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RECASTING COLONIALISM, REWRITING HISTORY: CULTURE AND  
IMAGINATION IN THE NEOLIBERAL PRESENT

by

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## ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Recasting Colonialism, Rewriting History: Culture and Imagination in the  
Neoliberal Present

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This dissertation brings the tools of literary and cultural analysis to the study of contemporary neoliberalism, a globally dominant political, economic and moral vision that limits the regulatory role of government while expanding the reach of capital into social life. While much scholarship on neoliberalism has emphasized the social and material changes it has ushered since the 1980s, my project attends also to its cultural manifestations and ideological dimensions, particularly to the ways in which its utopian free market ideology remakes the present by rewriting histories of colonial domination. Drawing on recent scholarship on neoliberalism— by social scientists like David Harvey, postcolonial and race theorists like Stuart Hall, and literary and cultural historians like Fredric Jameson— I show how contemporary global culture participates in and responds to the rise of neoliberal utopianism. In my introduction, I establish how regional hegemons and global powers like the United States, South Africa, and India adopt neoliberal policies, thereby destroying not only existing public assets but also collective memory. Considering an array of Anglophone texts from the last two decades—

including U.S. journalism and travel writing, South African memoir and testimony, award-winning Indian novels, and internationally-acclaimed cinema— each of my following chapters tracks the new narratives of the present and the past that have arisen in these national contexts in conjunction with their turn to neoliberal methods of profit-making and state-building. I reveal how the uncritical revival of colonial discourse, the recasting of colonial violence as moral failure, and the exoticization of colonial-era intercultural contact, lead to the radical rewriting of histories of colonialism, at the very moment when only a frank acknowledgement of these histories and their ongoing legacies might enable us to begin to repair the damage done. As opposed to theories of globalization that emphasize the radical newness of the contemporary geopolitical order, my dissertation illustrates both the discontinuities and continuities between the regimes of domination that characterize the neoliberal present and the period of European colonization.

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## Introduction

This project emerged in response to discussions about the supposed newness of the existing geopolitical order. The end of the Cold War and the growing dominance of neoliberal free market ideology produced a proliferation of discourses about a ‘new world order’ of freedom, multiculturalism and human rights— and about the rebirth and renewal of economies and nations in what was being called the ‘era of globalization.’ Such claims about the radical newness of the present found expression in a range of internationally-circulating cultural texts— from political and journalistic discourse to novels, films, and travel writing. My dissertation explores articulations of newness across a variety of turn-of-the-century literary and cultural production from three major Anglophone contexts—the United States, South Africa, and India.

This geographically and generically diverse body of texts brings to the surface common modes of imagining that arise at the end of the twentieth century in response to the rise of a neoliberal vision of largescale privatization, deregulation, and competitive capitalism. For neoliberalism, as scholars like David Harvey have shown, is more than merely an economic doctrine; it is also a form of utopianism that imagines a future in which geographical and socio-economic unevenness has been leveled by the forces of free-market capitalism and by the power of individual ingenuity and entrepreneurialism. Much of my analysis is directed toward apprehending the cultural manifestations of neoliberal utopianism—as well as understanding how the neoliberal vision proliferates through the culture industry.

My dissertation identifies ‘globalization,’ ‘human rights’ and the ‘nation-state’ as keywords that have been the locus of much controversy in recent years and that therefore help us to track the ideological terrain of the neoliberal present. While globalization is a relatively new signifier that appears in conjunction with the increasing dominance of a neoliberal vision of a new world unified by free markets, longstanding ideas of human rights and the nation-state have also been hotly debated and challenged in recent years. My chapters will explore how these categories are resignified in conjunction with the rise of neoliberalism—and how they register shifts in our understanding of the relationship between individuals and states.

I argue that as neoliberalism emerges as a hegemonic discourse in the final decades of the twentieth century, it shapes—and limits—how we imagine our collective future, and how we remember our shared past. Neoliberalism’s imagination of an ideal future society depends upon—indeed requires—the obscuring of colonialist violence and its role in producing geographical unevenness and longstanding social and economic inequalities. As many of the cultural texts I analyze reveal, contemporary attempts at redefining the world, the human, and the nation have entailed the rewriting of histories of colonialist violence. Moreover, it is not only imperialist nations like the United States that are invested in rewriting the histories of this violence. I show how post-colonial nations like South Africa and India repackage their histories of internal and external colonialisms as they construct themselves as “new” nations and emerging global powers.

The obscuring of colonial violence happens through a number of modes—some involving the denial of the continuing significance of this violence and others its repackaging for the purposes of commodification. The expanded markets for cultural

products viewed as ‘global,’ or as emerging out of ‘new’ nations, has much to do with the growing currency of the notion that we occupy a world order that has transcended the era of European colonialism. The marketability of these concepts, and the framing of cultural texts through these concepts, thus invariably entails the occlusion or distortion of histories of imperialist violence as well as the deflection of emergent anti-imperialist critique.

The final pages of my dissertation will consider literary and cultural responses that challenge the individualizing discourse of neoliberalism by calling attention to histories and ongoing realities of economic exploitation. Whether analyzing first person accounts of post-Cold War US travelers, testimonial narratives by survivors of South African apartheid, novels in English by post-colonial Indian writers, or blockbuster science fiction films, I attend to the internal logic of these texts as well as to their relationship with broader ideological currents and market forces. In other words, I read their historical and geographical imaginations against the backdrop of the rise of neoliberalism as a global ideological dominant and the marketing of culture by contemporary forces of capitalist globalization.

### The Rise of Neoliberalism

A utopian ideology and a set of practices aimed at dismantling the regulation of private capital, neoliberalism emerged as an ideological dominant during the 1980s, when its values were actively promoted by the influential regimes of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher. With the end of the Cold War, the 1990s then launched a period of

intensification in the global dissemination of neoliberal ideals of unbridled freedom for markets and individuals.

David Harvey defines neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (*Neoliberalism 2*). As Harvey points out, neoliberal theory advocates that the role of the state be limited to creating an institutional and legal framework—and a police and military—that protects citizens’ private property rights and ensures the smooth functioning of markets. Neoliberal theory had a following as far back as the 1940s, when its free market principles were proposed as a counter to prevailing wisdom about the necessity of state intervention for economic regulation and social welfare. It was not until the 1970s, however, that this theory became dominant and began to be applied in a number of world economies.

Harvey links the rise of neoliberalism in the 1970s to a broader “class project” of restoring power to elite classes in the advanced capitalist world in the aftermath of a destabilizing crisis of capital accumulation. By the 1970s, the then dominant, Fordist method of industrial production had ceased to be as profitable as it once was. To counter the stagnation of profits, capitalists in the advanced capitalist nations moved to new, more “flexible,” methods of capital generation that entailed increased dependence on finance capital, movement of production operations to third world economies, and a shift from industrial to service economies. Such flexibility allowed capitalists greater control over labor power both within their home countries as well as abroad.<sup>1</sup> But to ensure this flexibility, capitalists of the advanced capitalist economies needed an overhauling of the

regulatory measures that their nations had put in place during the post-World War Two era.

The Keynesian welfare state that was the norm until the late 1960s had entailed a “class compromise” between labor and capital. Capitalist expansion was regulated by the state in order to maintain equitable wage levels. The state, moreover, maintained control over industries such as healthcare, education, and energy that were deemed essential for promoting social equality and welfare. “The neoliberal project,” as Harvey puts it, “is to disembed capital from these constraints” (*Neoliberalism* 11) posed by the welfare state. Over the course of the following decades, this project of deregulating markets and restoring capitalist power generated global consent and made hegemonic the principles of neoliberal political-economy.

One of the key architects of late twentieth century neoliberalism is the Chicago school economist, Milton Friedman. In his seminal work, *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962), Friedman lays out many of the key tenets of neoliberal thinking. In the opening pages, Friedman proclaims, “Our minds tell us and history confirms, that the great threat to freedom is the concentration of power” (2). The need to preserve our freedom is not the only reason for dismantling state power, however; Friedman adds that this dismantling is also necessary for the unleashing of individual genius and creativity. As he puts it, “The great advances of civilization, whether in architecture or painting, in science or literature, in industry or agriculture, have never come from centralized government. Columbus did not set out to seek a new route to China in response to a majority directive of a parliament, though he was partly financed by an absolute monarch” (3). In addition to Columbus, Friedman draws on the accomplishments of Shakespeare, Milton, and

Edison, among others, and he argues that, “Their achievements were the product of individual genius, of strongly held minority views, of a social climate permitting variety and diversity. Government can never duplicate the variety and diversity of individual action” (4). Friedman’s writing exemplifies not only the key values (freedom, individual genius, and decentralized government) but also the tone and tenor of much neoliberal discourse. Like many neoliberals, Friedman repeatedly justifies his theories by invoking “history” and “civilization” and by reinterpreting historical events and personages (whether Columbus or Shakespeare) as evidence of the power of raw and unfettered individualism.

In *Capitalism and Freedom* Friedman laments what he sees as the erosion of the classical liberal vision with which he aligns himself. Explicitly differentiating his brand of liberalism from the welfare state liberalism that was dominant for much of the twentieth century, he writes:

The nineteenth-century liberal regarded an extension of freedom as the most effective way to promote welfare and equality; the twentieth century liberal regards welfare and equality as either prerequisites or alternatives to freedom. In the name of welfare and equality, the twentieth-century liberal has come to favor a revival of the very policies of state intervention and paternalism against which classical liberalism fought. (5-6)

Milton Friedman’s project, like that of neoliberalism more generally, entails the revival of classical laissez-faire liberalism associated with thinkers like Adam Smith. However, while even liberals like Smith were not completely opposed to limited degrees of state intervention, neoliberals like Friedman believe in the essential benevolence of competitive capitalism, thereby opposing all forms of welfare provision and regulation of markets as examples of paternalism.

Upholding the notion that the freeing of market forces entails the promotion of social equality, Friedman argues that competitive capitalism is especially advantageous for the uplift of minority groups. For instance, he proclaims that, “The maintenance of the general rules of private property and of capitalism have been a major source of opportunity for Negroes and have permitted them to make greater progress than they otherwise could have made” (108). As a result,

the groups that have the most at stake in the preservation and strengthening of competitive capitalism are those minority groups which can most easily become the object of the distrust and enmity of the majority—the Negroes, the Jews, the foreign-born, to mention only the most obvious. (21)

Friedman explains that conditions of monopoly capitalism are more liable to generate social discrimination than if the free market were allowed to operate without any control or regulation. He believes that “[T]he preserves of discrimination in any society are the areas that are the most monopolistic in character, whereas discrimination against groups of particular color or religion is least in those areas where there is the greatest freedom of competition” (108). Like much utopian discourse, Friedman’s writings invoke and imagine a resolution to the problems of social and racial inequality. In this case, an unfettered form of competitive capitalism emerges as the ideal solution for overcoming longstanding socio-economic disparities.

Since the 1970s Milton Friedman’s ideas have enjoyed much global appeal. Along with other Chicago school economists, Friedman oversaw the first experiment in neoliberal state formation in Chile in 1973. Here, following a coup by the US-backed Augusto Pinochet, Friedman and his colleagues put to work his emerging theory that moments of political and economic crisis were ripe occasions for the radical deregulation and restructuring of economies— a process of ‘shocking’ economies that was meant to

promote their long-term stability. In 1976, Friedman won the Nobel Prize in Economics, and in the 1980s he went on to become economic advisor to US President Ronald Reagan.<sup>2</sup>

In the 1980s and 1990s Friedman's ideas played an influential role in legitimating the welfare cuts and privatization measures undertaken by the Reagan administration in the United States and the Thatcher regime in Britain. Reaganomics and Thatcherism launched sustained attacks on trade unions, thereby chipping away at the class compromise that had checked capitalism's power to exploit workers. Simultaneous with these attacks on collective bargaining, both the Reagan and Thatcher regimes began the privatization of public transportation, healthcare, education and housing. Margaret Thatcher summed up the underlying neoliberal vision when she proclaimed that there was "no such thing as society, only individual men and women— and... their families" (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 23). Thatcher's statement is exemplary of the ways in which neoliberalism's political and economic restructuring rests on a radical re-visioning of the relationship between individuals and the state.

Owing largely to its promotion by the Reagan and Thatcher regimes, neoliberal thinking became global and mainstream during the 1980s. By the end of the 1980s, the so-called 'Washington Consensus' was consolidated—a supposed ideological agreement among Washington D.C.-based organizations such as the U.S. Treasury, the International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank about the efficacy of and necessity for neoliberal restructuring of global economies. Lisa Duggan describes this 'consensus' as a "backroom deal among the financial, business, and political elites based in the United States and Europe" (xiii)—one that pushed forward a "set of policy imperatives for

international government and business operations” (xii), emphasizing privatization, market deregulation, trade liberalization, tax reform, and cuts in public spending.

By the 1990s the World Bank and International Monetary Fund started to play an increasing role in promoting what was variously referred to as “structural adjustment” or “shock therapy” to so-called ‘sick’ economies in need of radical restructuring. India and South Africa are crucial examples of nations that embraced neoliberal doctrine during the 1990s. While India had already begun privatizing its economy during the 1980s, in 1991, after almost fifty years of a planned economy, the Indian government accepted a loan from the International Monetary Fund and adopted its Structural Adjustment Policies of radical trade liberalization, financial deregulation, and privatization. In a matter of a few weeks, the Indian economy was deliberately “shocked” by the slashing of its currency controls, the withdrawal of state subsidies, the downsizing of its public sector and the liberalization of its trade regulations. Such policies were deemed necessary for reviving the Indian economy from widening deficits, high rates of inflation, and depleting foreign exchange reserves.

Like India, South Africa had also begun adopting neoliberal policies during the 1980s, under the apartheid regime—for like much of the world, the South African economy experienced a crisis of capitalist accumulation in the 1970s. Through much of the twentieth century, the South African economy had disproportionately focused on mineral extraction and on the production of “luxury manufactured goods for the (mainly white) upper-income consumer market” (Bond 18). By the 1970s, there was an overproduction of these consumer goods and, therefore, declining profit rates. To counter this crisis, capitalists began disinvesting from industry and moving their funds from

production to speculative money markets. The apartheid state's response was to further deregulate the economy and to boost the financial sector, thereby beginning the process of neoliberalization in South Africa. Banks now had greater freedom to carry out predatory lending practices that further reinforced the uneven development created by decades of apartheid rule. "By the late 1980s," as Patrick Bond explains, "neoliberalism was inexorably adopted as the basis for economic policy-making, and enhanced the profitability of financiers while destroying industrial capacity" (49). South Africa's first democratically elected government then consolidated the late apartheid government's turn toward neoliberal policies.

Indeed, South Africa's decolonization—or independence from the apartheid mode of internal colonialism—occurred simultaneously with its turn to neoliberal reform, leading many like Bond to argue that this reform has severely compromised the process of decolonization and reinforced the racial and socio-economic divide inherited from the apartheid era. In the arena of housing, for instance, the adoption of neoliberal privatization policies has led to a rise in slums and to increased rates of homelessness and of the displacement of the poor. Apartheid era racial segregation has thus been replaced by class segregation.<sup>3</sup> As David Theo Goldberg notes, "Post-apartheid South Africa... has transformed racial apartheid into a more generic and so supposedly less pernicious class apartheid" (*Threat of Race* 314).

In the Indian context, some critics of neoliberalism have argued that the adoption of the IMF policies exemplify a form of recolonization of the nation that has reversed the achievements of independent India. Chakravarthi Raghavan, for instance, decried a US-led effort in the late 1980s and early 1990s to transform international trade laws in a way

that coerced third world nations to open their economies to multinational corporations. Raghavan argued that “In economic and social terms, Third World countries and their peoples could be said to be on the point of being rolled back to the colonial era” (45). The external pressures on India to open its economy were, however, complemented by the government’s subsequent embrace of neoliberal structural adjustment in the 1990s.

As is the case in post-apartheid South Africa, the Indian government’s adoption of structural adjustment measures has exacerbated social inequality. New regulations enabling private corporations to take control of forests, water and other natural resources have led to the dispossession of rural peasant populations and triggered their forced displacement to urban areas. The lowering of state subsidies for agriculture has then only further fueled this mass migration—an exemplary instance of the uneven geographical development that characterizes neoliberal restructuring of economies. Even in the advanced capitalist world, the absence of checks on private capital has meant that wealth has come to be increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few: “After the implementation of neoliberal policies in the late 1970s, the share of national income of the top 1 per cent of income earners in the US soared, to reach 15 per cent... by the end of the century” (16). Similarly, during roughly the same time period, “the top 1 per cent of income earners in Britain... doubled their share of the national income from 6.5 per cent to 13 per cent” (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 17).

Across these national contexts, privatization and the downsizing of the state have further restricted the possibility for upward mobility of traditionally marginalized groups. Drawing on Marx, David Harvey has argued that uneven development is in fact necessary to the neoliberal project, for the logic of profitmaking and competitive capitalism

necessarily rests on and requires inequality between individuals, groups and economies.<sup>4</sup> By privatizing healthcare, housing, education, transportation, energy, and other basic services that were provided by the welfare state for all citizens irrespective of social and economic standing— neoliberal reforms have exacerbated longstanding social inequalities and hierarchies. Access to these basic services now depends on income levels, leaving large groups of poor people—whether in the U.S. or in South Africa and India—dispossessed of what might be considered essential rights of citizenship.

### The Culture of Neoliberalism

Critics of neoliberalism point to the contradictions between its utopian vision of freedom for markets and individuals and the anti-democratic effects of its policies and methods of ‘shock therapy.’ While neoliberal theory believes that the market works spontaneously, critics have pointed to the coercive means by which neoliberal privatization policies have in fact been imposed and sustained. As was the case with the first neoliberal experiment in Chile, the turn to neoliberalism has entailed the expansion of a police state and regular assaults on democracy.

In *The Terror of Neoliberalism*, Giroux also points to broader shifts in cultural attitudes that have accompanied the downsizing of the welfare state and the promotion of an agenda of radical privatization. He argues that the loss of the welfare state has brought with it the loss of “a culture of shared responsibility. Self-reflection and collective empowerment, now reduced to self-promotion and self-interest, are legitimated by a new and ruthless social Darwinism played out nightly on network television as a metaphor for the ‘naturalness’ of downsizing” (xv). Although a predominantly political and economic

vision and set of practices, the effects of neoliberal thinking are far reaching. Moreover, Giroux's comments suggest that as this way of thinking becomes hegemonic, its values are legitimized and promoted not only by governments but also by culture and mass media.

Roman de la Campa similarly describes how the rise of neoliberalism has been accompanied by a set of cultural attitudes and a narrowing of our political vision. As neoliberal values are increasingly naturalized, it becomes harder to imagine that progressive change can occur through building collectivities or by working with existing collectivities such as the nation state. Instead, individual, consumer choices are considered to be the only ways in which change can happen: "the market is understood as the only social institution that provides order without coercion; politics and the state lose their transformational capacity except when they seek privatization; consumerism becomes inherently emancipatory in the absence of liberationist discourses" (70). In other words, the ethic of individual freedom and consumer choice begins to permeate and transform how it is that we think about ourselves and our capacity to effect change within the societies in which we live.

As seen through numerous instances of public discourse, the dominance of neoliberalism has meant a shift from considerations of social and economic inequality to those of individual freedom, diversity and multiculturalism. Indeed, the rise of neoliberalism has been accompanied by assertions that free markets promote the free and healthy mixing of cultures, which helps to transcend historical divides. Ann Cvetkovitch suggests that the "vocabularies of tolerance, diversity, and multiculturalism [are] connected to certain affects or structures of feeling that are inadequate to, or that too

conveniently package and manage, the messy legacies of history (465). In other words, Cvetkovitch suggests that vocabularies of tolerance and multiculturalism perform ideological labor by suggesting that we have moved beyond the “messy legacies” of histories of exploitation. Neoliberal celebrations of the market’s unleashing of freedom and diversity thus often requires the erasure or distortion of histories of exploitation that continue to shape the present. Roman de la Campa proposes that the language of diversity and multiculturalism might serve to naturalize inequality or to make inequality acceptable. He argues that “the blanket deconstruction of modernizing schemes [such as the welfare state, for instance] transforms structural underdevelopment into healthy examples of diversity and localized heterogeneity” (70). In other words, systemic and entrenched social and economic inequalities are explained away as evidence of natural difference and heterogeneity.

This dissertation investigates such ideological dimensions and cultural manifestations of neoliberalism by paying particular attention to its management of the “messy legacies” of histories of colonial violence. The contemporary cultural production I consider registers the dominance of neoliberal thinking while also pointing to the contradictions underlying its narrow view of individualism and its prioritization of the logic of the marketplace over ethical and human concerns.

### Notes on Method

Regional hegemony and global powers like the United States, South Africa and India have, in recent years, not only adopted but also disseminated and popularized values of deregulation, privatization, and entrepreneurialism. Each of my chapters

explores new narratives of the present and the past that have arisen in these contexts over the last twenty years in conjunction with the turn to neoliberal political and economic practices. Closely analyzing these narratives across a range of generic modes— including travel writing, journalism, testimony, memoir, novels and film— I reveal the ways in which neoliberal ideology obscures present inequalities while simultaneously recasting memories of colonial exploitation.

Rather than treating economics and culture as separate domains, this dissertation toggles back and forth between specific cultural manifestations and the broader political and ideological context of the rise of neoliberalism. My goal is to hold the political-economic and cultural domains in creative tension—to keep the context of neoliberalism in mind when analyzing cultural production, without necessarily attributing to economics the status of final cause for cultural expression. Each of my chapters considers important contemporary debates that take place in the US, South Africa and India about the role of the state—both historically and in the present— and about the ideal relationship between individuals and the state. I then turn to closely analyzing cultural, literary and political texts that respond to these debates in a number of different ways.

