Globalization, or the Vanishing Present of Postcolonialism? (and the Figuration of the Comprador-Intellectual)

Saikat Majumdar  
*Rutgers University*  
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.13.03

Follow this and additional works at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure

🔗 Part of the *English Language and Literature Commons*  
This work is licensed under a *Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License*.  

Recommended Citation  
DOI: https://doi.org/10.13023/disclosure.13.03  
Available at: https://uknowledge.uky.edu/disclosure/vol13/iss1/3

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Social Theory at UKnowledge. It has been accepted for inclusion in *disClosure: A Journal of Social Theory* by an authorized editor of UKnowledge. For more information, please contact UKnowledge@lsv.uky.edu.
Globalization in 25 Words or Less

| Between the horrifying myth and the over-simplified discourse is the reality, where from an edge of many silent tears a few greedily smile. | Felicity Paynter  
University of Leicester  
Leicester, England |
|---|---|
| Food, places, people—everything looks pretty much the same. | James Chia  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore |
| Globalization is the intertwining of nations in order to link the entire world and promote the unity of all people. | Kim Gasser  
University of Kentucky  
United States |

Saikat Majumdar
Globalization, or the Vanishing Present of Postcolonialism? (and the Figuration of the Comprador-Intellectual)

Of Cousins and Cannibals

Looking back, few theorizations of the relationship between postcolonial studies and the discourses of globalization stand out in my mind as strikingly as that articulated by a professor at Princeton, who, on the very first day of a graduate seminar on the subject, announced: "To the new entrants to the area of postcolonial theory, it is now time to say—'Hello, it’s over! Welcome to the discourses of globalization.'"

Carrying the legacy of urban, middle-class, educated Calcutta, speaking and writing in English, pursuing a doctorate in British modernist literature, I could have hardly considered myself a new entrant in the field of postcolonial studies at that point in time. Few members of the class could have, I suppose. Coming from corners of the globe as diverse and PoCo-friendly (or hostile, depending on the mood, time and place) as the Anglophone and Francophone Caribbean islands, China, Morocco, Turkey, England, Canada and South-Africa, not to mention Americans from all over the country, everyone in the class seemed to have been engaged with one sort of (post)colonial legacy or another. And no mere ‘native informant’ essentialism either—they all were engaged in reckonings, epistemic and personal, of not only such legacies, but of a more abstracted theorization of the encounters with empire in a larger, global space. Not ‘Empire,' I
Globalization, however, for me, was another animal altogether. As a teenager in India, I remember 1991 as a watershed year, or one that everybody considered to be such. That was the magic year when Dr. Manmohan Singh, the finance minister of the Narasimah Rao-led, tottering minority Congress government, was supposed to have opened the floodgates of the Indian market to the mythical giants of globalization and liberalization, ending nearly half a century of Nehruvian experimentation with socialist models. Like other mythical animals of contemporary politics, these two beasts (we weren’t really sure whether these were two, twinned, or one and the same) impressed more by their accompanying sound and fury than by tangible substance, whether in the applause earned from the Congress and business houses or in the mutually disparate voices of protest from the pro-Swadeshi Bharatiya Janata party and the Communists. Apart from a few new, sporadically scattered Ray-Ban showrooms and McDonald’s joints, ‘globalization’ remained something Manmohan Singh had done to the Indian economy, rather than a real and tangible presence. The turbaned economist was perceived as playing the kind of morale-boosting role for an ailing indigenous economy that Alan Greenspan was seen as doing in the Clinton-era United States. Industrially stagnated, Marxist-ruled Calcutta, of course, lagged behind the booming economic hotspots of Bombay, Bangalore and Hyderabad, and it is only now with the benefit of hindsight that I look back upon the irony of the ‘strongly dialectical’ relationship shared by the unsurprising contrasts: Calcutta, the most colonial of Indian cities, longtime capital of British India, locked in a ‘historicist’ past (speaking after the Calcuttan Dipesh Chakrabarty), eluded by the fast-paced, silicon-implanted sites of globalization; Bombay, Bangalore and Hyderabad, cities fast gaining the interest and attention of Bill Gates and company, fast kinships with their American counterparts in Seattle and San Jose. Even though the transition from the Queen’s English to MTV patois had been a smooth one for many, at least in one major space of cultural-economic negotiations, postcoloniality and globalization had refused to shake hands. 

