world: socialists, radicals, feminists, minorities. Although such crossings and interruptions of boundaries have become more insistent now, the turmoil in the field and attempts to write post-Orientalist histories are not new. Historians of India have previously questioned and unsettled dominant paradigms. Fine examples of non-Orientalist histories already exist; to think otherwise would mean attributing a totalizing power to Orientalism. The existence of earlier precedents, however, does not mean that the present historiography is completing the tasks left unfinished and that we are now witnessing the end of Orientalism; such a perspective entails the notion of a continuous history and assumes an essential similarity between different historiographies. Neither entirely new nor completely the same, the present ferment gets its specificity from the ways in which a new post-Orientalist scholarship is being currently conceived lies in the difference from previous contexts; and the particular insights generated by the emerging historical writing can be attributed to the larger field of social experience articulated in discourses.

The present critical appraisal of concepts, disciplines, and institutions associated with the study of South Asia forms a part of contemporary challenges to beliefs in solidly grounded existence and identities, if not their loss. Jacques Derrida's disclosure of the ''metaphysics of presence'' and Michel Foucault's genealogical accounts of the disciplinary constitution of criminal and sexual subjects have certain general affinities with Edward Said's analysis of Orientalism's suppression of difference in favor of stable and hierarchical East–West identities. These resemblances, which do not diminish significant differences among them, arise from their common espousal of poststructur-

alist methods. It is argued that these methods form theories about the practices of the earlier literary and aesthetic modernism (such as the latter's break from the belief that language was a transparent medium) and that the kinship with modernism accounts for its obsessive concern with language and writing, which displaces political questions to the aesthetic arena.[41] While the trace of modernism's transgressive impulses may well be discerned in poststructuralism's decentering methods, the current prominence of these theories is better understood as a moment in the postmodern valorization of blurred genres and off-centered identities. Fashioned by denials of grand totalizing theories, postmodernism defies and refuses definition. Only a laundry list of conditions can be offered—TV images, fashion magazines, Salman Rushdie, Talking Heads, challenges to universalist and essentialist theories, architectural irreverence and playfulness, transnational capitalism. The list is endless, without a beginning or end; and any gesture towards classification and distillation would be contrary to postmodernism, which exists only as a combination of conjunctural conditions.[42] This conjuncture includes the poststructuralist disavowal of the essentialist categories and modes of thought in the "Western tradition"—a position that overlaps with the third-world scholarship's combative stance with respect to the legacies of the application of this tradition to non-European cultures.

This repudiation of the post-Enlightenment ideology of Reason and Progress is also what distinguishes the present historiography from the anti-Orientalism of nationalism. Earlier, when nationalism challenged Orientalism, it staked the subjected nation's claim to the order of Reason and Progress by showing, for instance, that India had a history comparable to that of the West; that it too had produced a proto-republican political order; and that it had achieved economic, cultural, and scientific progress. The older Marxist historians, as well as the more recent social historians, broke up the nationalist's undivided India into an entry permeated with class conflict, but their global mode-of-production narratives did not fully confront the universalism of the post-Enlightenment order of Reason. What we are witnessing now in the post-Orientalist historiography is a challenge to the hegemony of those modernization schemes and ideologies that post-Enlightenment Europe projected as the *raison' d'être* of history, an assault on what Ashis Nandy calls the "second colonization." This is because, as Nandy argues:[43]

Modern colonialism won its great victories not so much through its military and technological prowess as through its ability to create secular hierarchies incompatible

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[41] Andreas Huyssen, *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 206–16.

[42] Andrew Ross, "Introduction," in *Universal Abandon? The Politics of Postmodernism,* Andrew Ross, ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), x.