Fredric Jameson's Marxist view of cultural analysis is helpful in characterizing the underpinnings of my method. Jameson argues that

The task of [Marxist] analysis would... be to detect and to reveal—behind... written *traces* of the political unconscious as the narrative texts of high or mass culture, but also behind those other symptoms or traces which are opinion, ideology, and even philosophical systems—the outlines of some deeper and vaster narrative movement in which the groups of a given collectivity at a certain historical conjuncture anxiously interrogate their fate, and explore it with hope or dread” (“Progress” 148).

Jameson's model—which brings together a range of cultural texts regardless of their status as “high” or “mass” culture—is one that appreciates the symptomatic value of cultural production.

Drawing on Jameson's proposed method, this project explores textual envisionings of collectivity at the end of the twentieth century. Through my examination of post-Cold War US travel writing, South African autobiography and testimonial writing, Indian novels in English, and world cinema, I attempt to understand how these acts of imagination offer evidence “of some deeper and vaster narrative movement” in which communities within contemporary US, South Africa and India “anxiously interrogate their fate, and explore it with hope or dread.” In each context, I choose genres whose popularity and growing marketability in recent years makes them exemplary sites of investigation. My chapters thus move from the expanding market for US travel writing in the post-Cold War moment to the increased circulation of autobiographical and testimonial narratives from post-apartheid South Africa, and from the rising demand for exotic Indian novels in English, to the international popularity of science fiction fantasy films that invoke histories of imperialist violence and dispossession.

### Chapter Descriptions

In an attempt to explore how the post-Cold War US imaginary has been shaped by neoliberal discourse, Chapter One considers imaginations of a ‘new world order’ in US journalism and travel discourse from the 1990s. In particular, I focus on the voice of the post-Cold War global traveler—as this voice finds expression both in foreign affairs journalism as well as in the travel book of the period. This chapter begins by charting the

development during the 1990s of a U.S. discourse of globalization that reflects and transmits neoliberal thinking. The end-of-the-Cold-War debate between Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington exemplifies the anxious search for new paradigms by which to describe the existing geopolitical order. This search for new paradigms also informs the journalism and travel narratives by Robert Kaplan, Thomas Friedman and Pico Iyer that I then analyze. I show how these texts translate neoliberal approaches to political economy into new ways of mapping the world and recounting global history at the end of the Cold War. I argue that across these various US narratives of globalization is a tendency to circumvent lingering evidence of colonial violence while uncritically reviving colonial-era polarities and dichotomies in defense of a neoliberal imagination of a new world order. Closely examining Kaplan's prose I show how, in positioning East Asian "cultures of ingenuity" in opposition to African "cultures of anarchy," he not only reinforces neoliberal celebrations of East Asian entrepreneurship but also, in the process, reactivates a colonial-era vision of Africa. One of the implications of my argument in this chapter is that neoliberal re-imaginings of the relationship between individuals and states proliferates not only through the optimistic and utopian narratives of writers like Thomas Friedman, or through the multiculturalism of Pico Iyer's travelogues, but also through the pessimism and shocking depictions of global poverty put forth by Robert Kaplan. If, as geographer David Harvey has shown, neoliberal capitalist expansion needs and depends on poverty and unevenness, then I suggest that this is true even in the realm of culture, where shocking images of poverty are as crucial as utopian fantasy for the proliferation of a neoliberal imagination.

Chapter two then turns to South Africa during the 1990s, a decade that brought an end to apartheid rule and launched what many have called a “new” multiculturalist South Africa. Pointing to the contradictions in the post-apartheid discourse on race, David Theo Goldberg argues that

South Africa is unique... in demonstrating in a historical blink the self-conscious shift from—or between, as the shift is hardly complete—racial absolutization and racial secularization, between “all is race” and racelessness, explicit racial emphasis as state architecture and neoliberal privatization as individualized relation. It offers, in a nutshell, a crucial experiment of—a social laboratory for observing—what the shift might look like” (*Threat of Race* 321).

An exemplary instance of how a race-neutral conception of human rights violations affects the ways in which apartheid is remembered is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), South Africa’s formal reckoning with its past. I begin this chapter by analyzing testimonies from the TRC’s Human Rights Violations Committee hearings—through which I establish how the TRC’s reliance on an individualizing and race-neutral conception of human rights violations leads to the occlusion of apartheid’s institutionalized racism. In the second half, I turn to representations of these testimonies in the memoir, *Country of My Skull* (Afrikaner writer Antjie Krog’s English-language account of the TRC hearings), and in the film, *In My Country* (English filmmaker John Boorman’s adaptation of Krog’s memoir). My analysis reveals how subsequent literary and cinematic representations of the TRC risk reproducing its view of apartheid when they emphasize the moral failings of individual perpetrators of violence rather than the systemic nature of apartheid’s racism. Drawing on Stuart Hall’s notion of ‘articulation’ in conjunction with David Theo Goldberg’s analysis of the problematic colorblindness of neoliberal ideology, I argue that in the South African context human rights discourse is ‘articulated’ with (as opposed to determined by) a neoliberal, race-neutral conception of

individual autonomy. In the process, apartheid is understood as violations committed by particular individuals against others rather than as a form of internal colonialism that marginalized entire communities on racial grounds.

This chapter shows how a narrow notion of individualism becomes dominant in the era of neoliberalism—a notion that requires the disembedding of the individual from the collective, and that prioritizes civil liberties over economic and collective rights. The TRC is an exemplary case of the challenges faced by this rights-based social justice model in the wake of neoliberal conceptions of radical individualism. I should emphasize, however, that this chapter is not an argument against human rights. On the contrary, I suggest that the concept of human rights needs to be disarticulated from neoliberal understandings of private individuality so that it can help achieve social justice for collectivities and not merely for individuals.

This third chapter then turns to another, older, post-colonial nation—India. India's embrace of neoliberal reform in the early 1990s is also accompanied by talk about a 'new' India. Chapter three thus begins by considering early examples of this discourse of a new India in a decade marked by the rise of neoliberalism as well as the fiftieth anniversary of India's independence from colonial rule. As in the case of post-apartheid South Africa, here too we see a desire to project a nation that is no longer influenced by colonial history. I look at how this desire is expressed in political and cultural discourse—and then consider how the marketing of Indian novels in English at once reinforces and complicates the idea of a new India. Drawing on Graham Huggan's idea of the "postcolonial exotic," I explore how these novels both complicate and contribute to the recasting of colonial history as exotic in the context of India's turn to neoliberalism.

For indeed, in recent years, India's history of British colonialism has become a key strategy of its international self-promotion as an English-speaking, global power. In the case of both Salman Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh* (1995) and Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997), we see a tension between their narrative critiques of neoliberal India and the ways in which the marketing of these novels and celebration of individual authors serves the promotion of a 'new' nation. I conclude this chapter with a discussion of Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* (2004), a novel that places the Indian state's practices of displacement and dispossession of peasant populations within a longer history of imperialism that includes but also predates the colonial encounter. I argue that the novel's attempts at stylistically registering the ecology and culture of the Sundarbans, convey at a formal level its critique of nationalist and neoliberal ignorance about the communal ties that bind individuals to place.

I conclude my dissertation with the question of what it would mean to challenge neoliberalism's utopian vision of a world of unfettered capitalism. Here I analyze the utopian and dystopian visions of recent blockbuster films—*Avatar* (James Cameron 2009) and *District 9* (Neil Blomkamp 2009)—that challenge the neoliberal vision. By thematizing the destruction that comes in the wake of capitalism's displacement and dispossession of communities, these films launch powerful critiques of the processes of what David Harvey calls "accumulation by dispossession"—a mode of capitalist accumulation that was central to colonialist regimes (including the apartheid regime to which *District 9* refers) and that becomes increasingly normalized under neoliberalism. In many ways, these films perform the labor that Jameson believes to be central to works of science fiction: the defamiliarization of the present. While the mode of narration

deployed in both films—their emphasis on guilt-induced transformations of white male protagonists—restricts the scope of their critiques of the present, these films can be read as exemplary cases of the use of utopian imagination for challenging the hegemony of neoliberal individualism and its vision of the future.

### Intervention

A key argument that emerges through the course of this project is that the expression of desire for a new global order has required the explicit or implicit reworking of the history of colonialism. Put differently, the contemporary imagination of the global—and of national collectivity in the era of globalization—has had to define itself against the memory and remaining traces of the era of European colonialism. The transnational cultural texts I discuss in my dissertation bring into relief, and partially reinforce, neoliberal ideology's occlusion and obfuscation of histories of colonial exploitation. They offer evidence of the ways in which we avoid, recast, or obscure by exoticizing, histories of colonial oppression. Indeed the texts I consider register the tension produced by the competing desires of recalling and yet managing the messiness of this past.

Much political and cultural discourse in the last thirty years has had to contend with the question of how the present moment of global interconnectivity is distinct from or continuous with the era of European colonialism. Over the last fifteen years, the discipline of postcolonial studies has been grappling with the question of what the rise of paradigm of globalization means for the study of European colonialism and its legacies. Some critics like Hardt and Negri question the very relevance of postcolonial studies

given the newness of the prevailing mode of imperialism (or Empire, as they call it) and its difference from colonialism, and given the decline of the nation state (the nation state being an area of focus for postcolonial studies) and the growing power of diffused, international structures of governmentality. If the present moment is a radical departure from the era of European colonialism, then how relevant is a mode of scholarship that takes as its point of departure the centrality of this era in the story of capitalist modernity? On the other hand, critics like Stuart Hall argue that given the often willful forgetting of histories of systemic oppression and colonial violence—what Hall refers to as “historical amnesia” (“The Local” 20)—we need to keep the memory of the colonial moment alive in the present.

This project brings literature on political and economic neoliberalism in conversation with debates within postcolonial studies about whether the present is a new world order or simply characterized by a new form of imperialism. Here, I follow critics like Stuart Hall and Ania Loomba who have made arguments for why postcolonial critics are “well positioned” to analyze the present. Loomba writes,

Given their historical awareness of past forms of empire and the structural connections between colonialism and neo-colonialism, postcolonial scholars are well-positioned to trace contemporary global inequalities in the often-confusing landscape of contemporary economics, politics, and culture. (227)

Hall, likewise, argues that globalization “needs to be located in a much longer history” of which colonialism is a key moment (“The Local” 20). A key implication of my argument is that if we wish to avoid “historical amnesia,” we need to view the “new” aspects of the prevailing imperialism in light of a longer history of capitalist penetration and anti-imperial resistance, and that postcolonial criticism can help provide us with a historical and theoretical framework through which to do so.

At the same time, however, I aim to bring the field of postcolonial studies to contend with contemporary political economy and ongoing realities of economic exploitation. Many like Arif Dirlik have criticized the field of postcolonial studies for emphasizing the post-colonial subject's cultural marginalization rather than issues of economic inequality that continue to plague post-colonial societies. Dirlik points out that "there is a parallel in the ascendancy in cultural criticism of the idea of postcoloniality and an emergent consciousness of global capitalism in the 1980s" (331). As he puts it,

The themes that are now claimed for postcolonial criticism, both in what they repudiate of the past and in what they affirm of the present, I suggest, resonate with concerns and orientations that have their origins in a new world situation that has also become part of consciousness globally over the last decade. I am referring here to that world situation created by transformations within the capitalist world economy, by the emergence of what has been described variously as global capitalism, flexible production, late capitalism and so on... [However,] with rare exceptions, postcolonial critics have been silent on the relationship of the idea of postcolonialism to its context in contemporary capitalism... (329)

Dirlik goes on to criticize postcolonial criticism for not acknowledging the context of global capitalism that has created the condition of possibility for its emergence. His critique suggests that postcolonialism needs to be wary of a culturalist tendency—a tendency, in other words, to look at culture in a vacuum, without taking into consideration its imbrication within political and economic realities. As the field of postcolonialism emerges during the 1980s, alongside the rise of neoliberalism and the commodification of ideas of globalism and multiculturalism, it too is susceptible to neoliberalism's erasures of histories and ongoing realities of economic violence. What is needed, then, is a dialectical model of cultural analysis—perhaps like the one Jameson proposes—that attends to the ways in which cultural objects are produced at particular historical moments and expressive of the anxieties and tensions of those moments.

In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson elaborates this model. Here, he envisions a Marxist method of cultural analysis that not only reveals the ideological labor performed by cultural production but also points to the ways in which it articulates collective desires and anxieties. Jameson characterizes the latter move as the “positive hermeneutic” function of Marxist criticism, that, he believes must always coexist with the more traditional negative hermeneutic function of ideological criticism:

Marxist analysis of culture... can no longer be content with its demystifying vocation to unmask and to demonstrate the ways in which a cultural artifact fulfills a specific ideological mission, in legitimating a given power structure, in perpetuating and reproducing the latter, and in generating specific forms of false consciousness (or ideology in the narrower sense). It must not cease to practice this essentially negative hermeneutic function (which Marxism is virtually the only current critical method to assume today) but must also seek, through and beyond this demonstration of the instrumental function of a given cultural object, to project its simultaneously Utopian power as the symbolic affirmation of a specific historical and class form of collective unity” (291).

Jameson uses the idea of a text’s “Utopian power” to suggest that all texts affirm a class form of ‘collective unity.’ In terms of Jameson’s theory, then, this project aims to

a) Understand the aspirations for collective unity that are expressed through the cultural texts I analyze, b) to assess the ideological function performed by these imaginative works in terms of consolidating class and imperial power, and c) to explore the implications of these exercises in imagining (or failing to imagine) new political collectivities at the end of the twentieth century.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For more on the shift from Fordism to “flexible accumulation,” see Part II of Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*.

<sup>2</sup> For a detailed description of this early neoliberal experiment in Chile and other examples of economic shock therapy, see Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*.

<sup>3</sup> For more on debates about housing policy during the transition years, see “The Housing Question” in Bond’s *Elite Transition*: 122-151.

<sup>4</sup> Here, Harvey is drawing on what Marx calls “the general law of capital accumulation”: the notion that “the mechanism of the accumulation process itself not only increases the amount of capital but also the mass of the ‘labouring poor’” (Marx 765). Marx suggests that capitalism generates poverty in the form of increasing masses of underpaid or unemployed workers. Moreover, this poverty is essential for capitalism’s survival. Indeed, ongoing accumulation requires the exploitation of a “reserve army” of unemployed or underpaid workers:

But if a surplus population of workers is a necessary product of accumulation or of the development of wealth on a capitalist basis, this surplus population also becomes, conversely, the lever of capitalist accumulation, indeed it becomes a condition for the existence of the capitalist mode of production. It forms a disposable reserve army, which belongs to capital just as absolutely as if the latter had bred it at its own cost. Independently of the limits of the actual increase of population, it creates a mass of human material always ready for exploitation by capital in the interests of capital’s own changing valorization requirements. (Marx 784)

## Chapter One

### Utopian Fantasy and Shock Therapy: The Global in the Post-Cold War U.S. Imaginary

Hardt and Negri's concept of Empire appeared at the end of the 1990s, a decade marked by numerous attempts to find new theoretical paradigms by which to characterize the post-Cold War world order. In *Empire* Hardt and Negri argue that the present is marked by a new form of sovereignty. "Empire," they maintain, "is not a weak echo of modern imperialisms but a fundamentally new form of rule" (146). Then, positioning their conception of Empire against neoliberal, free market idealism and also against what they call the 'conspiracy theory of globalization,' they write:

The problematic of Empire is determined in the first place by one simple fact: that there is a world order....We should rule out from the outset, however, two common conceptions of this order that reside on opposing limits of the spectrum: first, the notion that the present order somehow rises up *spontaneously* out of the interactions of radically heterogeneous global forces, as if this order were a harmonious concern orchestrated by the natural and neutral hidden hand of the world market; and second, the idea that order is dictated by a single power and a single center of rationality *transcendent* to global forces, guiding the various phases of historical development according to its conscious and all-seeing plan, something like a conspiracy theory of globalization. (3)

Hardt and Negri thus differentiate their view of the contemporary geopolitical order from celebratory theories of globalization as well as from those that see the present as a repetition of an older mode of power that accompanied European colonial rule. Empire, they insist, is "decentered," "deterritorializing," and "progressively incorporat[ing of] the entire global realm within its open, expanding frontiers" (xii-xiii).

Hardt and Negri's conception of Empire as decentralized power, has been critiqued by postcolonial scholars like Ania Loomba who have argued that this conception, like a number of theories of globalization, wrongly assume that we no longer have need for "a critical and analytical perspective which takes the history and legacy of

European colonialism as its focal point” and which relies on “concepts like margins and centers so central to postcolonial studies” (213). On the contrary, argues Loomba, the core-periphery model so central to postcolonial studies remains relevant in understanding the present. Meanwhile, scholars like Fredric Jameson have suggested alternative ways of thinking about the present, inviting us to examine the “ideological structure” of the concept of globalization. According to Jameson, “globalization is a communicational concept, which alternately masks and transmits cultural or economic meanings” (55). He refers to this concept as a “slippery” one (56) that sometimes celebrates cultural difference and at other times speaks to the “dark” realities of the “forced integration of countries all over the globe into ... [a] new global division of labor...” (“Notes” 57).

Building on postcolonial critiques of globalization theory, and responding to Jameson’s invitation to attend to the slipperiness of this concept, this chapter explores the ways in which a popular discourse of globalization emerges in the 1990s in the United States – the U.S. being a key site in the production of a globally circulating discourse of globalization. I argue that the emergence of globalization discourse needs to be studied against the background of the rise of neoliberalism. A radical form of free market economics, neoliberalism emerges as a global dominant in the late twentieth century, in the wake of crises of capitalist accumulation in the advanced capitalist world and growing skepticism about the long-term viability of state-interventionist strategies of economic development. ‘Globalization’ emerges as a keyword and as a new conceptual paradigm during the 1980s and 1990s, in conjunction with this global turn toward neoliberal economics and ideology. Although the emergence of the term ‘globalization’ registers the intensifications in the experience of time-space compression produced by

late capitalism,<sup>1</sup> it is not so much that the process of globalization is new, but rather that it has been discursively produced as such only relatively recently. Telling the story of the discursive construction of globalization—against this backdrop of economic neoliberalization—is essential to counter the term’s uncritical absorption within contemporary academic and popular cultures. Although, in subsequent years, ‘globalization’ has been also used within social justice movements, as a counter to capitalist imperialism, the emergence of this theoretical paradigm in the last two decades of the twentieth century needs to be understood in relation to the dominance of neoliberal ideology, and the increased currency of claims regarding the victory of capitalism in the Cold War, the ‘end of history,’ and the radical newness of the present.

This chapter explores the discursive production of globalization within the U.S. public sphere during the 1990s. I begin by recalling an early post-Cold War debate between Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington about the fate of what was being called the “new world order.” I suggest that what the debate format obscures is a common turn across both essays toward reframing geopolitical and class conflicts as cultural conflicts. Then analyzing *New York Times* journalist Thomas Friedman’s foreign affairs column from the 1990s, I show how the term ‘globalization’ comes into common usage as a result of economistic narratives that take the form of colonial-era accounts of global travel and exploration. Finally, I read Friedman’s column alongside the travel writing of Robert Kaplan and Pico Iyer, foregrounding the ways in which these travel narratives from the 1990s thematize the global by offering cultural explanations for social inequality and reproducing the modes of othering characteristic of colonial discourse. Moreover, while Kaplan’s and Iyer’s travelogues foreground images of global inequalities to a

greater extent than Friedman's optimistic narrative, their re-inscription of cultural difference and their circumventing of histories of colonial exploitation resonate with Friedman's evocation of neoliberal utopianism. Kaplan's and Iyer's narratives of global travel illustrate how the neoliberal worldview is disseminated not only through fantastical imaginings of a world unified by free markets but also through shocking images of inequality and difference that elicit a neocolonial gaze. I argue that these popular narratives of globalization interpret geographical and social unevenness in neoliberal terms and, in the process, retell histories of colonialism in ways that erase the violence of imperial domination. Drawing on philosopher Charles Taylor's concept of "social imaginaries," I suggest that these popular U.S. texts contribute to the transformation of our imaginaries by the moral and social vision underlying neoliberalism.

### Imagining a Post-Cold War World Order

The 1990s began with the fall of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and provoked a growing debate within the U.S. public sphere on the meaning and implications of the end of the Cold War. On one side were those that saw the fall of Communist regimes as a sign that the U.S. had won the Cold War and now reigned supreme as the sole superpower on the world stage. On the other side were those that were skeptical about U.S. supremacy, reiterating concerns that had been growing since the late 1960s about the decline of the U.S. manufacturing base and the simultaneous rise of Japan as a dominant economic force.<sup>2</sup> American narratives about the end of the Cold War debated the significance of the moment by producing new interpretations of modern world history and new ways of mapping world geography. This post-Cold War debate

took place in the pages of prominent U.S. journalistic publications, in influential political circles, as well as in popular culture.

Two of the most influential post-Cold War attempts at imagining what was being called “a new world order”<sup>3</sup> were by U.S. political writers, Francis Fukuyama and Samuel Huntington. Essays by Fukuyama and Huntington featured prominently in major foreign affairs journals, and their opposing viewpoints came to be seen as emblematic of the post-Cold War philosophical and intellectual climate. Published in *The National Interest* in the summer of 1989, Fukuyama’s “The End of History” appeared a few months before the fall of the Berlin Wall. Huntington’s “The Clash of Civilizations?” was published three years later in *Foreign Affairs*—the essay’s title mirroring that of Fukuyama’s and responding to his claims about the end of history. Both writers proposed new conceptual tools in an attempt to address the changes occurring in Eastern Europe and concerns about the U.S.’s political and economic dominance. This debate was a crucial discursive field within which globalization emerged as a dominant theoretical paradigm for making sense of the post-Cold War world.