As soon as the issues were severed from an immediately Indian context, the weaker cousin, ‘liberalization,’ melted into air, maybe corroborating its once-real solidity. But what about its ‘global’ counterpart? Not that I thought of During’s question—“Does globalization have a centre? Is it named America?”—as I arrived in the United States, but my first couple of years, spent surrounded by the popular vogue of Buckeye country music, tractor-pulls, Marlboro and Budlight in the suburban Midwest, were unblemished by any such concerns. Once again, with the benefit of hindsight, here was the Hardt-and-Negri-esque deconstruction of the inside-outside binary—if America is the heart of globalization, who cares about it in the heartland of the heart? If one exports Kentucky Fried Chicken and Windows 2010 to Bangalore, what does one export to Toledo, OH, or Gary, IN, except maybe the naughty pleasure of uttering – “Oh, this I didn’t expect. I thought American lifestyle was that of The Bold and the Beautiful, and McDonald’s its culinary ace!”

Not that the east was that different—after all, Wall Street is the heartland of the heart too, in a different sense! All the same, an eastward move coinciding with the September 11 tragedies—worldwide economic depression does make the globe shrink so—and the buzz of academia conferred on the existent Foucauldian power-schema of postcoloniality, an even stronger cousin that, oh, threatened to swallow it. Postcolonialism? That’s over. Welcome to globalization!

This popular version of the relationship between the two, depicting the former’s subsumption into the latter, was clearly more of a disciplinary gesture than one indicative of their interaction in real life. In other words, can one offer classes on postcolonial theory any more without giving globalization its pride of place, if not in the title, in the reading list? Or analyze sites in the global south without yoking these two, articulating in precise terms the older cousin’s subsumption into the younger and more strapping one’s bubbly life, or its vanishing present, if you will?

Conjunction and subsumption, however, are not quite the same thing, and while future hiring committees might justifiably want their postcolonial scholars to know their globalization (or in a lesser likelihood, vice versa), it is difficult to see how their disciplinary distinctions are made to collapse completely. Clearly, no theorists feel that way either. The question of course is what is this mystifying relationship between these two.
Incest or not?

During's theorization of this relationship indeed stands out among several intelligent attempts at it:

The distinction between postcolonialism and globalization is finally a distinction between a theory of dehistoricization (postcolonialism as the loss of progressive, teleological time as a master-narrative and the recovery of 'non-modern' relations to the past and future) on the one side, and, on the other, a theory of de-territorialization (globalism) as the retreat of geographical determination and the gradual transmutation of objects, styles, work into exchangeable and replicable resources within a fragmented but unified world-system in which new cultural-economic routes, zones or regions proliferate. (389)

Such a definition arrives at the crux of the interdisciplinary negotiation/transition implicit in the relationship between the two, and subsequently, in the change of disciplinary focus in reading lists as globalization comes to claim its pound of flesh next to its historicized antecedent on graduate syllabi. In the two terms used by During, 'dehistoricization' and 'deterritorialization,' we have respective hints of the critique of his - critique of geopolitical and geo-economic patterns carried on by globalization theorists like Saskia Sassen, Joseph Stiglitz and Enrique Dussel. Disciplinary differences not only contribute to distinct points of origin, but decisively mold the respective natures of their discourses to the point of deciding the amount of cultural capital attached to each: "Whereas postcolonialism and postmodernism had been developed inside literary and cultural studies and had only circulated in the media when their academic currency was in retreat, globalization came from the media and the social sciences, notably, economics, sociology and communication studies" (During 387).

Methodological differences also underlie the distinction between postcolonialism and globalization for Arif Dirlik, though he finds the two united in "their attitudes towards the location of Eurocentricism:"

Methodologically speaking, postcolonialism in its most popular forms (in the United States, at least) eschews questions of the structurations of the world in terms of "foundational categories" and stresses local encounters in the formations of identities; it is in many ways driven by a radical methodological individualism and is situationist in its historical explanations...Globalism on the other hand, draws attention to the structurations of the world by forces that operate at the highest level of abstraction and, in some of its versions, finds in such abstractions the reaffirmation of the scientific promises of social theory. (27)