[43] *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1983), ix.

with traditional order. These hierarchies opened up new vistas for many, particularly for those exploited and cornered within the traditional order. To them the new order looked like—and here lay its psychological pull—the first step towards a more just and equal world. That was why some of the finest critical minds in Europe—and in the East—were to feel that colonialism, by introducing modern structures into the barbaric world, would open up the non-West to the modern critical-analytical spirit. Like the "hideous heathen god who refused to drink nectar except from the skulls of murdered men," Karl Marx felt, history would produce out of oppression, violence and cultural dislocation not merely new technological and social forces but also a new social consciousness in Asia and Africa.

Today, ideologies of science, progress, and hypermasculinity that the Age of Reason brought to third world riding on the back of colonialism, have lost their seductive appeal; but in reflecting on this history in which Descartes defined rationality and Marx defined social criticism, we must, Nandy argues, listen to the voices contained therein and write "mythographies" that we did not before. This is not only a plea for a recognition of the plurality of critical traditions but a claim for the liberating nature of the victim's discourse, particularly for that of the colonized. Although both the colonizer and the colonized have been the victims of colonialism, the colonized have a special story to tell because they not only had to confront the "West" on its own terms of robust hypermasculinity but also to construct and connect with the other subordinated selves of the "West." This call for a writing of mythographies, therefore, provides an appreciation not only for the colonized's construction of their subjected self but also the colonized's appeal to and affiliation with the subordinated selves of the colonizer. Such mythographic accounts revealing the previously hidden histories of the subordinated selves of first and third worlds will also expose the mythic quality of colonial and postcolonial fables of modernity. This invocation of the mythic in disclosing the fable-like character of "real" history calls to mind Salman Rushdie's fabulous history of postcolonial India and Pakistan in *Midnight's Children*.[44] In the novel, Saleem Sinai, a child fathered by history, melts the apparent solidity of history single-handedly and—through his long nose, face, casual talk, and telepathy—causing border wars, violent demonstrations, and ethnic riots. The very extravagance of myths, dreams, and fantasies elicits belief in its truthfulness and defamiliarizes the real. While Rushdie spins his tale around pepper pots and spittoons, Nandy's mythography of history has unheroic heroes—the saintly Gandhi and the comical Brown Sahibs—and through these unlikely figures the tragic tale of colonialism is told, its alliance with psychopathic technologies exposed, its fantastic quality revealed.

Such a strategy of privileging the "mythic" over the "real" has turned the historiographical field topsy-turvy. The entities upon which South Asian stud-

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[44] Salman Rushdie, *Midnight's Children* (New York: Avon Books, 1980).

ies were based—India and the West—can no longer be unquestionably ac-
cepted as entirely separate and fixed. After all, if Gandhi's saintliness and
nonviolence—those quintessential "Indian" qualities—had counterparts in
the "West" (albeit marginalized); if the Brown Sahibs' imitation of the
British was an "Indian" strategy of survival and even resistance; and if, in
spite of its clearheaded realpolitik, modern anticolonial Indian nationalism
fell prey to a "second colonization"; then what is left of the neatly separated
"India" and the "West"? Such destabilization of identities and crossing of
carefully policed boundaries promise a new third-world historiography that
will resist both nativist romanticization and Orientalist distancing. This post-
foundational move, implicit in the emerging writings, affiliates the new third-
world historiography with poststructuralism, and together they both echo the
postmodernist decentering of unitary subjects and hegemonic histories.

   This common articulation of the postmodern condition, however, cannot be
taken to mean that the fragmentation and proliferation of identities, histories,
cultures, and the failure of representations and the existence of ironic detach-
ments do not have regional configurations and contextual resonances (Ameri-
can? French? Parisian? German? Continental philosophy? Marxism?). This
being so, the post-Orientalist scholarship, while sharing certain common fea-
tures with poststructuralism and postmodernism, cannot but be different from
them. This is particularly important because the third world was defined as
marginal from the very beginning. The new post-Orientalist scholarship's
attempt to release the third world from its marginal position forms a part of the
movement that advocates the "politics of difference"—racial, class, gender,
ethnic, national, and so forth.[45] Two points are worth noting about this
phenomenon. First, it posits that we can proliferate histories, cultures, and
identities arrested by previous essentializations. Second, to the extent that
those made visible by proliferation are also provisional, it refuses the erection
of new foundations in history, culture, and knowledge. Seen in this light, this
politics of difference evinces impulses similar to those manifested in what is
generally referred to as cultural criticism today, although cultural critics have
different concerns in that they take the "Western tradition" as their starting
point. Their principal aim is to unlock the "closures" in "high" literary and
philosophical texts and release meanings trapped by beliefs in essences.[46]
Often, their interests are not directly focused on political questions and dem-