“Something very fundamental has happened in world history” (3), declared Francis Fukuyama in “The End of History?” an essay that aimed to provide a “conceptual framework” with which to understand the “larger process...that gives coherence and order to the daily headlines” (3). Explaining his end of history hypothesis<sup>4</sup> Fukuyama states, “What we may be witnessing is not just the end of the Cold War, or the passing of a particular period of post-war history, but the end of history as such: that is the end point of mankind’s ideological evolution and the universalization of Western liberal democracy as the final form of human government” (4). Through an idiosyncratic interpretation of

Hegel's original philosophical concept, Fukuyama interprets the end of the Cold War as the end of history and the ultimate victory for Western economic and political liberalism. Explaining the relationship between liberalism and capitalism as a symbiotic one, Fukuyama writes that the survival of liberal ideology depends on it being "underwritten by the abundance of a modern free-market economy" (8).

The purpose behind Fukuyama's essay is, as he defines it, to oppose "the materialist bias of modern thought" among those on both the Right and the Left (6). His democratic liberalism is meant to challenge those on the Right who see man as primarily interested in profit maximization as well as those on the Left who, he argues, undermine the importance of culture by prioritizing economics. In his view, the "death" of Marxism-Leninism "as a mobilizing ideology" (17) reconfirms the fact that it is in fact culture and consciousness that determine material reality and not the other way around. Then, imagining a utopian post-Cold War world, he suggests that positive material consequences are bound to follow the world's movement towards free markets and democracy. What he sees emerging is a universal *cultural* consensus on the ideals of free market democracy—an emergence that confirms for him capitalism's victory at the end of the twentieth century.

Although Fukuyama's long-term vision is that of a world unified by the values of Western liberalism, in the short term he sees it divided between states still in history or "mired in history" (15) — which include "the vast bulk of the Third World" (15), the Soviet Union and former communist states— and states, such as the U.S., Japan, and Western European nations, that are "at the end of history," or that are "post-historical" (18). In other words, Fukuyama replaces the imagined Cold War division between First,

Second, and Third Worlds with a division between states “mired in history” and states “at the end of history,” thereby mapping the ideological and, in Fukuyama’s terms, “cultural,” gap between states onto a temporal grid. In other words, Fukuyama’s historical-geographical imagination reinforces the colonialist conception of a world in which states exist in different temporalities.

As opposed to proclamations of the decline of U.S. dominance, Fukuyama represents the United States as a leading power and an exemplar of liberal democracy and of the “classless society envisioned by Marx” (9). For Fukuyama, “the class issue has actually been successfully resolved in the West” and is therefore “receding” (9). Although he agrees that the gap between rich and poor still exists in America, he believes that this gap is the result of “cultural and social characteristics of the groups that make it up, which are in turn the historical legacy of premodern conditions. Thus, black poverty in the United States is not the inherent product of liberalism but is rather the ‘legacy of slavery and racism,’ which persisted long after the formal abolition of slavery” (9). Characterizing black poverty as the product of particular “cultural and social characteristics” of U.S. social groups, Fukuyama obscures the longstanding structures of racial and economic exploitation that undergird social inequality in the United States. Moreover, by viewing “slavery and racism” as “premodern conditions,” he effectively rewrites modern history by erasing the significance of racial and colonial violence for the development of capitalist modernity.

While Fukuyama’s utopian vision was of a world unified by the consensus on free market capitalism and liberal democracy, Samuel Huntington’s response, “The Clash of Civilizations?” was a warning against an impending “clash” between Western and non-

Western powers in the post-Cold War period (22). Huntington argues that recent explanations of “global politics,” including the idea of the end of history, “miss a crucial, indeed a central, aspect of what global politics is likely to be in the coming years” (22). Unlike Fukuyama, Huntington is anxious about the U.S.’s position in this new world geography. His advice to the United States— or to “the West” (there is frequent slippage in Huntington’s essay between the terms “the West” and “the United States”) — is that it pay heed to the impending clash of civilizations and learn to accommodate the “non-Western civilizations” whose values differ from its own.

While Huntington’s vision of a world divided into West and non-West might seem to be the opposite of Fukuyama’s optimistic view of a world unified by Western liberalism—indeed, these essays have consistently been positioned as opposites of one another—their global imaginations do converge in a number of ways. Like Fukuyama, Huntington is engaged with proposing a new concept—that of “the clash of civilizations”— as a framework by which to understand “this new world” (22); and he, too, foregrounds the role of “culture,” arguing that the source of future conflicts will be “cultural” and not economics or political ideology. Moreover, like Fukuyama, Huntington effectively rewrites global history in a manner that erases histories of economic exploitation. For instance, Huntington claims that prior to the end of the Cold War, global conflicts were “primarily conflicts within Western civilization, ‘Western civil wars,’ as William Lind has labeled them...With the end of the Cold War, [however,] international politics moves out of its Western phase, and its center-piece becomes the interaction between the West and non-Western civilizations and among non-Western civilizations” (23). In representing the bulk of conflicts preceding the end of the Cold

War (conflicts that he describes as being “between princes, nation states and ideologies”) as “*Western* civil wars,” Huntington erases the long history of political struggle between European colonial powers and non-Western colonized states, struggles that were fought for not only cultural but also economic and political independence from colonial dominance. Having effectively erased the histories of anti-colonial struggles, Huntington is unable to account for the legacies of colonial violence; instead, he views present conflicts in terms of a clash of ancient, relatively unchanged “civilizations.”

Huntington argues that the world is now polarized between “the West” and non-Western civilizations, rather than divided between First, Second, and Third Worlds: “During the Cold War the world was divided into the First, Second and Third Worlds. Those divisions are no longer relevant. It is far more meaningful now to group countries not in terms of their political or economic systems or in terms of their level of economic development but rather in terms of their culture and civilization” (23). Thus Huntington, like Fukuyama suggests that the geography of the early 1990s is a distinct departure from that of the Cold War period, though in Huntington’s case, divisions between First, Second, and Third Worlds are replaced by what he calls “the faultlines between civilizations” (22).

Together, Fukuyama’s and Huntington’s essays exemplify the ideological climate of the period immediately following the end of the Cold War—a period in which there was a proliferation of attempts to come up with conceptual frameworks with which to understand the US’s place within what was being conceived of as a “new world order.” These essays have been received as two opposing perspectives within an ongoing debate about whether the end of the Cold War brings an end to, or an exacerbation of,

ideological and political conflict—and, correspondingly, a boost to or a decline in the power of the United States. What the debate format obscures, however, is that both sides are involved in re-framing socio-economic and geopolitical inequalities in terms of cultural difference. These essays complement one another in that both Fukuyama's utopian optimism and Huntington's pessimistic and anxiety-filled vision of the post-Cold War world contribute to a rewriting of global history, such that histories of colonial violence as well as struggles for anti-colonial liberation are erased. As I will show, this debate format and these complementary modes of re-imagining the world at the end of the Cold War—and of obscuring histories of imperialist violence—inform the development of a U.S. discourse of globalization.

### The Emergence of Globalization Discourse

A discourse of globalization emerges in the context of what Fredric Jameson, among others, calls “late” or “multinational capitalism,” or in the period marked by, what David Harvey refers to as, “flexible accumulation.” As declining corporate productivity in the U.S. during the 1960s began to suggest the limitations and rigidities of Fordist methods of industrialization, U.S. businesses turned to more “flexible” modes of capital accumulation. Flexibility meant greater geographical mobility of capital, labor, and products, and also “greatly intensified rates of commercial, technological, and organizational innovation” (Harvey, *Condition* 147). Thus, in response to a crisis of capitalist accumulation, businesses became increasingly “multinational” and the pace of their operations also greatly accelerated. The term “globalization” reflects these late twentieth century shifts occurring in processes of production and capital accumulation

since the 1960s— and expresses the experience of “time-space compression” (or the experience of a sped-up life and collapsing spatial boundaries) that has accompanied these shifts. While in the 1960s<sup>5</sup> and 1970s, the term was used— mainly by economists, social scientists, and Wall Street financial and business circles— to describe new solutions to the crisis of capitalist accumulation, over the course of the 1980s and 1990s, “globalization” proliferated widely and emerged as a keyword for defining what was being perceived as a new world order.

The perspective of the world as “global” is not a new one, however. In *Reading the Global*, Sanjay Krishnan shows how as early as the eighteenth century, within the context of Europe’s economic and military expansions, “the global” emerges as an “instituted perspective” by which the world was “[brought] into view...as a single, unified entity, articulated in space and developing over (common) time” (1). Nor is the linguistic category of “global” new. According to Jan Aart Scholte, the term “global” began to be used in the late nineteenth century to denote “world scale”. By the 1940s, “global” was in popular use, accompanied by coinages such as “globalize” and “globalism.” After the U.S. joined the Second World War, or what the international press of the time referred to as “the global war, the adjective, “global,” became common usage in the U.S. and world over.”<sup>6</sup> In subsequent years, “global” continued to be used, and in combination not just with “war” but also with “peace,” “health,” “economy,” and so on. Marshall McLuhan’s famous coinage from the early 1960s—“global village”<sup>7</sup>—testifies to the growing currency of “global” as a linguistic category in the latter half of the twentieth century. The terms “global economy” and “global market” have been used

widely since the 1970s, especially in political rhetoric, alongside terms like “international economy” or “world economy.”

Although the word “globalization” first appeared in the 1960s in the context of shifting modes of capital accumulation, it became a popular usage only in the late 1980s and 1990s. A prominent mainstream U.S. publication like the *New York Times* hardly ever used the term prior to the 1980s, except, infrequently, in the business section.<sup>8</sup> By the 1980s, the word began to be used especially when a set of economic processes, including the deregulation of international securities markets,<sup>9</sup> the introduction of 24-hour stock market trading, the expansion of American multinational firms, and the trend of corporate takeovers and mergers spearheaded by U.S. firms. By the late 1980s, the *New York Times* talked not only about the “globalization of” some part of aspect of the economy but also increasingly, about the “globalization of culture,” “the globalization of fashion,” and the “globalization of education.” By the 1990s “globalization” came to be used as the representative sign and marker of our “age” or “era.”<sup>10</sup> In fact, it was during the 1990s that “globalization” emerged as a new paradigm for the post-Cold War period-- in conjunction with ongoing debates about a new world order and the rise of conceptual frameworks such as, “the end of history” and “the clash of civilizations.”

The Foreign Affairs column of *New York Times* journalist, Thomas Friedman, was crucial in launching “globalization” as a new conceptual paradigm during the 1990s. In this column, which was first introduced in 1995, Friedman popularizes the concept of globalization and uses it to defend a neoliberal world-view, or a vision of a world unified by free trade— what Friedman later came to call a “flat world”.<sup>11</sup> In his book, *The Lexus and the Olive Tree* (1999)—a compilation of the majority of his foreign affairs columns

from 1995-1999—Friedman characterizes his journalism as a “contribution to the body of literature that has been attempting to define the post-Cold War world” (xvii). He then acknowledges his debt to Francis Fukuyama, Samuel Huntington, and Robert Kaplan, among others, although it is clear that his thinking has most in common with Fukuyama’s utopian vision of the end of history, the triumph of Western liberalism and the emergence of a classless society. Friedman chooses “globalization” as his preferred conceptual paradigm for describing “the underlying motor” driving international affairs in the post-Cold War world (xviii).

Beginning in 1996, Friedman cultivates the voice of a theorist of globalization. Although the term “globalization” is in circulation years before it appears in Friedman’s Foreign Affairs column, it is no longer deployed merely in a restricted economic context but rather begins to frame conversations about a range of issues—social, political, and cultural. By repeatedly defining the term and by constructing a community of phrases and axioms that routinely circulate around it, Friedman’s column makes globalization into a key category within discussions about the future of the post-Cold War world. In fact, Friedman’s column makes “globalization” into “a thing in itself,”<sup>12</sup> —so that it appears to be an autonomous force that can “erase borders” and, like a person, “dictate” rules or govern economic, social and cultural life.

One of the recurring features of Friedman’s columns on globalization is that he defines the term repeatedly and in multiple ways. The first time he defines the term is in his February 7, 1996 column where he describes globalization as “that loose combination of free-trade agreements, the internet and the integration of financial markets that is erasing borders and uniting the world into a single lucrative, but brutally competitive

marketplace.<sup>13</sup> A few months later, in his July 17, 1996 column, Friedman re-defines the term. Discussing the issue of “internal wars” (by which he means conflicts within nations between groups he calls “economic winners and losers”) Friedman wonders why these have “become so sharp” in recent years. He responds by saying that, “The short answer is ‘globalization,’” globalization being defined as, “the integration of free markets, financial flows, trade and information—which has established a very powerful set of rules and standards for how countries have to behave if they are going to attract investment capital to grow. You can call those rules ‘The Paradigm.’”<sup>14</sup> In this definition, globalization is not merely a process, as suggested by the definition from “Revolt of the Wannabes,” but also a force endowed with agency and the power to dictate rules. Moreover, if we compare this definition with the earlier one, we see that missing here is the term “free-trade agreements.” While free-trade agreements suggests that there are people agreeing to this process that is “erasing borders,” this later definition makes it appear as though “globalization” is happening spontaneously, dictating rules and erasing borders as it carries on. [This is precisely the spontaneity that Hardt and Negri oppose in their definition of a new world order.] While the previous definition uses the term “free-trade agreements,” here we find that term substituted with “free markets,” the implication being that free markets automatically produce effects, as though without human intervention. Friedman also declares that apart from producing “winners,” “widening globalization spins off more and more losers:” in other words, globalization is described as a process that produces “winners” and “losers” as part of its natural momentum. The shift in language between the two definitions exemplifies how Friedman increasingly represents globalization as a thing in itself, an impersonal force with its own logic that —

like the free market—is self-regulating, and responsible for generating important social, economic, and political effects.

By March 20, 1997, in a piece called “The New Iron Curtain,” Friedman speaks of globalization as the defining feature of “the new era” that emerges at the end of the Cold War. Explaining what he believes is the difference between the two eras, Friedman argues that in the new era of globalization, it is not superpowers but “supermarkets” in the world’s key financial centers that control the supply of money. The natural, market-induced trade barriers set up by leading economic markets represent “the new Iron Curtain” that exemplifies how the political effects of free markets are positive and progressive, in sharp contrast with the power politics of the Cold War era.

Apart from his various definitions of “globalization,” Friedman creates a whole new vocabulary that circulates around this term. For instance, he routinely coins new terms that are related to “globalization.” In “The Globalutionaries” (July 24, 1997), Friedman introduces the term “globalution” to refer to the process, led by “globalutionaries” or pro-business forces all over the world, of producing a “revolution” by pushing their governments to join the global free market. Similarly, Friedman frequently uses the hybrid term, “glocalize” or “glocalization.” Here, the idea of globalization is not displaced by the “local;” rather, the local is folded into the logic of “globalization.” Through these new coinages, Friedman creates a vocabulary entirely dependent on the terms “global” and “globalization.” Friedman’s column also creates a community of phrases, ideas, and images that circulate around the term “globalization” and express its links with neoliberal thinking. For instance, he repeatedly deploys certain axiomatic phrases including, “no one is in charge,” or he foregrounds certain images such

as that of an anonymous “electronic herd” of bankers and speculators that controls global markets.<sup>15</sup>

“Globalization” thus emerges as a post-Cold War paradigm through Friedman’s various definitions and coinages. Like Fukuyama’s and Huntington’s theories about “the end of history” and a “clash of civilizations,” Friedman’s discourse of globalization obscures the histories and ongoing legacies of imperial power— while ascribing agency to an impersonal, invisible and revolutionary market process. While Friedman most resembles Fukuyama when he speaks of borders and inequalities being spontaneously erased by a universal culture of laissez-faire capitalism, he also shares Huntington’s interest in replacing “artificial” boundaries and Cold War divisions between First, Second, and Third Worlds with new, “real” divisions. If Huntington emphasizes the essential nature of tribal and ethnic divisions, Friedman speaks of the cultural differences brought into relief by market forces as being the more significant divisions affecting the post-Cold War period. Although Friedman’s is predominantly an economic discourse, like Fukuyama’s and Huntington’s essays, his column deploys the language of “culture” to represent social divisions in the era of globalization.

For instance, Friedman speaks of the distinction between “fast cultures” and “slow cultures” as being the real difference operating in the era of globalization. In his February 12, 1997 column titled, “The Hot Zones,” Friedman argues that there are some areas of the world that are well-disposed to embracing globalization because of certain “cultural” traits and habits. Friedman calls these areas “hot zones,” or areas comprised of “fast cultures.” Italy, for instance, is defined as a fast culture partly—and ironically—because of its political history of having weak governments that allow business to

flourish without too many interruptions. Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, regions of China and India, Israel, Korea, Brazil, Argentina, Chile, and the United States are other such “fast cultures.” Through his divisions between “hot” and “cold” zones and “fast” and “slow cultures,” Friedman suggests that the language of geography and culture remain influential even within his predominantly materialist and economic analysis. Like Fukuyama, Friedman suggests that some places are more “naturally” suited to compete internationally owing to cultural and geographical factors. In other words, although geographical borders seem to be “flattened” by globalization, culture and geography retain their significance and determine why places like the U.S. remain, as he puts it, a “very good fit with the brave new world” of globalization.

#### Friedman’s Geographical Imagination

While foreign affairs journalism may not earn the label of travel writing within the publishing industry, many of the articles from Friedman’s column read as a form of global travel writing in which the narrator journeys across the world, reports on his thoughts and ruminations, and then offers ways of mapping world geography. In one of his biweekly foreign affairs articles, Friedman speaks of his encounter in Mexico City with a man and his child who made a living from dressing as clowns to entertain motorists at traffic intersections. In his characteristic style, Friedman shares his internal musings—“I wondered: What could be more degrading?”—and then provides us with his interpretation: “That man represents for me all of the ‘left-behinds’—all those who have not shared in the benefits of the global marketplace... Those who have the savvy to keep up [with global competition] are thriving; those who don’t are panhandling at

stoplights.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, Friedman establishes the persona of a journalistic travel writer, one who muses aloud on his experiences of foreign travel. Moreover, Friedman’s brand of travel writing posits a number of generalizations about what he sees around him—generalizations that reflect and transmit neoliberal thinking, particularly its normalization of competition and its vision of a world divided between winners and losers (or left-behinds).

Friedman’s translation of neoliberalism into a geographical imagination is most evident in the following story written from Kigali, Rwanda, called “Come to Africa.” Here, like in much European colonial discourse, African subjectivity is constructed as a foil against which a European self is consolidated:

While on a stopover in Rwanda, the American U.N. representative, Madeleine Albright, asked her staff and the crew of their Air Force jet to pose for a picture on the runway of Kigali international airport. They all stood on the steps of their Boeing 737, which was emblazoned with the words, ‘United States of America.’ There was a Greek-American, a Czech-American, Jewish-Americans, black Americans and white Americans, there were Air Force crewmen from small towns and State Department experts from Ivy League colleges, and they were all standing there shoulder to shoulder. As they posed for the camera, I watched the Rwandan ground crew watching them. They had a slightly quizzical look. I couldn’t help but wonder what the Rwandans made of this scene. That picture represented everything that is good about America: the spirit of community, the melting pot, the willingness to help strangers in need and a concept of citizenship based on allegiance to an idea not a tribe. It is everything that a country like Rwanda is not (January 28, 1996).

In this episode, Friedman assumes the posture of a world traveler who sends back to the U.S. snapshots of itself. Africa, and what Friedman imagines to be the gaze of African subjects, is crucial to this view of the U.S. The Rwandans’ presence and their presumed “quizzical” look convince Friedman, and the American reader, about the contrast between Rwandan allegiance to tribalism and the U.S.’s allegiance to multiculturalism. The outsiders’ gaze thus serves to consolidate Friedman’s construction of U.S. identity.

Labeling “Africa” a “freshman Republican’s paradise,” because of its lack of social safety nets and its climate of ethnic conflict, Friedman portrays it as the opposite of this snapshot image of multicultural America.

Through such depictions, Friedman joins Fukuyama in quelling concerns about the future of U.S. supremacy. Friedman’s globalization discourse suggests that the U.S. is not in decline; on the contrary it is booming because it is best suited to prosper in an era of globalization. In “Dear Dr. Greenspan” (February 9, 1997), written from Davos, the site of the World Economic Forum, Friedman declares, “Globalization is us,” with “us” referring to the United States. In this article, Friedman writes an imaginary letter to Federal Reserve Chairman, Alan Greenspan, opposing the latter’s claim that the U.S. stock market was rising because of the “irrational exuberance” of international investors. Instead, he argues that it was rising in response to the U.S.’s economic superiority, which he attributes to its free market and multiculturalist environment: “The U.S. has the world’s most diverse and efficient capital markets, ...a multicultural population that speaks the language of the internet, a constantly renewing flow of immigrants, a transparent legal and regulatory environment and a flexible federal political system.” Rather than express concern (as many had been doing since the 1970s) about the unemployed former industrial workers and about the replacement of the U.S. industrial base with a service economy, Friedman expresses confidence in a multiculturalist American job market that enables worker mobility and in a corporate sector that downsizes and restructures itself to be globally competitive. Friedman thus celebrates U.S. cultural superiority justifying this stance as “rational exuberance” rather than as imperialism.<sup>17</sup>

Friedman's foreign affairs column from the 1990s is exemplary of how the economic discourse of neoliberalism is expressed through the language of globalization and translated into a geographical imagination. Friedman's journalism divides up the world between "fast" and "slow cultures," or between "economic winners" and "losers," such a division resonating with both Huntington's clash of civilizations discourse as well as Fukuyama's reframing of class difference in cultural terms.