These differences help Dirlik to tie the relationship between these two frameworks to an issue that has been almost consensually agreed on by most commentators—that of the difference in temporal focus. Whether or not the ideal aim of postcolonial theory is to dehistoricize notions of time, as articulated by During and Chakrabarty, surely it places its focus squarely on the past, whatever it might eventually do with such a focus. "Armed with the insights of the present," Dirlik writes, "postcolonialists proceed to reinterpret the past with the very same insights." Globalization clearly refuses to look back, and, in this refusal, seems implicit a similar denial of historicism—that events can be rationally explained by their linear progress through historical time. More important for our purposes here, while postcolonialism seeks to dehistoricize our understandings of the past, globalization uses dehistoricism, along with other weapons, to sever the present from the past—what good are tales of yore in explicating these troubled times? As such, while for Dirlik, "[p]ostcolonialism then is merely the current expression of forms of knowledge that have been around for a long time, except that there was no consciousness of it earlier," globalization is clearly a rupture with the past: "By contrast, advocates of globalization leave no doubt about the break they seek to accomplish between the present and the past, including a break between a present condition and the factors that may have brought about such a condition" (Dirlik 28).

The idea that studies of globalization necessitate an epistemological break with past traditions is also central to the claims of the significant earlier theorists of globalization. Roland Robertson, whose authority in fact is invoked by Dirlik on his way to his argument, considers insights earned from the past redundant in coming to terms with "the basic and shifting terms of the contemporary world order" (qtd. in Dirlik 29). But
perhaps the most striking argument in this direction, that of globalization’s rupture with the past as opposed to old-style European imperialism, is to be found in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s academic headline making publication, Empire, though the writers’ characterization as an internet-age Marx and Engels on the Harvard paperback of it is less a break than a qualification of epistemological paradigms of the past. This move, as Hardt and Negri theorize, necessarily presupposes ontological changes that require shifts in disciplinary foci. Reminiscent of Düring’s point noted earlier, this shift involves the questioning of history as a disciplinary tool in the study of the phenomena of globalization as contrasted to its indispensability with postcolonial scholars; in other words, whether or not ‘historicism’ becomes a political bane. For Hardt and Negri, the hydra has, to invert Linebaugh and Rediker’s equation, undergone a complete metamorphosis or has been reincarnated into a new avatar: “the construction of Empire is a step forward in order to do away with any nostalgia for the power structures that preceded it and refuse any political strategy that involves returning to the old arrangement, such as trying to resurrect the nation-state to protect against global capital” (Hardt and Negri 43). That the change is truly a qualitative one is reflected in the drastic biological transformations of its working metaphors: “in the contemporary passage to Empire, the structured tunnels of the mole have been replaced by the infinite undulations of the snake” (Hardt and Negri 57). Admittedly, Hardt and Negri are interested in the foundation of repressive forces, whether it is the centers of imperialism or the famously virtual or decentered center of Empire, and its consequent rival, the ‘multitude,’ torn as it is between the battle-cry of the activist and the detachment of the theorist. Even so, such interests end up throwing valuable light on the various conditions resultant from these foundations, be they the ‘past’ of colonialization or the ‘present’ of globalization.

Is the gulf between the theorist and the activist indeed the producer of some versions of disagreement over the nature of the relationship between postcoloniality and globalization? I had an interesting conversation recently with a scholar concerned with the bureaucratic institutions of the British East India company — one who has no qualms about making the unrelenting declaration that she is more on the ‘activist’ side, way more... and the fervor of her convictions bespeak it, too. Hardt and Negri have given her pause—haven’t they to us all before we burst into passionate applause or disappointment?—but post-pause, she doesn’t buy their theory of Empire’s drastic rupture with imperialism, the intricacy of the snake-mole metaphor. I tried a couple of the clichéd points of difference—the dispersal of the idea of national interests, the overriding economic nature of Empire as opposed to its partial (if dominant, nonetheless) role in the dominance of older European colonialism.

The piloting prongs of the post-renaissance European domination over the globe were two, I uttered: the missionary zeal to convert and the economic greed of trade... but doesn’t the move into outright annexation put on an overtly political mantle, sooner or later? Redfaced firang traders they were, in Aurangzeb’s stately Mughal court, and even after the decisive victory over Nawab Siraj-au-daullah on the battlefields of Plassey courtesy, the treachery of Mirjafa, with weakling Bahadur Shah Zafar in prison, kept the reins in the hands of the East India Company—though Clive be more of a man than Curzon, many might argue from the cigar-rooms of Bath... but the Sepoy Mutiny of 1857 precipitated Her Majesty Queen Victoria into complete control, didn’t it? A Crowned dominance that would last till the bloodied power-transfer of 1947. This isn’t network power, surely? Surely the sun that never set on the British Empire discriminated between the inside and the outside?