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[45] For a recent statement of this position from a feminist perspective, see Joan Wallach Scott,
Gender and the Politics of History (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988). This politics
of difference is called "minority discourse" by Abdul JanMohamed and David Lloyd in their
"Introduction: Minority Discourse—What is to Be Done?," *Cultural Critique*, 7 (Fall 1987), 5–
17.
   [46] These concerns are stated, for example, in Dominick LaCapra's *Rethinking Intellectual
History: Texts, Contexts, Language* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983), and *History and
Criticism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985).

onstrate an aestheticist bias, although this is not true of feminist theories and the advocates of the politics of difference.

The post-Orientalist historiography, on the other hand, is much more directly concerned with the question of domination because its very subject— the third world—is defined by its dominated status.[47] The attempt to unlock history from the "closures" is thus not so much a question for these scholars of taking pleasure in the revealed Bakhtinian carvinalesque but an issue of engaging the relations of domination. Thus, the representation of India as an other defined by certain essences—tradition, spirituality, femininity, other worldliness, caste, nationality—becomes a site of contest. In these contests, the maintenance and the subversion of the relations of domination discursively reproduced by the lack of a clear break from the legacies of Orientalism, nationalism, and the ideologies of modernization are at issue. The power attributed to the knowledge about the past makes historical writing into a political practice and turns the recent post-Orientalist historical accounts into contestatory acts. Such a clearly political vision is what distinguishes this historiography in a context in which the third world is widely recognized as a signifier of cultural difference but is rapidly appropriated and commodified as cultural surplus (the Banana Republic stores being the most offensive contemporary example in this respect)[48] or serves as an other in a hermeneutic exercise devoted to the exploration of blurred genres and decentered realities validated by postmodernism.[49] Enabled by, but also in resistance to, these contemporary postmodernist tendencies, the self-consciously political visualization of writing history as a site of contest acquires a distinct significance; but if the postmodern conjuncture accounts for the attention currently paid to how the "third world writes its own history," it also threatens to envelop it in the larger project of dislodging the "Western tradition." If that happens in the present flurry of conferences and seminars on the third world, we will lose sight of the crucial fact that the "Western tradition" was a very peculiar

[47] Compare Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture,* Cary Nelson and Larry Grossberg, eds. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), 271–313, in which she argues that even politically oriented Western poststructuralists, like Foucault, are marked by a certain blindness to the reality of imperialist domination.

[48] See Paul Smith's "Visiting the Banana Republic," in *Universal Abandon?,* 128–48.

[49] Stephen A. Tyler's "Post-Modern Ethnography: From Document of the Occult to Occult Document," in *Writing Culture: The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography,* James Clifford and George Marcus, eds. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 122–40, exemplifies this tendency. Note, for instance, that he conceives postmodern ethnography's task as invoking "the fantasy reality of a reality fantasy" and "the occult in the language of naive realism and of the everyday in occult language." This invocation, according to him, "provokes a rupture with the commonsense world and evokes an aesthetic integration whose therapeutic effect is worked out in the restoration of the commonsense world" (p. 134). In this view, the offcentering of the ethnographer, as in the cover photograph of *Writing Culture,* becomes the purpose of postmodern ethnography.

configuration in the colonial world; and the old axiom—that the third world is a good thing to think with about the ''West''—will once again be proven correct. Such a turn of events will bring the post-Orientalist historiography's promise to contest hegemonic structures and reveal new histories to an ironic end.