### U.S. Travel Narratives and the Dissemination of Neoliberal Thinking

US travel writing from the 1990s continues the search, undertaken by the political and journalistic writings of Fukuyama, Huntington, and Friedman for new concepts with which to define and map the post-Cold War world. In what follows, I will show how narratives of global travel by Robert Kaplan and Pico Iyer contribute to the discursive production of globalization and the promotion of a neoliberal worldview. Like the essays of Fukuyama and Huntington, Kaplan's and Iyer's travelogues differentiate between the various regions of the world—in many ways a permanent characteristic of travel writing—even as they are motivated by a need to understand the basis of interconnections between these regions in the post-Cold War period.

Kaplan's and Iyer's travelogues, moreover, contribute to the re-emergence of travel writing as a popular genre of Anglophone writing in the late twentieth century. After suffering relative inattention in the post-World War II period, the genre of travel writing returns as a popular literary form in the 1980s and 1990s. In the face of the decline of British imperialism, writers like Evelyn Waugh had announced the death of travel writing.<sup>18</sup> In his 1980 publication about early twentieth-century travel, literary

critic Paul Fussell echoed Waugh when he referred to the period from 1918-1939 as “the final age of travel” (vii). Fussell argued that, “Travel implies variety of means and independence of arrangements” (41). While “travel” had replaced the Renaissance mode of “exploration, it was “tourism” that, according to Fussell, had most recently replaced “travel.” Fussell considered Paul Theroux’s *The Great Railway Bazaar* as “one of the few travel books to emerge from our age of tourism” (40), Theroux undertaking an independent and rugged train journey through the Third World, in the style of “classic,” English travel writers like Waugh and Graham Greene, and producing an exotic “travel book” as opposed to a functional “guide book.” Despite Fussell’s argument about the death of the travel book, the 1980s produced what has been known, by critics and writers other than Fussell, as a “renaissance”<sup>19</sup> of travel writing, involving a surge in the re-publication of older travel writing as well as an increase in new travel writing. This renaissance was a result of advances in, and the cheapening of, air travel that allowed for greater international mobility, the growth of a mass tourism industry, and the rise internationally of a moneyed class with time and resources for leisure travel.<sup>20</sup> The U.S. traveler begins to dominate this new trend of travel writing, thus replacing the once emblematic figure of the British travel writer. If, as Mary Louise Pratt demonstrates in *Imperial Eyes*, European “travel and exploration writing produced ‘the rest of the world’ for European readerships at particular points in Europe’s expansionist trajectory,” and through its “signifying practices encode[d] and legitimate[d] the aspirations of economic expansion and empire” (5), then travel writing of the 1990s produces the world for an American audience and, in doing so, legitimizes American hegemony.

In her discussion of colonial-era travel writing, Pratt differentiates between a “scientific, information-oriented branch of travel writing” (“Scratches” 149) and a sentimental one. While the informational branch of travel writing “centers landscape, separates people from place, and effaces the speaking self” (“Scratches” 143), in sentimental writing,

The traveler is the protagonist of the journey and the primary focus of the account. [Sentimental travel writing] narrates the journey as an epic-style series of trials and challenges, of various kinds of encounters—often erotic ones—where indigenous inhabitants occupy the stage alongside the European. If the other discourse is called informational, this one should be called experiential. It constitutes its authority by anchoring itself not in informational orders but in situated human subjects, notably (but not always) the European protagonist (“Scratches” 151).

Pratt argues that “sentimentality both challenges and complements the emergent authority of objectivist science” (*Imperial Eyes* 75).

Pratt’s differentiation remains significant for the analysis of contemporary travel writing—even though the separation between sentimental and informational modes of travel is not as absolute in the case of contemporary work and both these registers might coexist within a single travel book. The travel writing of Robert Kaplan resembles the 19<sup>th</sup> century informational travel writers Pratt discusses in that his account aims to provide information and to find a theory for understanding globalization. At the same time, however, Kaplan’s prose is also in the sentimental vein in that the travel writer routinely expresses his desires and makes explicit his ways of seeing. Indeed, in what he characterizes as his “realist” travel writing, self-reflexivity and open self-expression coexists with a scientific, informational register of recalling facts and figures about the places he visits: “I wanted to wander outside the stretch limo, particularly in cities and large towns. According to the National Academy of Sciences, as much as 95 percent of

all the new births in our world occur in the poorest countries, while more than half of those occur in urban and urbanizing areas” (*Ends* 10). In sentences like this one, the traveler fluctuates between expressing his desires and providing journalistic information about the places he visits. In another instance, Kaplan displays self-consciousness about his traveler’s gaze: “[I]t is on foot that you learn the most. You are on the ground, on the same level with Africans rather than looking down at them. You are no longer protected by speed or air-conditioning or thick glass. The sweat pours from you, and your shirt sticks to your body. This is how you learn” (*Ends* 25). Kaplan’s self-reflexivity speaks to his self-consciousness about his authority and of its relationship to colonial travel writing. While Kaplan wishes to separate himself from what Pratt describes as the “monarch-of-all-I-survey” mode of colonial travel writing, I will show how his prose nevertheless relies upon the categories and ways of seeing implied within colonial-era travelogues.

### Kaplan’s Neo-Realist Travel Writing

In the preface to his travel book titled, *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, From Iran to Cambodia—A Journey To The Frontiers Of Anarchy*, Kaplan locates his work at the intersection of international studies and travel writing and describes his as a specific kind of travel writing about the “real world.” Here Kaplan is explicitly in conversation with contemporaneous conversations about the U.S.’s supremacy at the end of the Cold War. Like Fukuyama, Huntington, and Friedman, Kaplan’s goal is to find, as he puts it, “a paradigm for understanding the world in the early decades of the twenty-first century” (8). Yet, what he seems to want to do is to counter the optimistic portrayals by Fukuyama and Friedman of America’s growing

power and influence and to remind us of the threats that the US faces in an increasingly interdependent world. “Anarchy” is Kaplan’s chosen paradigm. On the one hand he marks some areas of the Third World as the “frontiers of anarchy;” but on the other hand he suggests that anarchy is the universal future of all nations including the U.S.

Published in 1996, Kaplan’s narrative reveals the brutalities of uneven development, ethnic violence, and forced displacement as he journeys across impoverished regions from West Africa to East Asia—regions that he refers to as “the frontiers of anarchy.” In his preface, Kaplan defends his unusual brand of journalistic travel writing and uses it to make a case for the enduring significance of the genre as a whole. He writes, “Though many landscapes are increasingly sullied, that need not spell the decline of travel writing. It does mean that travel writing must confront the real world, slums and all, rather than escape into an airbrushed version of a more rustic past” (xiv). Through the rest of his book, Kaplan recounts in vivid detail his various encounters with “the real world” while simultaneously offering the reader his theories regarding the causes underlying the poverty he witnesses. One of his main aims, as he describes it, is to perform a kind of shock therapy on the Western reader—that is, to “shock” the Western reader out of his or her complacency. He argues that African cities, with their high crime rates, “give you an eerie taste of what American cities may someday be like” (14). The fate of Africa, Kaplan warns, will be the fate of the Western world, unless it “confronts” Africa and thereby prepares for impending, global, ecological disasters resulting from “crime, population pressure, environmental degradation, disease, and culture conflict” (10).

Like Fukuyama and Huntington, Kaplan rejects traditional boundaries and attempts to produce a new map for the twenty-first century. He wonders, “What if there are really not fifty-odd nations in Africa, as the map suggests—what if there are only six, or seven, or eight real nations on that continent? Or, instead of nations, several hundred tribal entities” (6)? Referring explicitly to Huntington and aligning himself with the latter’s views, Kaplan writes “the real borders are the most tangible and intractable ones: those of culture and tribe” (270).<sup>21</sup> Thus, like Huntington, Kaplan attempts to re-draw the world map to represent “real borders” rather than the artificial borders of nation states or the imagined divisions between First, Second, and Third worlds. As he puts it, “I have tried to learn by actual travel and experience just how far places are from each other, where the borders really are and where they aren’t, where the real terra incognita is” (6). In search of the “real,” Kaplan begins his journey in Africa, “the birthplace of humankind,” and then “trace[s] our species’ likely trajectory of planetary settlement from Africa across the Near East into the Indian subcontinent and, ultimately, Southeast Asia” (6).

In what follows, I will show how, while Kaplan’s brand of “realist” travel writing critiques Western superiority and arrogance, it simultaneously normalizes and naturalizes the neoliberal vision of pure capitalism, entrepreneurship, and radical individualism that underlies contemporary imperialist practices. Reproducing neo-liberalism’s celebration of East Asian entrepreneurship, Kaplan’s prose posits East Asian “cultures of ingenuity” against African “cultures of anarchy.” In the process, Africa is called upon to function as neo-liberalism’s Other, just as it was once called upon to play this role within colonial discourse. I will begin by showing how Kaplan draws upon colonial tropes and structures

of feeling to elicit responses of horror and fear towards Africa—all in service of his project of “shocking” the contemporary Western imagination. In the process, Kaplan’s writing reinforces the new modes of racial and cultural differentiation normalized by neoliberal discourse.

Kaplan often speaks of his indebtedness to the writings of early British travelers, referencing their travelogues to legitimize his observations and perspectives. For instance, he frequently draws on the writings of nineteenth-century British traveler, Richard Burton. While he distinguishes his work from Burton’s overtly racist depictions of the physiognomies of some Liberians, he also simultaneously defends Burton by adding that “whatever Burton’s limitations...Liberia is no better off—is perhaps worse off—than it was in Burton’s day. Burton’s depictions of other places in West Africa, to say nothing of his account of disease, are germane to present circumstances, given the region’s economic decline. Africa, as I’ve said, has to be confronted” (25). He further defends Burton against the charge that his was “the hectoring tone of a man who has travelled much but understood little.” “That may be too easy an opinion,” writes Kaplan. “Burton spoke twenty-nine languages and operated in native disguise in Mecca” (24). Kaplan thus legitimizes the nineteenth century colonial vision by arguing that its insights remain relevant.

In this sense, Kaplan exemplifies what Steve Clark identifies as the indebtedness of contemporary travel writers to “an overtly imperial generation” of travel writers. Clark argues that the contemporary generation has an ambivalent relationship with the voice of the imperial traveler even as it is involved in “formulating an acceptable, or perhaps less culpable, post-imperial voice” (10). Kaplan attempts to create a “post-imperial voice” by

distinguishing his language from Burton's overtly racist vocabulary. However, by failing to acknowledge the links between Africa's colonial history and its persisting structures of economic exploitation, Kaplan ends up re-producing some of the imperial biases of writers like Burton.

When Kaplan references Africa's colonial past, he explicitly opposes the view that links histories of colonial violence with Africa's prevailing problems. Instead of acknowledging the continuities between colonial history and Africa's present, Kaplan considers nature and geography to be the "real" causes of African poverty and ethnic conflict. In other words, Kaplan reframes colonial reason by naturalizing—or placing in nature and geography—the causes of African poverty. When he is in Liberia, for instance, Kaplan makes an explicit connection between the nation's geography and its material reality: "It occurred to me that, perhaps, the forest had made the war in Liberia. I have no factual basis for this, merely traveler's intuition" (27). Later, on a less tentative note, Kaplan refers to Liberia as a "forest culture: a land of spirits" (29). Sounding increasingly like European colonialists with their representations of Africa as the land of unreason, Kaplan writes,

[I]n the forest, where one's view is blotted out by every manner of tree and creeper (each containing its own "spirit"), men tend to depend less on reason and more on superstition. The extraordinary profusion of carved masks in West Africa, which a visitor cannot help but notice, suggests the role of the forest (and of the savannah) in the regional psychology. The forest, a green prison with iron rain clouds draped low overhead, may have helped weaken Islam and Christianity. The staying power of animism, in competition with these two major world religions, might be traced to the survival of large tracts of forest here into the twentieth century. (28)

Thus, sidestepping colonial history, Kaplan bases his theories about the origins of ethnic conflict in Liberia on its geography, as well as on its (geographically determined) culture of animism.

Yet another way that Kaplan's writing is indebted to colonial-era travelogues is in its mimicking of colonialist modes of observation of places and peoples. When analyzing landscape descriptions within 19<sup>th</sup> century travel writing, Mary Louise Pratt calls out attention to how depictions of peoples and places occur in a timeless present tense with the traveler adopting a self-effacing and passive stance. Pratt describes how

The eye 'commands' what falls within its gaze; the mountains 'show themselves' or 'present themselves'; the country 'opens up' before the European newcomer, as does the unclothed indigenous bodyscape. At the same time, this eye seems powerless to act or interact with this landscape. Unheroic, unparticularized, without ego, interest, or desire of its own, it seems able to do nothing but gaze from a periphery of its own creation, like the self-effaced, noninterventionist eye that scans the Other's body. ("Scratches" 143)

Now, as opposed to this posture of passivity and self-effacement assumed by the colonial-era travel writer, Kaplan appears present in the scene, even self-conscious about the power of his gaze. Yet if we look closer, we see that mixed with this self-consciousness is a similar assumption of passivity and powerlessness to act and interact with what he sees. In the following passage, Kaplan fluctuates between active and passive, as well as between self-consciousness about the observer's gaze and uncritical observation of a distant Other:

The next morning found me staring through my taxi window at Ajame-Bramakote, the section of Abidjan near the bus station. Bramakote means 'I have no choice [but to live here].' I observed the rotting market stalls of blackened bile-green: rusted metal poles festooned with black plastic sheeting held down by rocks and old tires. In front of a mosque whose walls seemed almost to be melting in the rain, I spotted several women with bare breasts feeding their infants, and another woman urinating, oblivious of the crowd. Inadequate housing and the tropical heat had, perhaps, helped defeat attempts at decorum. The immodesty might also have indicated how Islam had been weakened in the course of its arduous journey across the Sahara.... Yet how much more violent would a city in the West be, faced with the same conditions as Ajame-Bramakote? It was my shock that had robbed this woman who was urinating of the privacy that others on the street gave her. (15)

Here Kaplan is both active and passive: the passage consists of a number of active constructions like “I observed, I spotted, etc. that show Kaplan’s awareness of the violent effects of his shocked gaze. Yet, like the colonial era travel writers that Pratt discusses, Kaplan is also passive in that just like the people have no choice but to live there, Kaplan suggests that he has no choice but to look. Somehow the people’s lack of choice licenses Kaplan’s gaze. Thus he begins this passage with the passive construction “the next found me staring through my taxi window at Ajame Bramakote.” Moreover, seeing the woman’s immodesty as emblematic of the place of Islam in Ivoirian culture is a distancing move—or a move that distances Kaplan, and the reader, from the woman and constructs her as an Other. Even if he displays an awareness of the violence of this shock and its capacity to “rob” the woman of her privacy—the viewer is invited to identify with Kaplan’s “shock” and in the process to watch the woman from the distance produced by this shock. It is through passages like this one that Kaplan implements his vision of producing “a travel document that would serve as shock therapy” (10).

### Reframing Colonial Reason in Neoliberal Terms

In describing his project as “shock therapy” for the West, Kaplan at once mimics and transforms the affective discourse deployed by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank in justifying their imposition of neo-liberal, structural adjustment policies on poor nations. Structural adjustment as conceived by the IMF and the WB involves a radical restructuring, or shocking, of economies that are deemed “sick”—a program of large-scale privatization to wipe out the effects of state-dictated economic policies. Kaplan suggests here that the Western imagination needs a similar kind of radical

restructuring or shocking in order to confront the reality of Africa and to recognize how this reality affects its own future. But ironically, this process of recognition of African reality by the Western reader requires a revival of colonial ways of seeing and of othering Africa.

In his first chapter called “An Unsentimental Journey”<sup>22</sup> (part of a section titled “West Africa: Back to the Dawn?”), Kaplan quotes from a letter from a U.S. diplomat in West Africa who writes, “The greatest threat to our value system comes from Africa. Can we continue to believe in universal principles as Africa declines to levels described by Dante than by development economists? Our domestic attitudes on race and ethnicity suffer as Africa becomes a continent-wide ‘Wreck of the Medusa’” (4).<sup>23</sup> The tension within this quote—between seeing Africa as a “threat” and as a problem that needs to be solved if we are to ensure the survival of the U.S. and of universalist values—is one that runs throughout Kaplan’s account. From the outset, a number of phrases signal this anxiety-filled appreciation of the global significance of Africa and the importance of acknowledging its socio-economic struggles: “At the equator nature is a terrifying face from which humankind cannot separate itself;” (3) “Africa, alas, is the inescapable center;” “Africa looms large in the middle of the vision field, connected to Eurasia through the Middle East” (4); “Africa [is] the birthplace of humankind” (6). Through all these attempts at positioning Africa as geographically central, and as historically primary, Kaplan recalls colonial-era anxieties about Africa as the alluring, resource-rich but ultimately tantalizing “dark continent.” In fact, references to colonial-era encounters with Africa are repeatedly raised throughout Kaplan’s travelogue even if the stories of colonial violence are erased. If Africa was figured as the dark continent within colonial discourse,

in Kaplan's prose, it is described as consisting of "cultures of anarchy" that are contrasted with the "cultures of ingenuity" that characterize East Asian nations.

Kaplan's thinking here is influenced not only by Huntington's ideas about post-Cold War civilizational clash, but also by "a school of environmental-population strategists" formed by thinkers like Thomas Homer-Dixon. This school, as Kaplan summarizes its perspective, agrees first with neo-Malthusians that curtailing population will save the world, and then with neoclassical economists who believe that free markets will save the world. According to this school of thinking, cultures with an adequate supply of ingenuity will be the ones to survive and resist demographical and geographical pressures. Kaplan's idea of "cultural ingenuity" draws from their thinking, thereby projecting neoliberal celebrations of individual initiative onto entire cultures.

When Kaplan travels through East and South Asia, he marvels at their "ingenuity" and "adaptability": he writes that "in the Indian subcontinent and China, more adaptable cultures are finding ways to expand their resource base" (349). He even suggests that East Asian "cultures of ingenuity" are essential to the economic revival of African "cultures of anarchy." Noticing the class difference he sees between Africans and Asians living in Africa, Kaplan remarks, "Indians, like the Lebanese and Syrians, went to sub-Saharan Africa a century ago with little more than the shirts on their backs, and went on to form the middle class in a number of African cities. This couldn't have happened merely by accident, or through 'exploitation,' since even exploitation requires ingenuity" (365). The implication here is that Lebanese, Syrians, and Indians are able to thrive in Africa because of their superior cultural traits—rather than as a result of their role as businessmen with the power to exploit local resources. Kaplan thus circumvents the role

of both colonial and contemporary forms of exploitation while emphasizing instead the role of geography and of a geographically-determined culture. The concept of cultural ingenuity, based in geographical difference, provides him with a natural logic to explain why Africa had “fallen off the economic map.”

Kaplan’s writing suggests that neoliberal utopianism—and its celebration of pure, deregulated capitalism and radical ingenuity and individualism—rests on, indeed requires, a vision of apocalypse that is the source of shock and fear. If in the political economic realm, shock therapy is needed to pave the way for a radical restructuring of economies along neoliberal lines, then Kaplan’s writing suggests that at the level of imagination, an aesthetic of shock is necessary for promoting neoliberalism’s utopian vision. As in the case of the colonial-era travelogues to which Kaplan remains indebted, Africa remains a potent site for laying bare the processes of racialization and othering that undergird contemporary neoliberal ideology. Kaplan’s view of Africa allows us to apprehend the new grounds for racial and cultural differentiation that are being produced by the globally dominant discourse of neoliberalism.

The mostly serious and unsentimental tone of Kaplan’s prose may be in sharp contrast to Friedman’s predominantly romanticizing and celebratory narratives. Both writers, however, share a similar imagining of world geography in which “Africa” comes to represent the quintessential zone of “anarchy.” In Kaplan’s writing, “Africa” offers a glimpse into the anarchy that America could become, and, in Friedman’s column, “Africa” is the antithesis of present-day America. Both writers—though to varying degrees—base their geographical imaginations on an idea of cultural difference. They both, moreover, establish a contrast between an emerging Asia and an anarchic Africa.

Across their writings, “Asia” is celebrated for its economic success (and is seen as a major contender, along with the United States, in the race for world supremacy), while “Africa” is treated as the opposite of the U.S. or as a “loser” in the global market. In the end, both writers construct Africa as an “other” to the United States and to Asia. Constructing Africa as an “other” is necessary to consolidate Kaplan’s belief in “cultural ingenuity” as the explanation for social inequality and Friedman’s belief in the U.S. as a model egalitarian and multicultural society.

Despite the gloominess of his vision, Kaplan’s foregrounding of the idea of cultural ingenuity also betrays the links between his writing and the utopian imagination of Fukuyama. Consider, for instance, the similarities between Kaplan’s idea about the “ingenuity” of Asian cultures and Fukuyama’s notion about “the strength and adaptability” of Asian cultures. In a footnote that appears in “The End of History?” Fukuyama expresses his views about the importance of culture. He writes,

One need look no further than the recent performance of Vietnamese immigrants in the U.S. school system when compared to their black or Hispanic classmates to realize that culture and consciousness are absolutely crucial to explain not only economic behavior but virtually every other important aspect of life as well. (7)

This statement by Fukuyama is not incidental. Indeed, his whole essay is about overturning the Marxist assumption that economic class determines cultural behavior. Fukuyama insists on how it is culture that is fundamental and not class. Like Fukuyama, Kaplan circumvents the issue of economic exploitation and frames class differences as cultural difference.

Kaplan’s downplaying of economic exploitation is related to his rejection of the role of colonialism in creating economic inequality. Kaplan does not totally erase colonial histories, however. Rather, as I have shown through his indebtedness to Richard

Burton's writings, he often invokes colonial history—especially the way that colonial writers drew connections between African physiognomy and African poverty—to critique its racism. Having invoked this history, however, Kaplan continues to make an argument in which this history is considered less important than geography and culture as an explanation for poverty in the post-colonial Africa. Kaplan in fact claims that he is writing with the aim of opposing standard explanations provided for poverty in places like Africa:

The reasons provided for this mess—‘colonialism,’ ‘the evil international economic system,’ Africa’s ‘corrupt elites,’ its ‘patriarchal society,’ and so on—could also apply to other third world regions that were daily pulling ahead of Africa economically: Africa’s vital statistics concerning population increase, living standards, and violence were the worst on the planet. (9)

In countering explanations based on the “international economic system” or on colonialism, Kaplan, like Fukuyama and Huntington, deflects attention away from economic exploitation and its basis in histories of colonial domination and directs it towards culture. Culture becomes the basis for reinscribing colonial difference in the post-Cold War world.