NO, says my activist friend. The chartered companies, she says, the chartered companies. They may not quite be the eighteenth century harbingers of Pepsi and its Indian incarnation in the Maha-Cola, but something in that direction, surely. Even if there be the British and the Dutch East India company, even if Clive and Duplex’s bloody egobattle takes on the rabid colors of Anglo-French hostility. I had to sigh, you have-a-point-there, and you know, Ian Baucom’s romantic view of the past in “Globalit, Inc., or, The Cultural Logic of Global Cultural Studies” does reconstruct the chartered companies in a similar light. But is the refusal of newness, of ruptures with the past, a kind of historical structuralism? The Oedipus myth replicates itself in Hamlet, as Monsieur Levi-Strauss might have said, as imperialism repeats itself in Empire. Perhaps the answer lies in Dipeshbabu’s shomoy-grotch, the stubborn time-knots. The present, after all, is always in the past, the past in the present. As the south-Asian subaltern historiographers have pointed out again and again, the historicist march of time can’t pull the wool over our eyes, not now, not ever!

And the theorist-activist pick is not the only one that accounts for versions of difference, discrepancy, or continuity, depending on your affiliation. One could go on forever. But more interesting than a com-
A comparative analysis of the two phenomena is how they interact with each other, on a site which draws in both. Contemporary South-Asia is fertile ground for this negotiation, and even more so, the figure of the South-Asian intellectual working in the US academy.

**A Knotty kinship, too**

"Time, as the expression goes in my language," writes Dipesh Chakrabarty, "situates us within the structure of a granthi; hence the Bengali word shomoy-granthi, shomoy meaning 'time' and granthi referring to joints of various kinds, from the complex formations of knuckles on our fingers to the joints on a bamboo stick" (Chakrabarty 112). Such time knots account for, as he puts it later, "the plurality that inheres in the 'now,' the lack of totality, the constant fragmentariness, that constitutes one's present" (Chakrabarty 243).

Such a time-knot, I'd like to argue, is to be found in the sites of negotiation between postcoloniality and globalization, as for instance in the South-Asian cultural reality of today, and in the lives and works of contemporary diasporic South-Asian intellectuals. Inasmuch as such knots exist, they defy any notions of a 'rupture' with the past as claimed by several high priests of globalization, but in the commonality of the crusade they both launch against historicist understandings of time and their cause-effect flows, perhaps a 'rupture' in a smooth line inevitably ends up in 'knots.' In other words, is the idea of a 'rupture' the temporal expression of that which the 'knot' is a spatial metaphor? Causality, after all, is the villain here, along with the teleological master-narratives of history, as During noted before. To hold During's other term, that reserved for globalization, to this temporalizing test would, however, be to complicate things infinitely—does 'de-territorialization' amount to a space-knot or a spatial rupture? It somehow seems that the motif of 'de-territorialization' is an easier sell among readers of globalization (cybershops, 1-800 numbers, the unreal reality of diaspora) than the reality of space in these processes as championed by theorists like Sassen. Take for instance her idea of the 'global city,' that space which is surely tied in a strange time-knot with the older forms of modernity and empire, the sordid-imperial text of Baudelaire and Eliot and Joyce?

The question remains: what sort of relationships can 'de-territorialization' be perceived to retain with older spaces, territories? No teleological, master-narratives of space, surely? Here 'rupture' may not be such a good friend of 'knot'—surely there is more of a knot between the global south and the north than a drastic rupture? Bangalore and Seattle seem to be knotting all right, turning the knotty discrepancies of international time-zones into knots of profit—while San Jose sleeps, Bombay works...Manhattan keeps the other half of the clock ticking while Hyderabad earns its night's rest! A knot, mind you, not a continuum...not the continuous economic subjection, the subject-object binarism, the smoothness of imperial trade implicit in post-renaissance European colonialism. The prosperous hi-tech cyberspatial Pacific rim of globalized quasi-future, not the parti-colored Atlantics of colonial pasts. Shrinkage of the world is hardly tantamount to a rupture, so unwieldy knots of space are it. Sassen would agree, one thinks. Isn't the global city one such enormous space-knot, with the glitzy Ritz of global finance and skyrocketing Dow-Jones downtown, the seedy shanties of underpaid female illegal immigrant labor from across the southern borders? Space-knots are time-knots too, for in the interlocking of Wall Street and immigrant ghettos what do we have if not the paradox of the cyberfuturistic and the 'nonmodern'? Interesting how South-Asian metropolitan centers reproduce such distressing knots of time and space, of prosperity—Bombay's the city of the incredibly affluent Malabar Hills with chauffeur-driven Mercedes and of Dharavi—the largest, the most appalling conglomeration of slums in Asia.

