

# Culture and Difference

## Heterologies of the Other

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**T**HE CRITICAL AND PUBLIC HERITAGE of postcolonialism as heterologies of difference is spread across diverse locations and localities, spaces and places, of thought and action that exceed the possibilities of accurately documenting and representing its history as a unified empirical and epistemic force committed to the emancipation of state and nation, mind, and body. The idea of difference and its postcolonial heterologies—diverse discourses of difference—have provided the conceptual groundwork for postcolonial theorists of nation, race, class, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality who have worked toward the ethical purpose of actualizing equitable contexts responsive to the alterity of individuals and groups within a society or culture regardless of identity politics and its categorical constructions. Yet, this altruistic desire for securing equitable environments and opportunities is also the practical juncture at which postcolonial theorists begin to part company with respect to the concept of difference. Difference and its heterology therefore become an intrinsic point of theoretical validation for asserting the legitimacy of such postcolonial discourses in practice by justifying the ethics of the methods each puts forward for the creation of grounds for equitable social environments that are fair and just.

For example, postcolonial feminists (e.g., bell hooks, Gayatri Spivak) have validated the need to analyze the material construction of sexual difference as a means for overcoming the bias of gender-role stereotyping. Postcolonial theorists who are concerned with nationality (e.g., Homi Bhabha) or ethnicity (e.g., Edward Said) have validated the importance of examining the socio-political ground for differences of subjectivity to illuminate the ideological subtext of human interactions, while others have concentrated on the economic distinction of class differences to address the bounds of social injustice and exploitation (e.g., Stuart Hall). Other postcolonial theorists have validated the necessity of acknowledging the uniqueness of racial differences as a heterogeneous marker of identity that gives a powerful voice to ethnic specificity in the face of discrimination against minorities and cultural hegemonies (e.g., Cornel West). There are also those postcolonial theorists who validate the significance of recognizing differences of sexuality or sexual orientation to situate the essence of subjectivity at the psychic and somatic core of human desire.

Indeed, some aspect of difference within the critical history of its heterological discourses has informed the attempts of these movements within postcolonialism to break down and reconceptualize the normative basis of subjectivity that has been operationalized in strictly ethical terms by the conventions of Western culture and philosophy. But a question arises, and its significance is paramount to the future directions of postcolonialism: To what extent can a rethinking of the idea of difference help us to look ahead to the future directions of postcolonialism while keeping the heterological past of its critical heritage alive in the present to come?

This question would assume that current articulation of the concept of difference among these heterological discourses is inadequate because it is not multidimensional and the problem of competing distinctions quickly arises. *How could we most properly adjudicate between the values of difference we are presented with in these postcolonial discourses to gauge both their argumentative and ethical validity?* It would not be possible to arbitrarily choose among differences of nation, race, class, ethnicity, gender, or sexuality to privilege some forms or aspects of difference while marginalizing or rejecting others and still adhere to the spirit of social justice in postcolonial theory. The concept of difference cannot be analyzed unproblematically, and this is especially so when it is couched in the politically and ethically regressive terms of a desire for competing validation. We need to have some way of synthesizing the unifying threads of the divergent notions of difference I have detailed above if we are to look forward to the future of postcolonialism. Postcolonialism, in theory and in practice, must move toward a re-awakening of an egalitarian consciousness that bridges the (negative) values of difference while recognizing their uniqueness or particularity. To reduce the numbing sense of divisiveness permeating the public sphere requires the solidarity of a community of difference rather than a simple celebration of a community of differences perceived to exist, more or less, independently of each other as the multiple sites of isolated or marginalized subjectivities. This is crucial if we wish to enrich our knowledge of the border crossings of identity so as to adapt social practices and institutional structures in a truly equitable way to the needs of all subjects regardless of nation, race, ethnicity, class, gender, or sexuality.

There must be an attempt, in theory and in practice, to rethink this concept of difference within and across these heterological discourses of postcolonialism with a view to the future directions of postcolonial thought. This rethinking is necessary if we wish to move beyond the stereotypes of difference and the subsequent politics of ideal categories that quickly arises in the struggle to protect the reason of one's own ground. As we move fully into the unknown territory of the new millennium, it has become obvious that the new era of global capitalism calls for a remapping of existing global relations that have defined the ideological and performative constellations of identity and difference. But the theoretical and pragmatic dimensions of such a call for a remapping of global relations must be informed by a *thinking toward the future* that grasps the complexity of contemporary structures of economic, political, and cultural power and by the effects and memories of earlier visions of society as both a traditional and radical milieu in which the subject is constituted. Without these two preconditions, the current preoccupations of cultural studies with Eurocentrism, ethnic diversity, and multiculturalism distract from issues of power that dominate global relations and that find expression in conflicts regarding difference. Such a *thinking toward the future*, I would argue, can only be a *thinking on the future of postcolonialism* since the discreet boundaries of difference that locate and mark the specificity of subjective identity across space and time are being increasingly eroded by the homogenizing influence of multinational corporate interests promoting a melting pot vision of ethnicity and culture as the by-product of what means to be a global subject in an emergent world culture. The

idealism of this cognitive remapping of identity and difference within the public sphere is maintained via what seems to be an unmitigating struggle across all media and communications technologies to enact and endorse the learning of a transnational multiliteracy, its images and languages, the sights and the signs of a total aesthetic, or a world view. The displacement and recodification of identity and difference reinforces yet overrides the localities of race, gender, class, ethnicity, and nationality, making the global subject a global citizen, a subject of both specific and general interpellation. This space where the subject is worked out, produced by an auto-, homo, and heterogenerativity, is a neo-colonial space because it posits a subjectivity capable of realizing the total aesthetic of a global vision that overcomes difference for a community of the same. It begs reflection on the question of the future of a “post-postcolonialism” or a neo-globalized subjectivity and the rethinking of how its localities of difference are constituted by engaging the logic of its heterological discourses. At the same time, it calls for a critical journey into the legacy of postcolonialism since the history of postcolonial thought inheres the intertwining of intellectual interests with the concern of social and cultural movements aimed at the decolonization of subjectivity and the recognition of difference on a global scale.