Kaplan’s prose further mirrors neoliberal thinking in its romanticization of migrant peasants. Speaking of the globally circulating population of newly urbanized peasants, Kaplan writes,

Everywhere in the developing world at the end of the twentieth century these new men and women—flowing into the cities, turning them into grotesque villages—were remaking civilization. To these empowered millions, national borders, nations themselves, even the idea of a nation, were vague. To them the real borders were the most tangible and intractable ones—those of culture. (132)

With such sweeping statements, Kaplan deploys the figure of the migrant to bolster his theory about the breakdown of national boundaries and his advocacy for considering “real” borders and boundaries. In another passage about this peasantry, he writes,

I marveled at this modern peasantry, for which life was a social adventure, where the government was not even asked, let alone expected, to provide for you. The difference between refugees and nomads is this: Refugees flee a place because they have no choice, but nomads are pioneers *on the make*. Nomads are makers of history. Refugees are its victims. (137)

This opposition between nomads and refugees, pioneers and victims, reflects and reinforces neoliberal celebrations of entrepreneurialism in Kaplan’s otherwise non-utopian imagination. His defense of a self-made, anti-national, or rather, transnational culture of nomadism, makes culture the central dividing force in contemporary geopolitics. In other words, while Kaplan may appear to reject the universalism underlying Fukuyama’s defense of Western liberalism, or the exuberance and optimism underlying Friedman’s celebrations of free market capitalism, his writing is steeped in and compatible with neoliberal celebrations of individual entrepreneurship or “social adventure” and freedom from state intervention.

#### Pico Iyer and the Marketing of Inequality and Unevenness

While it is well known that the neoliberal mode of capitalist accumulation exacerbates social inequality, David Harvey emphasizes also that it depends on inequality and unevenness for its advancement: “Uneven geographical development ... has been not only a result but also a driving force of neoliberalization on the world stage” (*Neoliberalism* 65). Addressing the work of Thomas Friedman, he writes, “If the world were anywhere near as flat as Friedman portrays it, then neoliberalism would not work”

(67). Harvey shows how the dominance of neoliberal approaches to political economy have made practices of dispossession the norm rather than the exception for capitalist accumulation. Harvey's theory about the necessity of unevenness within the neoliberal worldview is helpful for understanding the discursive proliferation of neoliberal thinking. Indeed, as my analysis of the apparently dissimilar narratives of Kaplan and Friedman have shown, the dissemination of neoliberal thinking on the world stage has been enabled by pessimistic narratives that focus on geographical unevenness as much as by narratives that imagine a unified world.

In *Tourists with Typewriters* Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan explain the dynamic of exoticization as follows:

exoticism functions as a dialectic of attraction and repulsion through which (cultural) difference can be acknowledged but also, if need be, held at bay. Travel writing tends to function this way, expressing itself through exotic registers that allow for often voyeuristic appreciation of 'different' places, cultures, and peoples while reserving the right to judge them according to narrowly ethnocentric tastes. (19)

In other words, the appeal of the exotic depends on valorizing the strangeness of places while at the same time containing this difference through judgment.

I would like to suggest that the aesthetic of shock enables an exoticization of places like Africa. It positions us as voyeurs who are at once attracted and repelled; moreover, it raises a threat (of absolute difference or anarchy) while at the same time containing or defusing this threat through his recourse to familiar, colonialist mythologies. In this final section, I will discuss another, more traditional, mode of exotic travel writing: Pico Iyer's popular, tourist-friendly travelogues map his travels across a number of spaces that have only been exposed to global capital. Like Friedman's foreign

affairs column and Kaplan's 'realist' travel writing, Iyer's post-Cold War travelogues contribute to making neoliberal thinking into commonsense.

Pico Iyer's travel narratives can be said to belong to a tradition of neo-sentimental travel narrative, the appeal of which is related in large part to the humorous personality and idiosyncratic subject-position of the traveler/commentator. A self-proclaimed "global soul," Iyer repeatedly reminds readers—both in his travelogues as well as in accompanying publicity material—of his identity as a hybrid cosmopolitan. The back-cover of Iyer's travelogue *The Global Soul* (2000) describes him—"a resident nowherian" "born of Indian parents, raised in America, and currently living in Japan;" and in the same travelogue, Iyer describes himself as "a person with an American alien card and an Indian face and an English accent on his way to Japan" (*Global* 10).

Although Pico Iyer is not an American writer in the strictest sense, his writings address a U.S. audience and participate in conversations taking place within the U.S. public sphere in the aftermath of the Cold War. Although its tone is distinctly playful and ironic rather than political or journalistic, Iyer's 1993 travelogue *Falling Off the Map: Some Lonely Places of the World* shares Fukuyama's and Huntington's impetus to explore the post-Cold War world in search of new descriptive categories and new maps. Iyer's descriptive categories for the post-Cold War period are put forward in this light-hearted travelogue amidst Friedmanesque optimism about the future of the U.S. in the post-Cold War world.

Iyer's *Lonely Places* affirms that the world is "shrinking" and that difference and unevenness are being produced as a result. As Iyer notes,

T]he very process of feverish cross-communication that is turning the world into a single polyglot multiculturalism is producing new kinds of Lonely Places as fast as it eliminates the old...And even as the world contracts and isolation fades, half the countries around the globe are still off the map in some sense, out of sight, out of

mind, out of time. (9-10)

Through his category of “Lonely Places” Iyer suggests that the post-Cold War world is not simply becoming homogenous and multicultural. And yet, if difference is also being produced, Iyer suggests this is only because some places “do not know how to carry themselves, are lost when it comes to visitors. They are shy, defensive, curious places; places that do not know how they are supposed to behave” (10). Iyer’s mode of dividing the world between places that are on or “off the map” resembles Friedman’s opposition between “fast” and “slow” and “hot” and “cold” cultures as well as Robert Kaplan’s observations on visiting Africa. In language similar to Iyer’s Kaplan notes that, “Africa is *falling off* the world economic map” (11, my emphasis). In both travelogues, “falling off the map” and geopolitical unevenness are attributed to cultural traits (the lack of “ingenuity,” in Kaplan’s account) or personality traits (the lack of knowledge about “how to behave,” in Iyer’s account).

Iyer’s and Kaplan’s travelogues also share an understanding about the underlying relationship between geography and time. Places that are considered to be “off the map,” are also considered to be “out of time.” Iyer’s travel narrative privileges the time of Euro-American modernity. If places overwhelmingly retain signs and symbols connecting them to a pre-modern past, then Iyer sees this as proof that they are “frozen” in time. He writes that in lonely places, “the local time is 1943 and the temperature is...frozen” (7). Iyer has an ambivalent relationship to these places that are “frozen” in time: “More than in space, then, it is in time that Lonely Places are often exiled, and it is their very remoteness from the present tense that gives them their air of haunted glamour” (7). While some places like Paraguay seem, to Iyer, to be unappealingly “frozen” in time,

others like Vietnam seem charmingly “out of time.” Kaplan too sees some parts of the world as frozen in time or in “history.” Part 1 of *The Ends of the Earth* is set in West Africa and the heading for this part of the book reads, “West Africa: Back to the Dawn?” Here, West Africa is figured as premodern. In contrast, the last section of Kaplan’s book—on East Asia—is titled, “The Indian Subcontinent and Indochina: *The Way to the Future?*” Kaplan thus organizes his journey as moving from the “past” to the “future.” In other words, his travel book is orchestrated to provide a certain narrative effect: the effect of coming out of gloom to hope, from time past to time future. In his 1992 travelogue, *Balkan Ghosts*, where Kaplan travels in the former Yugoslavia, he thinks about the fate of the world by treating the Balkans as a site of “history.” In *Ends of the Earth*, it is Africa that represents “history.” So although he only travels to one region in the former book, and here the scope of his travels is much larger, in both books Kaplan designates some places as “history” and others as “the future.” Traveling for Kaplan, as for Iyer, means not only traveling in space but also, symbolically, in time.

Kaplan and Iyer thus puts forth a geographical imagination that distinguishes between places that are on or “off the map” and places that are in “history” or in the “future.” Elided from Iyer’s framework, as from Kaplan’s, are histories of imperial and economic exploitation. Iyer’s portrayal of Vietnam, for instance, as a charming and “innocent” tourist destination elides the horror of America’s imperialist war with Vietnam. The “innocence” of Vietnam is suggested by representing the nation as a young girl. Vietnam is said to

still ha[ve] the bashful charm of a naturally alluring girl stepping out into bright sunlight after years of dark seclusion. Protected, ironically, by its years of hardship and cut off from modernity by more than a decade of Communist rule, Vietnam is still, more than most places, new to the world. It does not know what to make of us,

nor we of it. Its pleasures feel unrehearsed, and surprise is still a growth industry.  
(116)

Through this feminizing discourse, Iyer portrays Vietnam as “new to the world,” a benign modernizing space, rather than as a site, not so long ago, of a horrific imperial war. Such a representation of Vietnam is in sharp contrast to an earlier period when the country was also represented as female—but figured as a seductress. As David Spurr points out, the country was “often represented in images of prostitutes and ‘dragon ladies.’” This representation persisted even after the war:

*A Chicago Tribune* reporter visits Vietnam in 1983 and finds the symbol of postwar Saigon in Madame Dai, a woman of former wealth and influence now fallen on hard times: ‘Saigon is an aging dowager mistress, pining for her lost youth, yet still capable of firing the imagination with gestures that hint at the elegant temptress she once was’ (November 27, 1983). (Spurr 173)

Iyer’s depiction of Vietnam as an innocent girl is in sharp contrast to this earlier image of the nation as an aging temptress. This change in Vietnam’s representation within the U.S. context is in service of producing new associations with this place as Vietnam adopts free market reforms and opens its economy to tourism. What remains consistent, however, is the fixing of Vietnam as essentially female and as a place that is stuck in the past.

When Iyer does raise the memory of the Vietnam War he takes pains to show that the Vietnamese have moved beyond this memory. When describing the town, Hue, Iyer reminds us that it “connotes bombardment, and the savageries of the Tet offensive.” But he qualifies this statement by showing that the war does not color the place or overtake local people’s memories:

Yet for all the freshness of such memories, and for all the bullet holes that scar the mountain, the foreigner has only to say he’s from America, and he is greeted with shinningly genuine smiles. ‘For us, French is the language of power and love,’ a Vietnamese friend explained. ‘English is the language of commerce. Russian is the language of quarrels. (127-128)

Thus, memories of the war are raised but qualified with reassurances that for the Vietnamese the war and the nation's broader history of colonial occupation are in the past. Iyer's raising of the war, only to take us beyond it, is reminiscent of Kaplan's gesture of raising Africa's colonial history, only to remind us that this history does not impact the present; rather, Africa's geography and essential culture are what matter.

Iyer performs similar reassuring gestures for potential American tourists by representing spaces within Vietnam as "picturesque" and as retaining their ties to a deeper past beyond the Vietnam War. This is how he represents the Hue landscape:

[T]he nineteenth-century capital of regal pavilions has never lost its air of gracious reserve and a faded glamour as picturesque as that of the black and white shots of local Lana Turners pouting down from every streetside Photo Shop. At one riverside pagoda, a head monk unfurled for me the banned Buddhist flag, talking all the while of Herman Hesse and Krishnamurthi. The students on their bicycles carried themselves like ancient porcelain. And my guide in Hue, a soft-spoken, scholarly man in spectacles, talked warmly of Tagore. (126)

Iyer's portrayal of the place as anachronistically charming effectively de-links it from the rest of the world as well as from the recent past and the violence of the Vietnam War.

Iyer thus reforms our associations with Hue: no longer connected with America's imperial war, the town is rendered as unthreatening, un-ideological, and as a belated entrant into modernity. Both Iyer and Kaplan narrate their travels to former sites of colonial exploitation by displacing the significance of their colonial histories and by portraying these places as belated entrants to modernity. But while Kaplan is troubled and shocked by the belatedness of the places he visits, Iyer likes to see this belatedness as charming, innocent—and as exotic.

By addressing the concerns of the American traveler, Iyer does not merely erase America's war with Vietnam; Vietnam's communist past is also disavowed while its

market-friendly present is what is emphasized. Iyer addresses the concerns of an American audience in the following lines: “[T]he Socialist Republic of Vietnam is also one of the least ideological, or Marxist-minded, places I have ever seen, buzzing as it does with an enterprise that could not be freer, and principles mostly honored in the breach” (119). Then, directly addressing the American tourist, Iyer writes, “Americans need fear nothing except an excess of curiosity and goodwill, and the insults of children who mistake them for Soviets; these days much of Vietnam is praying for a greater American presence” (119). In other words, rendering Vietnam a new tourist destination in the post-Cold War period means diminishing its associations with not only its colonial, but also its communist, past. Vietnam is fixed as an exotic state that lives in a deep past, untarnished by the War or by Communism. It is this essential, exotic, Vietnam that Iyer reveals as being newly open to tourism and available for consumption.

### Conclusion

The end of Cold War narratives discussed above are all attempts at mapping the geography of the post-Cold War world and debating the future status of the U.S. within this world. While Fukuyama, Friedman and Iyer explicitly celebrate free market economics, Kaplan’s and Huntington’s writings are less overt in their alignment with neoliberal thinking. Yet, as I show, the vision underlying these apparently opposed viewpoints is indeed supportive of neoliberal utopianism. In each of these writers’ works we see a common view—that of an inherently competitive world, in which poverty and social inequality is produced by geographical and natural factors on the one hand and

cultural factors on the other. In the process, each of these texts revives colonial tropes and ways of seeing while circumventing or erasing histories of colonial violence.

Together, these texts can be said to constitute, in philosopher Charles Taylor's terms, a new "social imaginary," one that reinterprets world history and remaps world geography in neoliberal terms. Building on Benedict Anderson's theory of imagined communities, Taylor proposes the term 'social imaginary' to refer to "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie those expectations." Then explaining his choice of 'social imaginary' over 'social theory,' he writes,

my focus is on the way ordinary people 'imagine' their social surroundings, and this is often not expressed in theoretical terms, but is carried in images, stories and legends...what is interesting in the social imaginary is that it is shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society....[T]he social imaginary is that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy. (23)

Taylor's concept is descriptive of "the way we collectively imagine, even pretheoretically, our social life in the contemporary Western world" (50)—an idea that is useful in describing the terrain of globalization discourse. For the discourse of globalization emerges in the final decades of the twentieth century not only as a result of theories by Hardt and Negri and others but also through the "images, stories and legends" circulated by economists, political commentators, journalists, travel writers, and others engaged in re-mapping the world and re-telling modern history along neoliberal lines. As neoliberal economic policies and practices gain international legitimacy in the final decades of the twentieth century, the utopian vision underlying neoliberal thinking begins to transform our social imaginaries. The writings by the political commentators,

journalists, and travel writers discussed in this chapter show how neoliberal thinking emerges out of the confines of economic and political discourse and informs our “common understanding” and imagination of the world.

While scholars of neoliberalism have pointed to the role of think tanks and corporate sponsorship in the popular dissemination of neoliberal thinking,<sup>24</sup> this chapter calls attention to the significance of popular U.S. texts that circulate a discourse of globalization in the immediate aftermath of the end of the Cold War. The U.S. discourse of globalization that emerges in the 1990s imagines a new world that is at once unified by free markets and torn apart by competition between “cultures of ingenuity” and “cultures of anarchy.” Although not as deliberate and intentional as the efforts of think-tanks and corporations, this globalization discourse—whether celebratory or pessimistic about the effects of global capital—reflects and further reinforces a neoliberal world-view.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> For more on time-space compression under late capitalism, see David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity*. Harvey argues that, beginning in the 1970s, the advanced capitalist world moved towards practices of “flexible accumulation:” employers from advanced capitalist nations are able to move freely through labor markets across the globe, often hiring labor on short-term bases and rapidly de-skilling and re-skilling labor in the process. Capitalism’s global movement creates a sense of the shrinking of distances – a phenomenon that Harvey refers to as the “compression of space”—along with a change in the “time horizons” for capitalist operations—a phenomenon Harvey refers to as the “compression of time.” This flexible accumulation has brought about “uneven geographical development,” argues Harvey, and has overwhelmingly worked in favor of the advanced capitalist economies (210). It has entailed an increase in monopoly capital, the weakening of labor contracts, the lowering of wage levels and job security, and higher rates of exploitation, especially of women workers.

<sup>2</sup> Discussion about the decline of U.S. industrial towns and worry about the survival of the U.S. as a major economic power were staple material within mainstream journalism. Articles such as the following from the *New York Times* were fairly common during the early 1980s: K. Arenson’s “On the Frontier of a New Economics” considers fresh solutions to the economic stagnation brought on by “the perils of Pittsburgh and Detroit, the ascendancy of Japan and Germany and the paltry growth of productivity in the United States during recent years” (31 Oct. 1982). P. Kilborn’s “The Twilight of Smokestack America” (8 May 1983) asks, “Can the West survive if the United States forsakes the production of steel and becomes a nation of insurance companies and fast-food restaurants?”

<sup>3</sup> According to Geoffrey Parker, “Since the end of the Cold War, the terms ‘globalization’ and ‘world order’ have become an integral part of the discourse on the nature of the international scene. The re-introduction of the term ‘world order’ was particularly associated with President George Bush, who spoke of the necessity to construct a ‘new’ order at a time when, in the wake of the Cold War, world order was clearly breaking down. Since then the terms ‘international order’, ‘new international order’ and even ‘new world order harmony’ have entered the international discourse. The idea of a ‘new’ order presupposes the existence of a previous ‘old’ order, and the Cold War is implicitly considered to have fulfilled this role” (72).

<sup>4</sup> The discourse of globalization matures and gains currency in the company of parallel discourses, such as “the end of history,” that theorize the fate of the post-Cold War world. Fukuyama’s end of theory thesis celebrates the collapsing of temporal boundaries; in a similar manner, globalization theorists’ claim the breakdown of *spatial* boundaries.

<sup>5</sup> According to Scholte, “‘Globalization’ first entered a dictionary (of American English) in 1961” (14).

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<sup>6</sup> The term “global war” was prominently revived in recent years with the U.S. government adopting the phrase “global war on terror,” to refer to its military exploits in the Middle-East in the aftermath of September 11, 2001.

<sup>7</sup> Marshall McLuhan’s theorization of the “global village” could be considered a precursor to contemporary theories of “globalization.” Like contemporary theorists of globalization, McLuhan observed the growing interdependence among nations and imagined a world that had been rendered borderless owing to the spread of mass communication.

<sup>8</sup> The earliest use of “globalization” within the *New York Times* is in an article by Soma Golden from 31 Dec. 1974 titled, “Grappling with Multinational Corporations”: here economists are quoted as using the term to discuss the implications of increased foreign expansion by the U.S. corporate sector.

<sup>9</sup> *New York Times* articles from the business pages speak about “globalization” as a new “buzzword” in the securities industry. On 1 April 1986 James Sterngold writes, “Ungainly terms such as ‘internationalization’ and ‘globalization’ have been security industry buzzwords for more than a decade, nebulous phrases about a future that many sensed would push the frontiers of Wall Street as far as telephone lines could stretch.”

<sup>10</sup> Consider these *New York Times* articles that symptomatize a growing trend of speaking of globalization as an “age” or “era”: Federtoronto, Barnaby, J. “Unfinished Business with Canada” (8 October 1989); Ostry, Bernard. “The Risks in Going Global” (31 Dec. 1989).

<sup>11</sup> See Friedman, *The World is Flat*.

<sup>12</sup> Here I borrow from *Culture and Society*—Raymond Williams’ groundbreaking effort to map, through changes in language, the transformations occurring in British social reality with the onset of the industrial revolution. Williams describes the way that the use of the term “culture” evolves— from “culture of something” to “culture as such, a thing in itself” (xvi). Williams proposes that this change in the use of “culture” reflects a movement in its meaning from “the ‘tending of natural growth’” to “a whole way of life, material, intellectual and spiritual” (xvi).

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Friedman, “The Revolt of the Wannabes.” *New York Times*, 7 Feb. 1996: A19

<sup>14</sup> Thomas Friedman, “Turkey Wings It.” *New York Times*, 17 July 1996: A23.

<sup>15</sup> When the East Asian financial crisis takes place in late 1997, Friedman is at his most defiant in countering opposition to globalization. In “Excuse Me Mohamad,” for instance, Friedman ventriloquises the response of U.S. secretary of state, Robert Rubin, to a talk delivered by Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohamad at a World Bank meeting in Hong Kong. Mohamad had railed against “globalization” and against powerful Western nations in this talk and had called financiers like George Soros, “morons.” Friedman’s response (in Rubin’s voice) is as follows:

Excuse me, Mohamad, but what planet are you living on? You talk about participating in globalization as if it were a choice you had. Globalization isn’t a choice. It’s a reality... And the most fundamental truth about globalization is this: *No one is in charge, you moron!* ... The global market today is an electronic herd of anonymous stock, bond and currency traders, sitting behind computer

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screens...But when you [Malaysia] started to break the rules by overspending, the herd sold you out. (29 Sept. 1997)

Friedman's exclamation, "No one is in charge," like his coinage "the electronic herd," reinforce the sense that globalization is an autonomous force generating its own effects rather than reacting to the authority of a superpower.