**What a site!**

But what about the sites where postcoloniality and globalization have to battle out their identities, to negotiate them? What spatial and temporal knots clog up there, what space-time ruptures? Speaking of actual places/geographical locations/nations, few parts of the world occupy as explosive a position as Latin America and the Caribbean islands in this spatio-temporal negotiation. Already parti-colored with the imprints of the colonialism of various nations, Latin America and more strikingly, the Caribbean, occupy strategic positions with respect to globalization owing to—what else—their physical proximity to the United States.3

Central and south America remain the most volatile sites of the myriad of these power plays—beginning from the economic domination, through outright political big-brotherhood to the flagrant trinity of militarism-drugs-illegal immigration. In the Caribbean, for instance,
Children of Incest?

Diasporic intellectuals, precisely those from the former colonies of European countries now working in the US academy, it seems to me, embody the dualism of both the time-knots and space-knots as those I’ve been discussing. I’d like to argue that such intellectuals comprise one of the most significant sites of the negotiation of postcoloniality and globalization, in the manner in which they must necessarily reconcile their identities as postcolonials (with respect to their legacy of post-renaissance European colonialism) to those of diasporic professionals whose location within the ‘metropolis’ of Empire (à la Hardt and Negri) has largely been contingent upon processes of globalization.

Moreiras’s essay “Global Fragments: A Second Latinamericanism” indeed demonstrates how erroneous any split between the phenomena of globalization and its studies in the institutional space of the academy is—how the latter, instead of being an objective, independent assessment of these geopolitical practices from a space outside them, is rather implicit in such processes and reflective of them. Leslie Sklair’s assessment of ‘Third World elites’ surely applies to diasporic intellectuals from the global south working in the metropolitan universities of the US:

Third World elites do not form a comprador class in the sense of serving First World interests or assimilating into western culture. Rather, they constitute a transnational capitalist class whose members act in the interest of the global system. Like transnational corporations (TNCs) their allegiance is not to the nation-state but to a global consumerism that thrives on cultural hybridities. (Sharpe 185)

Some important qualifications are in order here, inasmuch as such intellectuals are engaged in critiques of cultural and epistemological paradigms of which processes of postcoloniality and globalization are a part. From one such diasporic intellectual, Arjun Appadurai, comes an important insight about the ways in which they complicate epistemic knots, as it were, in the creation of what he calls “ideoscapes,” reflecting the increasingly complicated realities of postcolonial cultures in the wake of globalization: “The fluidity of ideoscapes is complicated in particular by the growing diasporas (both voluntary and involuntary) of
intellectuals who continuously inject new meaning-streams into the discourse of democracy in different parts of the world” (37). Whether or not postcoloniality or globalization can enter ‘history after Eurocentrism,’ the only site of possible critique of Eurocentrism is the diasporic intellectuals, agents of empowerment located within Eurocentric matrices of power/knowledge – notably the academy. Well-versed in the Eurocentric canons of knowledge, these intellectuals of postcolonial origin – or of ‘Third World,’ to use a more controversial term – engage in their critique. Dirlik writes:

The contemporary critique of Eurocentrism is driven not by victimization by Eurocentrism but by empowerment within it. Foremost among modern critics of Eurocentrism are those who are not marginalized by Eurocentrism or left out of its structure of power, but those who claim ‘hybridities’ that give access to both Eurocentrism and to its Others, probably more of the former than the latter. If Orientalism was a product of Euro-Americans located in “contact zones” outside Euro-America on the margins of non-Euro-American societies, anti-Eurocentrism is a product of contact zones located at the hearts of Euro-America or in transnational structures or circuits of power. (Dirlik 36)

Things were probably simpler when in a slightly earlier period the postcolonial intellectual worked with the cultures consequent upon the encounters of the former empires and their colonies, even though such encounters and their resultant cultures themselves amounted to an unsettling of geographic and epistemic boundaries of earlier canons. Such intellectuals might have talked about the works of V.S. Naipaul and Chinua Achebe or the large-scale immigration to Britain from its former colonies. As late as 1995, Jenny Sharpe wrote: “A glance at any English curriculum will reveal that the Anglophone writings of former British colonies are now an essential offering. This inclusion represents the effort to reshape British literature in the same way that the canon of American literature had been transformed by the introduction of minority literatures and cultures” (181). But with the spread of what Hardt and Negri calls Empire, especially towards the latter half of the 20th century, and finally with the triumph of global capitalism in a post-cold war era, the new behemoth of globalization increasingly has come to complicate an already complicated phenomenon of postcoloniality vis-à-vis post-

Globalization, or the Vanishing Present of Postcolonialism

Clearly, the south-Asian intellectuals working in the US academy, as much as those from Central and South America, are faced with the complex epistemic negotiations of the cultures of postcoloniality and globalization even as they deal with the interaction of the two processes within the matrices of their very identities. Even though they haven’t been touched by the immediacy of Empire as the Caribbean and Latin America have been, the case of the south-Asian diasporic intellectual is interesting, notably in the momentum postcolonial scholarship from that part of the world has gathered in the US academy, perhaps partly attendant on the duration and impact of British colonialism in these parts, India being the fabled “jewel in the Crown” of the British Monarch. Many would probably go so far as to consider Subaltern Studies, originally an offshoot of South-Asian area studies, to be the most significant paradigm of postcolonialist epistemic practices in the US academy today.

The case of the south-Asian diasporic intellectual is therefore an occasion to consider this significant element of the interaction of postcoloniality and globalization, namely, area studies. Many of the intellectuals negotiating this tension were originally (and in most cases, still are) area studies scholars whose disciplinary structures, already at least partially contingent upon (post)coloniality, are now becoming infinitely more complicated by the advent of globalization. With respect to the area studies he’s concerned with, Moreiras sees, after Hardt, the transition from area studies Latinamericanism to a Latinamericanism contin-

Pangaea
gent upon processes and discourses of globalization as a move from the work of an epistemic society of discipline to that of an epistemic society of control. Important assumptions about the ways of understanding alterity and the resultant Orientalist practices are implicit here: "If it is fair to say that the first Latinamericanism operates under the assumption that alterity can always, and indeed must always, be theoretically reduced, the second Latinamericanism understands itself in epistemic solidarity with the residual voices, or silences, of Latin American alterity" (Moreiras 89).

This dualism resonates with During's encounter of critical postcolonialism and globalization: "[T]he category of globalization has, for the most part, superceded that of 'postcolonialism' and that critical postcolonialism needs to be seen not simply as globalization's enemy but (in part) as its effect. That is, globalization and critical postcolonialism have a weakly dialectical relation" (During 385). This resonance is a significant one, as critical postcolonialism is the force that is decisive in the formation of subaltern nationalisms, as a riposte both to colonialisms of the past and the globalizations of the present and the future. It is in this troubled site of subaltern nationalism that area studies makes significant discoveries with respect not only to (post)colonialism and globalization, but also to revisionist historiography, as is exemplarily demonstrated in the South-Asian case. In The Nation and Its Fragments, the subaltern historiographer Partha Chatterjee challenges the notion that nationalism is a purely Western import to colonial and postcolonial countries by showing how in India the real nationalist project was launched not in the outer/material domain of national culture (where the West had established its dominance) but in the inner/spiritual domain (where indigenous superiority was taken for granted): "The home, I suggest, was not a complementary but rather the original site on which the hegemonic project of nationalism was launched" (Chatterjee 136).