<sup>16</sup> Thomas Friedman, "14 Big Macs Later..." *New York Times*, 31 Dec. 1995: F9

<sup>17</sup> In fact, Friedman frequently disavows U.S. imperialism. In "Excuse me Mohammad, for instance, he suggests that the U.S. is not a "great power" that controls and dictates rules of world trade but is simply an exemplar of free-market globalization. Friedman suggests that states should learn from the United States how to govern well and protect themselves from the "shocks" that are bound to occur along the way, as part of the growth processes of "emerging markets."

<sup>18</sup> Waugh wrote, "I do not expect to see many travel books in the near future. Never again shall we land on foreign soil with letter of credit and passport...and feel the world wide open to us" (qtd. in *Tourists with Typewriters* 1).

<sup>19</sup> The idea of a "renaissance" of travel writing has been expressed in diverse contexts. A *New York Times* article by Mary Lee Settle from March 22, 1987 argues, "To give the lie to the idea that travel has ceased, and there is only tourism, there has been a renaissance in travel writing" ("Through Jungle and Ice by Armchair"). Two decades later, in a 2006 publication called, *The Global Politics of Contemporary Travel Writing*, Debbie Lisle refers to "the modern 'renaissance' of travel writing," arguing that it was "inaugurated by Paul Theroux's *The Great Railway Bazaar: By Train Through Asia*" (2). Lisle demonstrates the publishing industry's embrace of travel writing in recent years by noting that, "six major publishing houses established new lines dedicated specifically to travel writing at the end of the 1980s" (19).

<sup>20</sup> In *Tourists with Typewriters*, Patrick Holland and Graham Huggan offer another plausible reason for "the boom in travel writing": [T]hose same globalizing processes that have helped make the world more accessible have also arguably made it less exciting, less diverse. The travel literature industry... has been quick to cash in on Westerners' growing fears of homogenization, promoting its products as thrilling alternatives to the sanitizing spectacles of mass tourism" (2).

<sup>21</sup> Although he agrees with Huntington that the world is being pulled apart by cultural conflict, Kaplan also opposes some of Huntington's claims, by showing, for instance, how there is fighting not only between civilizations but also within civilizations; yet, he argues that "Huntington's civilization clash is an appropriate term—as a crude organizing principle" (271).

<sup>22</sup> Kaplan refers explicitly to Lawrence Sterne's 1768 travel account, *A Sentimental Journey: through France and Italy*: "I would not be so naïve, I told myself. Mine would be an unsentimental journey" (11). Here, of course, Kaplan misreads the 19<sup>th</sup> century use of the term "sentimental."

<sup>23</sup> In a footnote to the diplomat's quote, Kaplan explains his reference to the "Wreck of the Medusa": "The diplomat was referring to an early-nineteenth-century French shipwreck, whose survivors were ravaged by starvation..." (4). What Kaplan avoids mentioning, ironically, is that the Medusa was wrecked on the shores of North

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Africa. In many ways, the wreck can be seen as a moment that exposed the horrors and vulnerabilities of the French colonial project.

<sup>24</sup> Harvey speaks of how “Think-tanks, such as the Heritage Foundation, the Hoover Institute, the Center for the Study of American Business, and the American Enterprise Institute, were formed with corporate backing both to polemicize, and when necessary, as in the case of the National Bureau of Economic Research, to construct serious technical and empirical studies and political-philosophical arguments broadly in support of neoliberal policies” (*Neoliberalism* 44).

## Chapter Two

### Public Memory, Private Justice: Testimony and Human Rights in Post-Apartheid South Africa

If the increasing dominance of neoliberal solutions to political-economy led to the consolidation of new linguistic categories like globalization, then it also led to the transformation of existing notions of human rights. This chapter explores the ways in which the language of human rights is articulated with neoliberal notions of privatization and individual autonomy, as South Africa reinvents itself as a new nation in apartheid's aftermath. Examining testimonials from the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), in conjunction with literary and cinematic re-framings of these testimonials, I reveal the tensions created by the imperative to remember systemic violence in terms of private wounds.

East London, South Africa, April 16, 1996: At an early hearing conducted by the Human Rights Violations Committee of the South African TRC, Commissioner Domisa Ntsebeza welcomes the witness, Mrs. Feziwe Mfeti, wife of disappeared anti-apartheid activist, Phindile Mfeti:

[W]e would like you to know that today the people of South Africa and the whole world would like to hear you, perhaps for the first and the last time [-] how your life has been, being the wife, the lover, the partner of a man, who almost a decade away, just disappeared from the face of the earth. These people who are gathered here and the whole world will be watching your testimony. We would like you to tell in your own words what it has been like, your hopes an[d] your despairs, your moments of encouragement if there had been any and your moments of disappointment. [Y]our high notes and your lowest ebbs, all the emotions that have gone through your body in this decade or so, during which you have had to come to terms with the reality that you will never see your husband again. And therefore I would like you to be relaxed, to know that this is your moment to tell us in your own words how your life has been in these last harrowing, almost ten years....Now I will ask you questions and I hope

that when you reply your story will unfold. ....[T]ell us about yourself, who are you, where did you grow up, where did you go to school, where did you meet with this Mfeti, what do you remember about him, what is it that makes you feel very angry when you think about him...and tell us about the first day hearing about his disappearance...tell us about your feelings.<sup>1</sup>

Commissioner Ntsebeza's opening remarks ready the witness to testify by making her understand that "the whole world" is her audience. A forum for formerly silenced witnesses like Ms. Mfeti to "tell in [their] own words" about their intimate experiences of marginalization and dehumanization under apartheid, the public hearings organized by the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee became emblematic of South Africa's transition from a condemned and isolated apartheid state into a legitimate member of the international human rights community.

The commissioner's welcoming words are additionally significant in that they reveal the TRC's expectations about how confessional narratives about apartheid's human rights violations might "unfold." The commissioner makes explicit what is implicit throughout the hearings—the fact that the narrative conventions of literary genres like memoir and testimonio are internal to the TRC's mode of eliciting and guiding testimony. Indeed, internalized conceptions of the conventions of these genres mediate the workings of the TRC and shape our understanding of apartheid's history. We see the influence of the Latin American testimonio,<sup>2</sup> for instance, in the ways that Commissioner Ntsebeza prompts the witness to disclose her "hopes," despairs, "moments of encouragement," or "disappointment," her "high notes" and "lowest ebbs," as well as "all the emotions that have gone through [her] body." In a strikingly similar manner, the testimonio of Nobel Peace Prize winner, Rigoberta Menchu, opens with her declaration that "there have been many very bad times, but yes, moments of joy as well" (1). If

testimonios typically move from accounts of a witness's early life to the present, balancing stories of injustice and oppression with "moments of joy" and personal triumph, then this structure of unfolding is also implicit in the TRC's questioning of witnesses. Moreover, just as testimonios might include emotionally-charged episodes of violence or trauma as key turning points for the subject's development, Commissioner Ntsebeza isolates a key moment—"the first day hearing about his disappearance"—and invites the witness to tell us about the feelings that this moment triggered in her. In other words, the truth about apartheid emerges out of this interaction between the witness's words and commissioners' internalized understanding of the conventions of testimonial and autobiographical writing. Ntsebeza's opening remarks draw our attention to the role commissioners played in guiding and shaping testimonies into narratives of personal trauma that served the promotion of South Africa as a new nation and, in the words of the Commission, "human rights culture."

The South African TRC exemplifies the rise of human rights-based truth commissions at a time when human rights emerges "as the privileged mode of addressing human suffering" (Schaffer and Smith 2). A product of the political negotiations between the African National Congress (ANC) and the National Party (NP) that brought an end to apartheid, the TRC was set up shortly after the 1994 election of President Nelson Mandela. Like the truth commissions of Chile, Argentina, and El Salvador on which it was based, the TRC served as an important means of legitimizing and establishing the democratic credentials of a new government.<sup>3</sup> However, while these prior truth commissions gave blanket amnesty to authoritarian regimes, the ANC government opposed the apartheid regime's demand for blanket amnesty and negotiated that amnesty

would be granted only to individual “perpetrators” who could prove at the amnesty hearings that they acted for “political” (and not personal) reasons. In addition, the ANC government negotiated that “victims” of rights violations would be allowed a public forum (the Human Rights Violations Committee hearings) to tell the stories of their oppression under the apartheid regime. The language of “victims” and “perpetrators” was therefore crucial to the political negotiations that took place in the aftermath of apartheid. Through this language, moreover, the TRC conveyed the post-apartheid government’s commitment to race-neutrality in its consideration of those responsible for, and those who suffered from, apartheid’s human rights violations.

In addition to taking “more statements than any previous truth commission in history (over 21,000)” (Wilson 21), the TRC has also inspired a host of literary and cinematic representations, thereby contributing to a proliferation of what Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith refer to as “life narratives.” According to Schaffer and Smith, the end of the twentieth century, and especially the 1990s, were marked by a surge in the commodification and popularity of life narratives—which include a range of genres from “oral and written testimony that bears witness to human rights abuse; to published narratives that unfold as retrospective, ethnography, confession, memoir, testimonio, letters, journals, recorded oral history; to autobiographical and semi-autobiographical fiction that adheres to some invocation of historical events or persons” (7). In their view, this worldwide appeal of life narratives, many of which “tell of human rights violations,” is closely related to the simultaneous rise of “human rights as the privileged mode of addressing human suffering” (2).<sup>4</sup> In fact, in recent years, “life narratives have become one of the most potent vehicles for advancing human rights claims” (1).

In what follows, I analyze life narratives produced by and about the TRC. In the first part of this chapter, I closely analyze selected testimonies delivered before the TRC's Human Rights Violations Committee and reveal how the Commission molded witness's words into narratives of rights violations that a) emphasized the performance and display of physical or psychological trauma and b) encouraged a narrative arc from innocence to traumatic experience and cathartic release.<sup>5</sup> This mode of storytelling—and its structure of empathetic identification—cued local and international audiences to read the state-sanctioned violence of apartheid in terms primarily of physical and psychic wounds suffered by particular victims as a result of the actions of individual perpetrators of violence. While these hearings provided a forum for the first public acknowledgement of apartheid's injustices committed against black South Africans, the mode of narration that was privileged limited the TRC's capacity for addressing apartheid's institutionalized violence. Although the TRC acknowledged individual acts of racism, its adherence to a race-neutral narrative of individual rights violations obscured the systemic racism of apartheid's discriminatory policies and practices.<sup>6</sup>

In the second half of this chapter, I turn to literary and cinematic representations of TRC hearings. My analysis of *Country of My Skull* (1999) — an experimental memoir by Afrikaner poet Antjie Krog— focuses on its selection and incorporation of excerpts from TRC testimonies. I show how Krog's use of testimony fragments produces a picture of apartheid that overwhelmingly emphasizes acts of physical brutality committed by both the NP and the ANC. Simultaneously, the process of addressing apartheid's violence is treated as requiring the public confession of private guilt and forgiveness. If a confessional trend dominates much post-apartheid cultural production, this confessional

trend has at least in part been inspired by the centrality of the TRC in the post-apartheid South African imagination and its promotion of an individualistic model of confession, catharsis, and reconciliation.<sup>7</sup>

But while Krog is self-conscious about the limits of forgiveness and reconciliation, John Boorman's cinematic adaptation of Krog's text is less so. *In My Country* (2004) stages an interracial romance between a guilt-ridden, white South African woman (Juliette Binoche) and an African-American man (Samuel L. Jackson) — both of whom are journalists covering the TRC—thereby symbolically enacting reconciliation between whites and blacks and between South Africa and the rest of the world. I analyze the film's portrayal of TRC testimonials and its structure of empathetic identification. By emotionally involving viewers in a dynamic between the trauma of black subjects, the guilt of white subjects, and the moral failure of individual perpetrators of violence, post-apartheid films like *In My Country* at once acknowledge apartheid's brutalities and occlude its practices of racial and economic segregation. I argue that Boorman's representation of the TRC cues audiences to understand apartheid primarily as a moral conflict between black and white, good and evil. Indeed, the film tells apartheid's story as a story of – what David Theo Goldberg calls—“racisms without racism.” Goldberg argues that in the era of neoliberalism, the emphasis on moral failure and individual accountability makes it increasingly difficult to hold governments responsible for systemic injustices and violence. Life narratives produced by the TRC as well as by post-apartheid films like *In My Country* exemplify how an individualizing discourse of human rights obscures the institutionalized racism caused by laws and policies of an imperialist regime.

This chapter throws light on the problems raised by the addressing of apartheid's systemic violence through performances of private suffering and guilt. In fact, the oral, written, and cinematic narratives that I analyze are symptomatic of a global climate in which the discourse of human rights comes to be articulated with notions of privatization and autonomous individuality. Speaking of the parallel trajectories of neoliberalism and human rights discourse in the present conjuncture, David Harvey notes,

Neoliberalization has spawned within itself an extensive oppositional culture... The rise of opposition cast in terms of rights violations has been spectacular since 1980... Human rights issues came to prominence after 1980 and positively boomed after the events in Tiananmen Square and the end of the Cold War in 1989. This corresponds exactly with the trajectory of neoliberalization, and the two movements are deeply implicated in each other. Undoubtedly, the neoliberal insistence upon the individual as the foundational element in political-economic life opens the door to individual rights activism. But by focusing on those rights rather than on the creation or recreation of substantive and open democratic governance structures, the opposition cultivates methods that cannot escape the neoliberal frame. (*Neoliberalism* 175-176)

Harvey thus suggests that as neoliberalism in the political and economic realm emphasizes privatization and the withdrawal of the welfare state, an individualizing conception of social justice—one oriented around protecting the bodily and property rights of individuals—becomes dominant. Using Stuart Hall's concept of articulation—meaning “both ‘joining up’ (as in the limbs of the body, or an anatomical structure) and ‘giving expression to’” (“Race, Articulation” 328)—we might say that in the contemporary conjuncture, human rights discourse has come to be articulated with neoliberal values of privatization, individuation, and deregulation. Deriving the concept of articulation from Althusser's original formulation, Hall deploys it to propose a new theory of race and racism. The concept of articulation allows Hall to conceive of race as having relative autonomy from class. Hence, race is not reducible to ‘the Economic’ or merely an expression of economic relations, but nor is it independent of class. Rather,

Hall argues that in modern, racially-structured social formations, race and racism are articulated with class hierarchies.

Hall also suggests that “[dominant ideology] succeeds to the extent that it articulates ‘different ideologies to its hegemonic project by an elimination of their antagonistic character’” (“Race, Articulation” 335). Hall’s understanding of ideology is helpful in making sense of human rights discourse in the era of neoliberalism: human rights and the neoliberal vision of privatization and state withdrawal are relatively autonomous. However, as neoliberal thinking becomes hegemonic, it articulates even potentially oppositional ideologies such as human rights to its economic and political project. Truth commissions, of which the South African Truth Commission is a preeminent instance, exemplify this articulation of human rights with neoliberal thinking. In the South African case, the TRC testimonies and their literary and cinematic representations exemplify the ways in which a race-neutral discourse of individual rights becomes articulated with the neoliberal vision of privatization and individual autonomy.

While the TRC hearings and its subsequent representations gave a voice to many who had hitherto been silenced and marginalized, a restricted notion of human rights violations and the rigidities of an attendant mode of storytelling separated out systemic injustices into particular acts of injury carried out by individual perpetrators, thereby obscuring the colonial project of apartheid’s institutionalized discrimination. I should emphasize, however, that in critiquing contemporary human rights discourse and its attendant modes of narrative, my aim is neither to abandon human rights as a means of achieving social justice nor to suggest that this discourse always results in shoring up individual autonomy and in obscuring structures of racial inequality. Rather, I wish to

show how in the wake of a global turn towards privatization and individual rights activism, the TRC's use of human rights discourse reinforces a growing tendency to think of oppression and social justice in terms of private suffering and reconciliation between individuals. The TRC hearings— and their representations— are hence fertile ground for understanding the challenges confronted by rights-based social justice struggles in the era of neoliberalism. To move beyond the neoliberal paradigm would require insisting on not only political and civil but also economic rights— and demanding justice not just for individuals but also for communities.

#### Individual Rights and Race Neutrality in the South African Truth Commission

Although the idea of human rights is by no means new,<sup>8</sup> since the 1980s human rights has emerged as the dominant language through which social justice claims have come to be articulated world over. As Lynn Hunt explains, “During the 1950s and 1960s, the cause of international human rights took a backseat to anticolonial and independence struggles” (206). While the United Nations sanctioned the Universal Declaration of Human Rights in 1948, it was not until the 1980s and 1990s that human rights discourse became globally dominant, encouraging a model of social resistance based in the empowerment of individual citizens.

Since the end of the Cold War the necessity and universal appropriateness of a rights-based conception of social justice has been propagated through the language of “globalization.” Discourses of globalization and universal human rights are often jointly invoked and rhetorically and ideologically complement one another. Often, the fact of globalization is used as the basis for promoting a universalistic human rights approach.

For instance, within the field of international relations, analysts argue that “in an increasingly globalised world, we need universal standards that are based on the idea that we are human beings first and citizens second” (Chandler 89). What is happening in the field of international relations is an index of how, more generally, in the post-Cold War climate, arguments in favor of universal human rights are premised on and sustained through claims about the “globalized” nature of our world. In fact, in the midst of the 1990s euphoria about the fall of the Iron Curtain, discourses of human rights and globalization came to be jointly invoked to legitimize capitalist dominance and to signify a so-called “new world order.”

But if human rights discourse has sometimes served as a mask for promoting the idea of a ‘new world order’, it has also featured prominently within the liberalizing projects of formerly authoritarian regimes. The 1980s and 1990s saw human rights emerge as the language of political compromise within conflict-ridden nations. Richard Wilson notes that truth commissions have been “one strand of the globalization of human rights” in recent years (xviii): “In democratizing countries of Latin America from the mid-1980s and Eastern Europe from 1989, the language of human rights emerged as a universal panacea to authoritarianism” (xv). Extra-legal mechanisms set up by newly liberalizing regimes, or within states transitioning from authoritarianism to liberal democracy, human rights-based truth commissions soon became the norm for nations undergoing political transitions and wishing to establish their legitimacy by signaling a break from their authoritarian pasts. As Patricia Hayner points out, “A Truth Commission can play an important role in transition, either by affirming a real commitment to change in the human rights practices of a government and respect for the rule of law in the

country, or by helping to legitimize or strengthen the authority and popularity of a new head of state or both” (608). Between March 1992 and late 1993, six truth commissions were established in various parts of the world. Typically, truth commissions are set up by national governments (though they could be set up by the U.N. or by opposition parties) and tend not to prosecute or hold trials, although their findings could be used in a court of law. Moreover, they all tend to legitimize new regimes by performing and theatricalizing power. As Wilson notes, “truth commissions are transient politico-religious-legal institutions which have much more legitimizing potential than dry, rule-bound and technically-obsessed courts of law” (20). The performative aspect of human rights-based truth commissions helps to secure the power of new democratizing and liberalizing governments and to advertise internationally these governments’ commitment to liberalism and democracy.

A discourse of individual rights figured prominently within negotiations between the ANC and NP—negotiations that culminated in the end of apartheid rule and the emergence of a democratic South Africa. As Wilson notes, “rights talk was indeterminate enough to suit the programs of both the NP and ANC, who came together to form a power-sharing agreement. The ascendancy of human rights talk thus resulted from its inherent ambiguity, which allowed it to weld together diverse political constituencies” (Wilson 6). When the new government was sworn in in 1994, a race-neutral rights discourse continued to be essential in bringing the ANC in agreement with the Left parties: a human rights agenda indicated to the Left the government’s commitment to social and moral justice, for it signaled that the ANC had not abandoned this goal in its compromise with the white elite and embrace of their vision of free markets and

privatization. Simultaneously, “The prospect of a political order based upon human rights reassured the business elite since they practically demanded a liberal political economy” (Wilson 6).<sup>9</sup>

By the late 1980s, in light of an emerging crisis of capital overaccumulation within its borders, the apartheid government had embraced neoliberal policies of increased privatization that favored the existing, white-dominated business elite. When, in 1994, the apartheid regime was formally terminated and Nelson Mandela’s ANC, supported by the Congress of South African Trade Unions and the South African Communist Party, came into power to form the Government of National Unity (GNU), the apartheid regime’s neoliberal policies were not discontinued, leading many to criticize the “elite character of South Africa’s 1990 political transition” (Bond 7).

According to Ian Taylor,

[T]he ANC moved its politico-economic policies from a populist and vaguely socialist platform that held out a tacit promise for nationalising the means of production and which would have helped to facilitate the construction of a historic bloc that at least held out the potential for redressing the inequalities of the past, to that of a fiercely pro-capitalist framework...that sits well within the remit of the ongoing hegemonic order. The evolution of the ANC’s economic policies culminated in the government’s macroeconomic plan, the Growth, Employment and Redistribution (GEAR) strategy, which was released in June 1996. (38)

The ANC thus abandoned its nationalization objectives and instead embraced the global trend towards neoliberalization through its adoption of GEAR, a set of policies that discouraged state spending on the grounds that it was an obstacle to economic growth and instead actively encouraged privatization and the loosening of financial controls.<sup>10</sup> In setting up GEAR, the ANC and its “policymaking elite” learned how to appeal simultaneously to Leftist groups as well as to white South African capitalists oriented towards privatization and global markets. One of the key discourses that allowed the

ANC to appease Leftists as well as capitalists was the discourse of human rights. Nelson Mandela's government thus strategically deployed the perceived political neutrality of human rights to reconcile opposing political interests.