When South-Asian elites come to occupy the position of diasporic intellectuals (a twice-exiled one, as Said points out in his influential essay on the subject) in the US, they invariably end up acquiring a different kind of consciousness about their location in their own nations and with respect to such subaltern nationalisms easy responses to the twin processes of imperialism and Empire. It is not surprising, therefore, that such diasporic South-Asian intellectuals have taken recourse to revisionist historiography in order to critically reexamine the ideologies and realities of subaltern nationalisms and to seek to restore agency to the various marginalized populations within the nation (a red-herring effort according to many, even though the gesture remains indispensable). Aijaz Ahmad, in In Theory, engages in such a critique of subaltern nationalisms even as he critiques Euro-American rhetoric of 'otherness.' Partha Chatterjee engages in a similar project in his effort to tell the suppressed stories in the female autobiographies in 19th century Bengal. He writes, after telling the story of the Bengali stage actress Noti Binodini:

Indeed, the opening up of the whole problematic of the national project within and outside the domain of the state makes it possible for us now to make the radical struggle with colonialism, contained many possibilities of the authentic, creative, and plural development of social identities that were violently disrupted by the political history of the postcolonial state seeking to replicate the modular forms of the modern nation-state. (156)

Also similar is the revisionist historiography of the members of the Subaltern Studies Collective in their project to restore agency to the subaltern in a British colonial or bourgeois nationalist historiography. Dipesh Chakrabarty's work becomes especially interesting here, in that his critique of historicism and the teleological, rationalizing processes of the master narratives of history is simultaneously directed at the secular rationalisms implicit in the work of the subaltern historiographers as at the privileged nexus of reason and subjectivity structuring Eurocentric historiography that "enabled European domination of the world in the nineteenth century."

Much of the critical force of South-Asian subaltern studies, I'd like to argue, comes from the diasporic locations of its practitioners that are made contingent by a globalization that does not hesitate to extract its pound of flesh (read 'share of immigrants') from the academy. It is in this critical force that a significant interaction of postcoloniality and globalization is to be found. Arguably, subaltern studies, with its stronger mooring in postcolonial epistemologies, remains oriented towards the past, while the realities of globalization continue to decisively affect the present and the future. But, as Moreiras has so aptly pointed out in his essay, it is precisely the realities of globalization, including its immigration of elite and subaltern populations, that destabilize such boundaries. Area studies are, therefore, much more than the means of exercising
power/knowledge over the ‘Orient,’ they are critical to apprehending the geopolitics of the contemporary world order, especially with regard to the global expansion of US capitalism. That the traditional grids of power and subjectivity which characterized the organization of postcolonial studies since Said’s Orientalism are inadequate to apprehending the realities of the “Disjuncture and Difference in Global Cultural Economy” is made clear by Appadurai and the various perspectival constructs that he calls ‘scapes.’ “The new global cultural economy has to be seen as a complex, overlapping, disjunctive order that cannot any longer be understood in terms of existing center-periphery models (even those that might account for multiple centers and peripheries)” (Appadurai 32). Appadurai seems to carry Hardt and Negri’s project even farther in the fragmentation of the sites of power, and it is no surprise that Simon During finds in his work “a theory of cultural globalization brushed by post-structuralism – a celebratory rather than critical globalism,” that perceives a world which is “a radical departure from the colonial” (During 388). Appadurai, therefore, is a prime exemplar of the South-Asianist who seems to have completed the transition from postcoloniality to globalization.

In spite of all the post-structuralist de-centering of power, in the figuration of postcolonial theory within a globalized sphere, the crucial figure remains that of the subaltern. It is she who is configured in the Foucauldian power/knowledge grid in the face of privileged western subjectivities as signified, albeit in different ways, in both colonialism and the expansion of global capital. This is where the work of Gayatri Spivak becomes significant. From the beginning, Spivak has maintained a significant but critical involvement with the Subaltern Studies Collective, as for instance in her essay “Subaltern Studies: Deconstructing Historiography,” where she foregrounds the notion of ‘subaltern effect’ as a means of apprehending the subaltern consciousness. Spivak carries on this project in her celebrated essay, “Can the subaltern speak?” – specifically the problem of restoring voice and agency to the subaltern - and in her 1999 book, A Critique of Postcolonial Reason, where she chooses the term “native informant.” It is Spivak’s work that most clearly ties the subaltern from British colonial history of South-Asia with the marginalized and the disempowered in the imperialist expansions of global capitalism – the santal and the Rani of Sirmur and the poor Bangladeshi woman harnessed, in flagrant violation of her human rights, in the capitalist systems of transnational corporations.