The formation of the TRC marked the continuation of this strategic deployment of a race-neutral discourse of human rights. In the immediate post-apartheid period, South Africans actively sought out models from other nations—especially Chile, Argentina and El Salvador—that had been through similar processes of political transition in recent years. In February 1994, a conference set up by NGOs entitled 'Justice in Transition: Dealing with the Past' was organized in order to assess models for South Africa's transition from apartheid to democratic government (Christie 81). In a second conference by the Justice in Transition project, international delegates with experience setting up truth commissions in their respective countries were invited (Christie 82). However, while some of these prior truth commissions gave blanket amnesty to the perpetrators of human rights violations, the South African TRC was clear in its intention to provide amnesty only on condition of full disclosure during public hearings.

The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act No. 35 of 1994 (passed into law on 16 December 1995) lay the legal foundation for the TRC as a body designed to record individuals' experiences of apartheid's human rights violations with the eventual goal of bringing about reconciliation between so-called "victims" and "perpetrators" of apartheid. The Act named 3 committees—for amnesty, human rights violations, and reparation and rehabilitation—that were supposed to conduct separate hearings and to produce a final public report on their findings. As many of the commissioners repeatedly declared, the TRC's goal was to show that the new South

Africa was a “human rights culture.” Indeed, Commission chair, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, and Vice Chairperson, Alex Boraine, used this phrase frequently in their public addresses at the start of TRC hearings. Moreover, the Commission’s final recommendations, printed in its *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, similarly emphasized that, “For reconciliation to have any chance of success, it is imperative that a strong human rights culture be developed” (5: 308, paragraph 14).

An exemplary instance of how human rights-based truth commissions became integral to transitioning states, the TRC allowed ordinary people—both whites and blacks— to express publicly their grief and suffering, thereby exposing the hitherto unacknowledged violations committed under apartheid and enabling the nation to transition to a culture of liberal democracy. Numerous public hearings were held in crowded halls all over the country and were often dramatic and emotionally-charged affairs with victims crying or crowds collectively chanting and praying. Televised, aired on radio, as well as translated into all of South Africa’s eleven official languages, these public hearings displayed the nation’s negotiation with its oppressive past. The intended audience—as evidenced by Commissioner Ntsebeza’s welcoming remarks to Feziwe Mfeti—was not only the commissioners but also the public—both those physically present in the room as well as those watching and listening within South Africa and abroad. In fact, the weekly television series *TRC Special Report* rarely cut from victims giving testimony to shots of the commissioners; rather, cutaways focused on anonymous spectators in the audience, many of whom listened to the hearings via headphones that translated the proceedings into all of South Africa’s languages (Cole 10). In this manner,

the post-apartheid South African state relied upon the international legitimacy of human rights discourse to support its nation-building efforts.<sup>11</sup>

The *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* is explicit about how the political negotiations between the ANC and the apartheid regime took place in an international context marked by the centrality of human rights discourse. According to the *Report*, "...the negotiations that would bring apartheid and political conflict to an end and herald the introduction of democracy in South Africa...took place within an international framework, which increasingly emphasised the importance of human rights and the need to deal with past human rights violations." (1: 50, paragraph 8). But in addition to the language of human rights, the TRC also relied on a number of already available and popular discourses to promote its idea of truth-telling for reconciliation. On the one hand, it drew on the Christian discourse of confession and forgiveness. The commission as a whole emphasized the virtues of confession, while Archbishop Desmond Tutu, in particular, spoke often of the need for victims of human rights violations to forgive perpetrators who confessed, expressing his belief that those who were most victimized were also the most willing to forgive. On the other hand, the TRC drew on the African notion of *ubuntu* or "reciprocity"—the belief that "a human being is a human being through other human beings"—to promote its model of restorative, as opposed to punitive, justice. These notions of confession, forgiveness, and *Ubuntu* were thus interwoven into the TRC's particular brand of human rights discourse and were crucial in legitimizing the truth commission's project in South Africa and beyond.

In its attention to violations committed by individual perpetrators against victims, the TRC also adopted a race-neutral discourse. The ANC-led government set up the TRC

in a manner that acknowledged acts of violence perpetuated by both the apartheid government as well as by the Inkhata Freedom Party (the military wing of the ANC) and other oppositional groups. On the one hand, this acknowledgement of acts of violence committed by both sides resulted in the recognition that victims and perpetrators of violence could be white, black, or colored. On the other hand, however, this race-neutral approach made it harder to address apartheid's systemic targeting and dispossession of communities of color. In other words, its adoption of a race-neutral approach obscured the fundamental power differential structuring relations between groups in South Africa.

The TRC's adoption of a race-neutral discourse of human rights was also part of a broader global trend in the era of neoliberalism towards "color-blind" ideology.

According to scholars of race like Charles Mills, if liberalism has historically always been a "racial liberalism" in which rights, duties, and the notion of the social contract have all been racialized, then we are now "in a 'color-blind' phase of the contract and of racial liberalism...[in which] the long history and ongoing reality of exploitative non-white-to-white transfer [is] obfuscated and occluded by individualist categories and by a sense of property rights in which white entitlement is the norm" (1394). Although it was by no means designed to further white entitlement, the South African TRC's posture of race-neutrality exemplifies this contemporary tendency toward obfuscation and occlusion of histories of systemic racial exploitation and dispossession. For the TRC's race-neutral discourse of victims and perpetrators suggested that apartheid consisted primarily of acts of violence committed by some *individuals* against others.

### Molding Testimony into Narratives of Rights Violations

The goal of the Human Rights Violations Committee hearings was to identify and uncover the truth about “gross human rights violations” committed under Apartheid.

According to the Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act of 1995, which legislated the establishment of the TRC, a gross human rights violation was defined as,

the violation of human rights through-

- (a) the killing, abduction, torture or severe ill-treatment of any person; or
- (b) any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command or procurement to commit an act referred to in paragraph (a), which emanated from conflicts of the past and which was committed during the period 1 March 1960 to the cut-off date within or outside the Republic, and the commission of which was advised, planned, directed, commanded or ordered, by any person acting with a political motive.

This definition of “gross human rights violations” overwhelmingly emphasized discrete acts of physical brutality committed under the apartheid regime. Thus poverty and economic hardship, for instance, created by apartheid’s marginalization of non-white communities, could not be condemned as “gross human rights violations” while the torture and killing of individuals could.<sup>12</sup>

In his astute analysis of the language of the TRC’s mandate, Mahmood Mamdani has shown how, in defining “victims” and “perpetrators” of apartheid in individualistic terms, and in limiting its understanding of “gross human rights violations” to acts of bodily violence or the destruction of private property, the TRC could not address the violence caused by “the policies of apartheid”—policies that, for instance, forced the displacement, and restricted the movement, of entire communities on racial grounds. In Mamdani’s words,

Though it acknowledged apartheid as a ‘crime against humanity’ which targeted entire communities for ethnic and racial policing and cleansing, the Commission majority was reluctant to go beyond the formal acknowledgement. The Commission’s analysis reduced apartheid from a relationship between the state and entire communities to one

between the state and individuals. (33-34)

Mamdani shows how apartheid had its roots in a bifurcated legal system that treated differently “non-natives” (or whites) and “natives”—governing the former group via a rights-based “civil” law system while splintering the latter group into a number of ethnic tribes, each ruled by its own “customary” laws. Instead of seeing this bifurcated legal system as foundational, however, the Truth Commission treated it as merely the “context” for understanding “gross human rights violations” committed against individuals under the apartheid regime.<sup>13</sup> Building on Mamdani’s analysis I show how, in addition to its limited understanding of the meanings of “victim,” “perpetrator” and “gross” human rights violations, the TRC’s molding of testimonies into *testimonio*-like narratives of personal trauma led to an official retelling of apartheid’s story in starkly individualistic terms.

The testimonies I am about to analyze were delivered by black women from the Crossroads township near Cape Town. Both these testimonies illustrate how the TRC molded witnesses’ accounts into narratives of rights violations that emphasized particular, trauma-inducing acts of brutality committed by the apartheid police against specific individuals. While testimonies by anti-apartheid activists— or wives of activists such as Feziwe Mfeti and the widows of the “Cradock Four”— feature prominently in the TRC’s portrayal of itself as well as in academic and critical discourse about the hearings, testimonies by ordinary black women have been relatively ignored. Moreover, while the widows of the famous Cradock Four, were given “‘showcase’ status by the Commission” (Moss 95) and allowed to speak at length, the testimonies I discuss here have the witnesses speaking for no more than a few sentences at a time before being interrupted

and led by the commissioner. These testimonies are hence especially illustrative of the role commissioners played in shaping witness accounts into narratives of personal trauma.

The first testimony I analyze is by Nomatise Evelyn Tsobileyo, who spoke at a Human Rights Violation Committee hearing held in Cape Town on April 24, 1996. Ms. Tsobileyo was shot at by the police and incurred a number of injuries, including in her vagina, when she was protesting against the apartheid government's forceful relocation of residents like herself out of the Crossroads township. Vice chairperson of the TRC, Alex Boraine, presided at the hearing and Advocate Ntsebeza, who also questioned Ms. Mfeti, was the interrogator.

As in the case of Ms. Mfeti's testimony, the commissioners played an important role in guiding Ms. Tsobileyo as she testified. The testimony transcript opens with welcoming remarks by chairperson, Alex Boraine: "[W]ell just remember that you are amongst friends and we want to help you to tell your story [;] and Advocate Ntsebeza, Commissioner [,] will help you do just that, and I hope that you will find telling your story is going to be of great help to you as well as to the Commission[.]" Chair Boraine's comments are interesting in terms of how they subtly cue the witness to understand the limits and parameters of her testimony. In Boraine's welcoming remarks, Ms. Tsobileyo is constructed, first, as someone who needs help to tell her own story, and second, as someone who is going to help the commission. Moreover, her interests are presented as being in alignment with the TRC's even before her testimony can be heard. From the beginning, then, Ms. Tsobileyo's testimony is framed to fit the terms of the Commission. Following Boraine's statements, Advocate Ntsebeza provides yet another frame—a

historical frame—for Ms. Tsobileyo’s story, using information provided by the TRC’s research department. He declares: “[T]his is yet another of those stories that have become so too familiar and that took place or events of which took place in the Western Cape here. And the period is 1985, and that was a period of great conflagration in the communities here.” Ntsebeza then proceeds to provide what he calls “background” for Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony, by drawing on the TRC’s research department report:

This particular instance was when they [the apartheid government] had decided that large communities of people should be removed from Crossroads, Guguletu[,] to Khayelitsha[,] a waste land about 50 kilometres from Cape Town... When the people resisted...the apartheid machinery answered in the only way they knew how [–] by unleashing their killing machine on a protesting public. Yet again people had to die, people had to be mangled, people had to be injured in pursuit of a mad indefensible police. Nomatise’s story is an illustration of that madness for which unfortunately the cost again was very high. She’ll show you injuries that she sustained, horrifying injuries; but there are injuries which she will not be able to show you, because of the delicate place where they are located. [T]he human mind sometimes becomes innovative in very perverse ways and...some of the ways the torturers express[ed] themselves was to go for the genitals of victims.

Thus before we hear Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony, we are prepared to see it as an “illustration” of apartheid, which is described as “madness.” Although Ntsebeza informs the audience about the forced removal and displacement of Crossroads residents to Khayelitsha (Xhosa for “new home”), in interpreting apartheid as a “madness”—as something brutal yet not rational— and in treating Ms. Tsobileyo’s physical “injuries” as emblematic of apartheid’s high “cost,” Ntsebeza foregrounds the bodily injuries incurred in the process of apartheid’s forced displacement of black communities. Moreover, the underlying causes of apartheid’s violations are characterized as being largely mental—attributed to “madness” or, as Ntsebeza later adds, “perversities” of “the human mind”—while the effects of these violations are depicted as being primarily physical, necessitating the visual display of injury (“She’ll show you injuries that she

sustained...”), or references to unseen wounds (“there are injuries which she will not be able to show you...”). Although the Commissioner’s comments acknowledge the segregationist policies of apartheid, they relegate these policies to the status of “background” for the injuries caused by a “mad indefensible police.”

After having provided the audience with information about the conflicts at Crossroads, Commissioner Ntsebeza then addresses the testifier and says to her, “Nomatise now I am going to speak Xhosa with you [;] I am going to ask you to please bear with me, your pain is our pain as well. We hope that by your coming here today, the lump that you have in your throat all this time, is going to melt away.” By emphasizing that her pain was the Commission’s pain as well, Ntsebeza implies that the TRC’s interests are aligned with the victim’s and that therefore testifying would be a cathartic experience for her. At each stage of the hearings, but certainly in his introductory remarks, we sense an effort to remind the victim (and the audience) of the TRC’s viewpoint and agenda and to include her within this agenda.

When he begins questioning the witness, Commissioner Ntsebeza asks her about the motivation for the riot at Crossroads during which she was injured. He asks if she was “satisfied with the place [she was] already living in,” clarifying that she was being sent “to a place where [she] didn’t want to go,” where “there were not even proper houses that time,” and where if people go and live there, they were being thrown there.” In this manner, the Commissioner invites us to see the riots as legitimate forms of protest against the forced displacement and violation of citizens’ freewill. Ms. Tsobileyo verifies that her injury was incurred during a protest march that she and her “comrades” had organized “to complain about the forced removals.” Commissioner Ntsebeza further legitimizes this

protest march by asking the witness to confirm that she and her friends were unarmed and that nobody told them that what they were doing was illegal. Then the rest of his questions turn toward ascertaining the details about the shooting incident and establishing this incident as the primary violation being investigated.

When describing how she was shot by the police Ms. Tsobileyo says simply, “I saw one boer only to find that he also saw me, he shot at me.” When Commissioner Ntsebeza intervenes to ask the witness where she was shot, she replies, “He shot me on my left arm-leg. Then I fell.” Ms. Tsobileyo then describes how difficult it was for her to get medical care and how she was interrogated by the police even when she was in pain. Following a brief series of questions on Ms. Tsobileyo’s treatment and recovery, the commissioner returns us to the moment of confrontation between Ms. Tsobileyo and the policeman who shot her: “Now let’s go back, let’s go back to the *scene* of where you were shot. Did you two see each other at the same time, you and this white policeman?” (emphasis added). By reframing Ms. Tsobileyo’s narrative in terms of important “scenes” of violence, Commissioner Ntsebeza controls the victim’s narrative and presents her story as if it were a performance involving a dramatic confrontation between victim and perpetrator. His questions and interventions inform us of what the TRC considers important scenes and players. In this way, Ms. Tsobileyo’s story is translated into the terms of the Commission, broken up into different scenes, which in turn are ranked in terms of importance and organized according to cause and effect. In effect, Commissioner Ntsebeza constructs a dramatic narrative out of Ms. Tsobileyo’s responses, one that emphasizes violations of the witness’s freewill and bodily integrity.

After a while of questions and answers, Commissioner Ntsebeza then moves the victim to show us her wounds: “Could you please show the Archbishop and the Commission your scar on your leg. That isn’t the only place where you got injured is it?” Ms. Tsobileyo’s scar is called upon to give her story credibility as a legitimate case of human rights violations. Moreover, in light of the absence of visual evidence for the injuries to Ms. Tsobileyo’s vagina, the scar on her leg is displayed as a way of compensating for that which cannot be shown and talked about. The visual (and its absence) is called upon to give weight and further credibility to Ms. Tsobileyo’s verbal account. Wounds—both seen and unseen—are thus privileged in this narrative, the raw materials of which are supplied by Ms. Tsobileyo, but the framing and shaping of which is carried out by Commissioner Ntsebeza.

In his closing comments, Chairperson Boraine thanks Ms. Tsobileyo and asks her to “please have forgiveness in you. We hope that you will be healed spiritually and physically.” At this point, Commissioner Ntsebeza intervenes with a final question: “Can I just ask one question I just remembered [?] We didn’t ask you sister because of your pain now, is there anything that you would like the Commission to help you with [?]” In response to this question, Ms. Tsobileyo declares, “Seeing that I am not working and I have four children, only my husband is working and he doesn’t pay much. Seeing that the commission can see how I am [,] I would appreciate it if [it] can do something for me.” In framing Ms. Tsobileyo’s story as that of a victim of physical (and spiritual) pain, the TRC relatively marginalizes her reality as a poor woman suffering injuries beyond the bodily realm. In fact, throughout her account of how she was shot by the apartheid police,

Ms. Tsobileyo talks simultaneously about her physical pain and the financial difficulties she faced in trying to get medical care:

On the first day of my treatment I told [the hospital] I don't have more money to keep coming back. So I asked them to give me a free ticket for the bus. Nobody answered me there, so that was the last time I went for that treatment. From there I went to Kwa-Noxolo Clinic where I - I use[d] to pay R0,50 and sometimes I wouldn't have the R0,50 and I [would] stay at home then.

In this way, Ms Tsobileyo's account reminds us of how, for her, the shooting incident and its aftermath included memories of not only the physical pain but also the financial hardship she suffered. Her account brings to light the problems with separating out or disembedding physical injury from witnesses' experiential accounts of apartheid's many injustices.

While the Commissioner frequently intervenes to ask the witness follow-up questions to clarify the violation of her freewill and bodily integrity, he does not inquire further into her financial difficulties. In response to Ms. Tsobileyo's request for assistance, Commissioner Ntsebeza poses the following questions: "About your children, are they at school?" and "So you have intentions that your children should go to school [?]" Commissioner Ntsebeza's intervention subtly legitimizes Ms. Tsobileyo's plea by suggesting that she is asking for money for her children's education. Just as he intervened to legitimate Ms. Tsobileyo's protest—to show that this protest was understandable given that it was in response to the state's violation of citizens' freewill—here, too, there appears to be a need to present the witness as a sympathetic "victim" who is deserving of reparations given her desire for the welfare of her children. Ms. Tsobileyo's plea for economic assistance nevertheless challenges the notion that the pain of bodily injury is

the ultimate example of apartheid's violence. Indeed, it reminds us of the lingering injuries of apartheid, injuries that lie beyond the personal and bodily realms.

### Molding Testimonies into Trauma Narratives

Ms. Tsobileyo's testimony makes explicit how apartheid policies were treated as "background" within the context of the TRC hearings. For the victims, however, apartheid's dispossessions were more than merely the background for violations committed against their bodies and properties; in fact, attending to the dialogic interaction between witness and commissioner reveals the gap between the commissioner's and the witness's understandings of apartheid's human rights violations.

This gap in the witness's and the commissioners' understandings of rights violations was also tied to a discrepancy in their understandings of emotional and affective aspects of traumatic experience. The testimony of Ms. Nokiki Gwedla, which I will next discuss, reveals the problems inherent in the TRC's attempts at eliciting visible emotional responses to acts identified as human rights violations. Also a resident of the Crossroads community to which Ms. Tsobileyo belonged, Ms. Gwedla testified about the police's shooting and disabling of her son Albert Kopolu, or Zongisile, in November 1985, only a few months after Ms. Tsobileyo was shot. Although both mother and son were present at the hearings, Ms. Gwedla spoke on her son's behalf because—as Commissioner Pumla Gobodo explained— he “wasn't quite comfortable... being [t]here.”<sup>14</sup>

Before Ms. Gwedla begins speaking, Commissioner Gobodo sets up a frame for her testimony by reading from a TRC research department report about police offensives

in the Crossroads community around the time of Zongisile's shooting. As she informs us, "In late November 1985 local security forces began to go on the offences in Crossroads and surroundings, squatter camps with crime prevention rates, signaling the beginning of a long pursuit...The shooting occurred during what was called a crime prevention operation in the squatter camps." Commissioner Gobodo then begins her questioning by asking Ms. Gwedla about what her son was like before the shooting: "First mamma could you please tell us...what kind of a child was Zongisile before this accident?" To this query, Ms. Gwedla responds, "He called me to Cape Town and he was a good child [;] he was working." Gobodo follows up with a series of questions, about "what kind of a role...he play[ed]," and if he "support[ed]" [Ms. Gwedla] in any way." In response to the question about whether her son supported her, Ms. Gwedla replies, "He dropped out of school and then he had to go and look for work. Now when I heard [of] this heart condition that I have, he told me to come and join him. I stayed with him for two weeks, the third week – on the third week he was shot." Here Commissioner Gobodo interrupts Ms. Gwedla: "Yes mamma we will get there, but now seeing that Zongisile called you to come to Cape Town [,] that shows us that he really took care of you, is that correct?" In this way, gently nudging Ms. Gwedla to return to earlier points, to emphasize particular details, or to reflect on what her statements "show us," Commissioner Gobodo encourages the witness— who seems inclined to move onward— to slow down and slowly build up her story. The Commissioner then sums up the first part of Ms. Gwedla's testimony with, "In other words mamma your life was being taken care of by Zongisile?"

Having established that Ms. Gwedla's life was "being taken care of by Zongisile" prior to his wounding by the apartheid regime, Commissioner Gobodo then leads the witness to recount a moment of transition in her narrative:

MS GOBODO

Now when did that change?

MS GWEDLA

All that changed when he was shot

MS GOBODO

Now your roles were reversed [,] now you had to take care of him?

MS GWEDLA

Yes.

In speaking to the witness about the "roles" that she and her son played, Commissioner Gobodo introduces Ms. Gwedla as well as the audience to the vocabulary the TRC uses in responding to testimonies. Having set us up to read the rest of Ms. Gwedla's account as the consequence of Zongisile's shooting, Commissioner Gobodo then directs the witness to return to and fully describe the moment of transition: "Mamma please take us back to November when this incident happened. Just tell us how you see this[.] [W]hat happened [?] [G]ive us a description of all this." Ms. Gwedla responds by recounting mundane events from the morning of the shooting. When she describes how she received news of her son's shooting, she mentions merely that a girl "called Nomsa arrived at home[;] [s]he told me that come your son doesn't know how to speak anymore, he has been shot. This girl took me with a Kombi[;] that time I didn't even know this places, [s]he took me to the sit, I saw him, yes he was shot." In this matter-of-fact manner, Ms. Gwedla describes the moment that Commissioner Gobodo has been setting up as a

“turning point.” When she gets to the shooting, she—like Ms. Tsobileyo before her—says plainly, “I saw him, yes he was shot.”