Perhaps, it is also time to rephrase the earlier question in a South-Asian context—will there be any South-Asian postcolonialist working in the US academy who’s not also a globalization theorist? A book like Aijaz Ahmad’s In Theory provides a complex answer in the negative. Ripostes to Western theorization of the ‘rhetoric of otherness,’ in this book, ties in as much with the geopolitics of power in the world-system as with the legacies of English education and canon-formation in post-colonial India. At such moments, it does seem that imperialism and Empire are not such different animals as Negri and Hardt would make them out to be. Therefore, why should the move from postcoloniality to globalization be such a drastic transformation for the South-Asianist or for any intellectual from the global south working in the metropolitan university?

The phenomenon of colonialism, however, still remains a bigger and more pervasive question in the South-Asian context—much more so than that of globalization, making scholars like Appadurai, therefore, a rarer breed. No South-Asianist has, for instance, engaged in a shockingly perspectival psychoanalytic dissection of globalization as has been done to the phenomenon of (post)colonialism by that brilliant Fanon of India, Ashish Nandy, in his classic The Intimate Enemy. As is easily evident through, say, a comparison of South-Asian immigration patterns to the UK and the US (assuming that immigration to the former is more of a postcolonial phenomenon while in the latter case it has been accelerated by the logic of globalization—a shaky corollary yet with some truth in it), and as implied by Sharpe, the reality of the South-Asian diaspora in the American capital of Empire is, in some ways, an artificial or a synthetic one – even in comparison to the immigrant populations from Latin America and many parts of East Asia. The lack of a clear historical (as with Britain and its former colonies) or geographical link (as the US has with Mexico and Central America, or even between east Asia and California) between the South-Asian countries and the US limits such immigration to a small group of elites, to its rich, its educated, and its skilled professionals—if we choose to ignore the smaller immigration streams that took place during the west coast railroad constructions of the early 20th century. The epistemic earthquake in Latin American studies that Moreiras described due to large-scale immigration to El Norte—creating communities that are perhaps more ‘natural’ and ‘moored in reality’ with populations engaged in everything from executive positions in the Cabinet to pay-by-hour farm work—is clearly a far
cry with respect to South-Asian studies in the US. Unless one considers the global spread of Indian indentured laborers in the past to places as far-flung as Fiji and Africa as a past paradigm of globalization, it is perhaps safe to say that the ‘real’ negotiation of postcoloniality and globalization hasn’t even properly begun with respect to the diasporic intellectual from South Asia—not to the degree with which it has intensified in regard to the Caribbean and Latin America. What is visible here, due to the distinction of postcolonial scholarship from that part of the world, is arguably, only the tip of an iceberg that the future will reveal more of.

Notes
1. Exactly what this attitude is Dirlik chooses not to amplify, and the question that comes to my mind immediately is whether either of these two phenomena can enter, to use Dirlik’s own phrase, “history after Eurocentricism?”
2. In Peter Linebaugh and Marcus Rediker’s The Many Headed Hydra, ironically, the hydra, constituting of slaves, rebel sailors and pirates of post-renaissance Atlantic, signifies something approximating the ragbag collection of forces that would be likely to counter the metamorphosing hydra of Hardt and Negri, which of course in their book is a metaphor of the hegemonic force of Empire itself.
3. Of course, to what extent the US is the center of the phenomena of globalization—which would entail dealing with the issue as to what extent globalization has a center at all—is a heated issue. Hardt and Negri’s fascinating chapter on the US constitution is theoretically foundational here, even though it needs no ghost to tell us what is the Mecca of capitalism in the world today, the singular pole of power in a post-Cold War era. The concept of the non-annexing imperialism of network power, that destroyer of inside-outside binarism implicit in the expansionist philosophy of the US constitution, sounds fascinating indeed, perhaps a tad too alluring to our intellectual consumerism. The transnational nature of globalization’s prime vehicles, the multinational corporations, causes a mild erosion of the idea of a nation as a center, but like my friend the scholar-activist, most people would say that can’t ‘fool’ them. And going by Empire, Empire is not merely economic—network power is more complex than that.

Works cited

Globalization in 25 Words or Less

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gingerly</th>
<th>inter-Locked</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Odyssey, Born</td>
<td>Against</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lonely and</td>
<td>Isolated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>‘Z’s—</td>
<td>Abandoned</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To</td>
<td>Invisibly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Opaque</td>
<td>Nullity</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Angela Yong Chwee Yun  
National University of Singapore  
Singapore