Just as she once slowed the witness down, Commissioner Gobodo intervenes at this point to try to get the witness to express emotions related to the traumatic incident—in this case, the shooting of her son: “Please mamma [,] tell us [,] what did you feel [?] What did you see when you saw him [?]” When Ms Gwedla continues with recounting other mundane details, Commissioner Gobodo persists: “It’s all right mamma [,] you don’t have to be worried, we understand that you have to go through this pain again. If you want us to wait mamma[,] yes we will.” In this way, by overtly referencing the witness’s “pain,” the Commissioner invites the witness to emote as she tells her story. Having set up a frame as well as a narrative arc for Ms. Gwedla’s trauma narrative, Commissioner Gobodo now attempts to direct the witness to display her feelings about her son’s shooting—the event that the Human Rights Committee of the TRC identifies as the primary human rights violation and that Commissioner Gobodo re-frames as the original traumatic experience.

When Ms. Gwedla continues— describing her wait at the hospital where her son was being treated— her account becomes confusing, causing Commissioner Gobodo to pose clarifying questions such as, “Excuse me mamma [,] Zongisile was now in hospital, you saw Zongisile sleeping in - in hospital [?]” But Ms. Gwedla’s account remains confusing. She starts talking about how the police came looking for another man, not for Zongisile, at which point Commissioner Gobodo again interjects: “Mamma let’s talk about Zongisile, let’s leave the other one. About this policeman you called Barnard who came in, when he - this Barnard said he is - is he the one who shot Zongisile?”

Commissioner Gobodo thus encourages the witness to restrict her account to her son, excluding the other victims to whom Ms. Gwedla refers; moreover, in asking Ms. Gwedla about Barnard, the Commissioner also tries to get Ms. Gwedla to identify a main perpetrator of the act of violence committed against her son. In this manner, Commissioner Gobodo tries to restrict the scope of Ms. Gwedla's testimony to the confrontation between a single victim and a single perpetrator—and to thereby clarify Ms. Gwedla's fragmented and disconnected story.

No matter what the question, Commissioner Gobodo fails to get Ms. Gwedla to speak with affect about her immediate reaction on seeing her son injured. The witness relays plainly her account of what happened in the aftermath of the shooting incident—how her son temporarily lost his capacity to speak, how he had bullets in his head, and how he became unable to work since his right arm was limping. However, when describing her son's condition in the present moment, Ms. Gwedla begins finally to emote:

He has changed in every regard. Even now he is too weak [...] [Y]ou could talk to him now and all of a sudden he will just get angry. Sometimes I can't even have a peaceful sleep because he doesn't come back at night. The problem now is everybody who wants to bully anyone, they bully my son, even my husband left because he...couldn't stay with a[n] abnormal child like this one...He is even disgusting when he is eating.

For the first time in her testimony, Ms. Gwedla displays the emotion that Commissioner Gobodo had been encouraging her to express in relation to the shooting of her son. Ms. Gwedla's response attests to what trauma theorists like Cathy Caruth would call the inherent "belatedness" of the witness's response to a traumatic event. Moreover, her response suggests that the shooting incident did not have primacy for her over other incidents and experiences. We can read Ms. Gwedla's emotional response to her son's

present state as evidence of the fact that, for her, apartheid's oppression could not be contained within, or expressed through, a single event or incident that occurred in the past. While the Commission's mandate limited the hearings to considering "conflicts of the past"—and to treating all that lay beyond the moment of violence or the moment of confrontation between victim and perpetrator as less central to the witness's testimony—Ms. Gwedla's account reminds us that essential to the traumatic experience is "its refusal to be simply located ... [and] its insistent appearance outside the boundaries of any single place or time" (Caruth 9). This testimony is evidence of the challenges faced by Commissioners in their attempts at restricting apartheid's trauma to localized, past incidents involving confrontations between victims and perpetrators.

Responding to Ms. Gwedla's unprecedented emotional frankness, Commissioner Gobodo comments, "As you are explaining this mamma it looks like there are other things that affected you." To this Ms. Gwedla replies, "There are many things my child that are affecting me." Commissioner Gobodo's statement about the "other things" affecting Ms. Gwedla suggests that, according to the TRC, emotional responses not directly connected to the shooting incident—or to acts identified as primary human rights violations—are "other" than, or tangential to, what is assumed to be the core of the witness's traumatic experience. What this narrow understanding of trauma obscures, however, is that for Ms. Gwedla, the loss of family, the shame of having an "abnormal" child, and the burden of economic hardship are all interconnected and constitutive of apartheid's trauma. While Commissioner Gobodo's acknowledgement of "other things" suggests a realization of their conflicting approaches to trauma, it nonetheless also

reinforces the TRC's prioritization of "gross" violations—such as shootings and killings—over "other" elements of the witness's experience.

Continuing to speak of the "other things" that are affecting her, Ms. Gwedla confesses that "Even in this Commission I told myself that I wish that he was dead, I would be happy if he was dead, but now I have to work and I have to [take] care of such an old man. But sometimes when I am alone it becomes too much for me." As she has done throughout the witness's testimony, Commissioner Gobodo intervenes at this point with, "It is obvious mamma that *this incident* had really put a heavy load on your shoulders because at the beginning you were being taken care of by your son, but all of a sudden now you have to take care of him and yet you are already now too old" (italics mine). Ms. Gwedla's wish for her son's death seems to threaten the clarity of the TRC's victim/perpetrator binary, for rather than directing her feelings towards the "perpetrators" of the crime that left her son disabled, she turns her emotions towards her own son. Commissioner Gobodo's move to bring us back to the prior "incident" of violation, rather than to Ms. Gwedla's present feelings about her disabled son, serves to reorganize the story so that victim and perpetrator remain clear and distinct categories and the shooting incident is at the top of the narrative's cause-and-effect chain. In these ways, Commissioner Gobodo's interruptions and promptings organize and control the narrative logic of the story and, in the process, elide Ms. Gwedla's alternative understanding of her experience.

Such instances, where victims' statements challenge the TRC's expectations, can be read as revealing the silences inherent in the TRC's understanding of apartheid's trauma. Not only does the TRC presume a narrow definition of apartheid's trauma (one

focusing on the physical and psychic brutality of particular incidents of violence), it also expects there to be a uniform mode of testifying about this trauma. By prompting the witness to narrate her story such that the shooting incident would occupy the place of the causal, traumatic incident, apartheid's oppression is localized and framed in terms of individual wounds or injuries that result out of a confrontation between witness and perpetrator. The result of this narrative framing of testimony, this molding of testimony according to the conventions of trauma narratives, is to limit our understanding of witnesses' experiences of apartheid's violence. This notion of a singular form of truth-telling conflicts with the multiple ways in which individual victims tell their stories.

Ms. Gwedla's testimony suggests that although the TRC's public hearings allowed citizens' voices to be heard, they at the same time also limited witness accounts— by forcing them to fit into a narrative framework that contained apartheid's trauma within particular incidents of rights violations. Moments such as when Ms. Gwedla expresses a desire for her son's death could be read as instances of resistance against the TRC's attempt to mould testifiers into innocent victims of rights violations and into good mothers and national subjects. Commissioners Ntsebeza's and Gobodo's interruptions reveal how human rights discourse requires and imagines an ideal, sympathetic rights bearer and victim of violations. However, the witness must be steered, directed, and guided in order for her to perform the picture of innocent victimization that is expected of her.

Throughout both testimonies, moreover, the power differential between witness and commissioner is glaringly apparent. For instance, at one moment during her testimony, Commissioner Gobodo asks Ms. Gwedla to state when she found out that her

son still had bullets in his head. But to this request Ms. Gwedla replies, “No I don’t know because I’m not educated.” Commissioner Gobodo persists, “Please mamma estimate was after the 1985 incident?” But Ms. Gwedla responds, “All I know is that it’s been 10 years since he has been injured.” As is often the case in her testimony, the witness’s response suggests an alternative to the TRC’s mode of keeping track of time as well as an alternative framework of priorities and ways of recounting experience.

### Dialogic Dynamics and Autonomous Individuality

Ms. Gwedla’s case reveals the limits of representing testimony solely through victims’ words; for the pattern of exchange between witness and commissioner—that which is often erased in representations of these testimonies—is equally, if not more important. Both Mark Sanders and Joseph Slaughter have called attention to the dialogic dynamics of the TRC hearings—so that testimonies are seen as products of a dialogue rather than as first-person narratives. For Mark Sanders, this dialogism is reminiscent of the collaborative nature of *testimonio*. In his words,

The Commission acts, so to speak, as an engine of "transference." In assuming responsibility, not for anything it may itself have done, but for the responsibility of others, the Truth Commission operates as a clearing house for responsibility. In the "transference" engaged in relation to the victim, the Commission, through the questioner, assumes responsibility not only for what a perpetrator has done but, in certain cases, also for the responsibility of the witness for one who has died." ("Truth, Telling, Questioning" 16-17)

In portraying the TRC as a “clearing house for responsibility,” Sanders offers us a powerful image of the TRC’s posture towards the “victims” of apartheid. By standing in for the perpetrators of apartheid, the TRC commissioners enable the “transference” of which Sanders speaks. However, my reading of testimonies suggests that if the TRC

assumed responsibility for acts of violence committed under apartheid, it was able to do so by individualizing the oppressions of apartheid or by addressing apartheid's "crime against humanity" through acts of mostly bodily violence directed against particular individuals. In other words, its assumption of responsibility for apartheid had limits: while the TRC stood in on behalf of the apartheid state for acts of torture or arson and physical violence, it was less able to accept responsibility for the "other things," (as Commissioner Gobodo put it) that constituted apartheid's system of legalized and institutionalized racism.<sup>15</sup>

Like Sanders, Joseph Slaughter acknowledges the dialogic dynamics at play in the TRC hearings. Moreover, he points out that "the dialogic dynamics of the TRC produced generic conventions for testimony and narrative truth that, like all public spheres, excluded certain kinds of stories and personal experiences even as the commission promoted an ideal of an all-inclusive community of speech" (144). My reading suggests that the "certain kinds of stories and personal experiences" excluded were those that spoke of violations having an impact beyond the private or individual realm. In other words, the TRC's method of shaping testimonies into trauma narratives revolving around particular human rights violations gave birth to an autonomous, individualistic citizen-subject who was awarded rights based on this perceived, autonomous individuality. If the TRC can be seen as a "clearing house for responsibility" or as an "engine of transference," then this is precisely because the victims are defined as individuals in narrow ways and the violations of apartheid are limited to acts of violence committed against bodies and private property. The testimonies of Ms. Tsobileyo and Ms. Gwedla call attention to the limits of the TRC's acceptance of responsibility for

apartheid as a result of its discourse of individual rights.<sup>16</sup> By emphasizing violations of bodily integrity and individual freewill, and by attributing these violations to moral corruption or psychological perversity, the HRVC hearings could only tangentially address the economic violence caused by apartheid's mass displacement and dispossession of communities of black South Africans.

Re-framing TRC Testimonials: Antjie Krog's *Country of My Skull*

Popular culture texts emerging out of South Africa's transition from apartheid to liberal democracy reproduce the TRC's account of apartheid's history when they, too, emphasize bodily and psychic wounds as well as confrontations between individual perpetrators and victims. In what follows, I discuss Afrikaner poet Antjie Krog's memoir and representation of the TRC hearings, *Country of My Skull*, in conjunction with *In My Country*, a cinematic adaptation of Krog's text. Both of these texts received a considerable amount of attention within as well as outside South Africa; moreover, both of these texts contain traces of and references to Ms. Tsobileyo's testimony which I will analyze.

Literary scholars like Schaffer and Smith have analyzed the role played by literature and culture in making hegemonic human rights discourse at the end of the twentieth century. They point out that while a "memoir boom" has certainly occurred in English-speaking countries (from Australia to Jamaica, from England to South Africa) and also in some European countries (such as France and Germany), there has equally been a boom in personal narratives elsewhere in the world (13). In their view, this memoir boom has been triggered by global transformations brought about by prolonged

civil wars (involving mass genocide in a number of places including Rwanda, Bosnia, Cambodia, etc); an evolving global culture of rights in which personal witnessing plays a central role; the global dispersal of ideas of trauma and trauma theory within the human rights movement; and the establishment of a market for trauma narratives initiated by the commodification of Holocaust narratives in the post-World War II period. Alongside the popularity of memoir and testimony, they call attention to the increasing popularity of related genres such as the postcolonial bildungsroman (“the story of education into and for national citizenship, [which] explores the possibilities for and constraints limiting the decolonization of subjectivity in postcolonial worlds” (28)), testimonio (“the recorded and transcribed testimony of indigenous and/or poor peoples, bear[ing] witness to collective struggles against massive state violence and oppression” (15)) and “coming out” narratives. In other words, as the human rights movement brings personal and confessional writing into the forefront, simultaneously, this confessional writing makes into common sense the language and discourse of human rights.

While remarking on how truth commissions have emerged since the 1980s as “preferred mechanism(s) to effect political change in situations of political impasse and to deal with a past characterized by atrocity and injustice” (330), Anthea Garman notes that this rise in truth commissions has been accompanied by “a notable rise in autobiographical and confessional literature” (330). In part, this proliferation of confessional literature includes book reports of the truth commission findings and testimonies. For instance, *Nunca Mas* (1984), the book report of Argentina’s truth commission (investigating the military’s actions during the Dirty War of 1975-1983), became a bestseller in Argentina and elsewhere in the world. Similarly Brazil published

its own *Nunca Mas*, called *Brasil: Nunca Mais*, which “climbed to number one on the country’s best-seller list” (Hayner 652). In the South African case, radio and television reportage on the TRC as well as the production of a number of literary and cinematic works based on the TRC led to the proliferation of testimonial narratives.<sup>17</sup> In analyzing *Country of My Skull*—an internationally renowned, English-language memoir and account of the TRC proceedings by the Afrikaner poet, Antjie Krog—I attend to how Krog’s text deploys TRC testimonials within a confessional narrative about white guilt and shame in the aftermath of apartheid. Part journalism and part memoir, Krog’s text oscillates between excerpts from witness testimonies presented before the TRC and her own confessions of guilt and longing for forgiveness. In fact, the American edition of the book is subtitled “Guilt, Sorrow, and the Limits of Forgiveness in the New South Africa.”

Although an international bestseller, *Country of My Skull* has invited mixed responses. Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith credit Krog’s memoir for revealing the “complexities of witnessing to another’s suffering through an ethics of recognition” (78). Similarly, Mark Sanders reads Krog’s text as enacting “hospitality” towards witnesses by “mak[ing] itself host to testimony” (“Truth, Telling, Questioning” 14). On the other hand, the book has also been criticized for instrumentalizing and appropriating the testimonies of black South Africans. For instance, Sarah Ruden among others has criticized Krog’s treatment of the testimony of the illiterate farmer, Lekotse, as “postmodern appropriation of testimony” and as “yet another white invasion” that robs the witness of his experience and dignity (Whitlock 25). Similarly, Laura Moss takes issue with the fact that the book uses black witnesses’ testimonies in ways that erase their specificity. She contends that Krog’s “montage” or layering of her voice over the voices of testifiers, means that “the

actual voices of the victims of Human Rights abuses sometimes get lost among the emotions of “Antjie” as various versions of the narrator-reporter overcome a sense of guilt and a recognition of complicity” (90). While prevailing critiques have tended to emphasize the ethics of Krog’s incorporation of black voices in her narrative about white guilt, my concern here lies with how, by excerpting and juxtaposing testimonies, Krog constructs a narrative about apartheid that foregrounds individual acts of physical brutality while obscuring the systemic nature of apartheid’s oppression.

South Africa already has a long tradition of confessional writing that predates the circulation of post-apartheid memoirs like Krog’s. Following the establishment of the apartheid system in 1948, “personal narratives, smuggled out of the country or written in exile, kept knowledge about State violations of human rights in circulation, supplementing and adding personal immediacy to news reports” (Schaffer and Smith 58-59). With the rise of the Black Consciousness Movement in the 1980s, more black and colored writers produced first person narratives that served the struggle within South Africa in addition to motivating international activism. Prominent examples of life narratives from this period include Elsa Joubert’s semi-fictionalized biography *The Long Journey of Poppie Nongena* (1978) and Mark Mathabane’s *Kaffir Boy* (1986). With the end of apartheid, new kinds of narratives emerged, as the TRC’s project of eliciting witness testimonies “became the foundational event symbolizing the transition from apartheid to the post-apartheid State” (Schaffer and Smith 65).

The aftermath of apartheid also saw the proliferation of first person accounts, often by major political figures like Nelson Mandela [*The Long Walk to Freedom* (1994)], and Desmond Tutu [*No Future Without Forgiveness* (1999)]. Moreover, oral

testimonies emerging out of the TRC hearings became the subject of a number of books and films produced in the confessional mode. In 1999, shortly after the truth commission hearings had ended, Antjie Krog, who had been covering the hearings for the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC) under the name of Antjie Samuel, published her account of the Commission. *Country of My Skull* tells the story of Krog's personal journey as a white Afrikaner forced to confront her upbringing and her privilege as she encounters the testimonies of thousands brutalized by the apartheid regime. Krog's first-person narrative moves chronologically from the beginnings of the Human Rights Violations Committee hearings to their termination; and it includes within it fragments of testimonies, bits of poetry, as well as interviews with psychologists, commissioners, and academics. For the most part, Krog's narration is based on her actual experiences of reporting on the TRC; yet, some parts are fictionalized. For instance, Krog mentions in her postscript that she invents a character—known as the “beloved” —with whom the protagonist, Antjie, has an affair. We learn about how the intense experience of bearing witness to others' trauma leads Antjie to feel increasingly alienated from her husband and family. The “beloved” character functions as a substitute, an “other,” with whom the protagonist can communicate about what she learns and feels as she listens to testimonies about rape, torture, murder, and other acts of brutality committed by the apartheid government.

Krog's book is the winner of many awards. Moss notes that Krog won the

1999 *Sunday Times* Alan Paton Award for nonfiction, the Booksellers Award for the book they liked to sell most, as well as several journalism awards internationally for her coverage of the TRC...*Country of My Skull* is an international best seller and is noted on one South African promotional website to be “the” book to read about South Africa. (Moss 88) <sup>18</sup>

Gillian Whitlock also points out that “Krog's book has been one of the most successful carriers of ... testimony outside of South Africa—what else could bring TRC testimony to M LA conventions on a regular basis, for example, or to curricula of undergraduate courses in autobiographical writing beyond South Africa?” In Whitlock’s view, “*Country of My Skull* has met with international recognition because it performs the destabilized and contingent subjectivities of contemporary postmodern autobiography so well, and because there is a market for trauma writing” (25). The international success of *Country of my Skull* has made Krog into an expert of sorts on truth commissions and nations in transition. Krog has been invited to lecture in a number of universities and other settings worldwide; for instance, she was “invited to speak for the South African transition and to other similar situations (such as Rwanda where she led the English session at a conference on ‘Writing as a Duty of Memory’ in June 2000) in a number of arenas” (Garman 330). Anthea Garman concludes that,

It is then, as the voice of what can only be described as a ‘confessing witness’ that Krog has emerged as an unusual, perhaps unique, form of expert on the TRC process...Krog simultaneously operates in South Africa and internationally as a particular kind of intellectual purveyor of symbols and values around the recent phenomenon of commissions of confession” (331).

Krog begins *Country of My Skull* by describing early debates about the formation of the TRC, focusing especially on Afrikaner resistance to South Africa’s transition to democracy. The text alternates between public and private, between the narrator’s reporting on the meetings about TRC draft legislation and descriptions of her time spent among her family members at their Free State farm house, thereby establishing that the book is at once memoir and reportage. The book’s opening chapter titled, “They Never Wept, The Men of My Race,” sets her up as a white Afrikaner women taking stock of her

role, and the role of her fellow Afrikaners, in perpetuating apartheid. She is introduced to us as both an insider and an outsider to the story she is telling; for she is at once implicated in the violence of apartheid and yet also set apart from the legacies created by “men of [her] race.”

For the most part, Krog quotes from testimonies without providing us much information about witnesses and the incidents to which they testify. In a few instances, however, Krog overtly analyzes and interprets TRC testimonies. For instance, she analyzes fragments from the much-discussed and replayed testimony of Nomonde Calata.<sup>19</sup> Mrs. Calata’s eruption into loud wailing was repeatedly played on television and radio all over South Africa and came to be seen as an index of apartheid’s suffering and as an emblematic moment of the TRC hearings. Many commissioners, including Archbishop Tutu, have spoken of Mrs. Calata’s wail as “the defining sound of the TRC.”<sup>20</sup> Krog discusses Nomonde Calata’s testimony by staging a conversation with a Professor Kondlo, a Xhosa intellectual from Grahamstown who wants to “take the tale of Nomonde Calata and make a comic out of it” (51). Through this dialogue with Professor Kondlo, Krog provides us with two perspectives to the much-discussed testimony of Mrs. Calata. The professor and Krog play the testimony on tape and comment on sections from it. Krog represents the back and forth between herself and the professor, often without demarcating who says what. At the moment when Mrs. Calata’s bursts into loud crying, one of them comments,

For me, this crying is the beginning of the Truth Commission—the signature tune, the definitive moment, the ultimate sound of what the process is about. She was wearing this vivid orange-red dress, and she threw herself backward and that sound...that sound...it will haunt me for ever and ever...When the hearing resumed, Tutu started to sing the Zulu anti-apartheid protest hymn, ‘Senzeni na, senzeni na...What have we done? What have we done? Our only sin is the color of our skin.’ I was at a meeting

once where ANC leaders rejected this song because it perpetuates the idea of being a helpless victim. But when it was sung this morning, I cried with such a sense of loss and despair I could hardly breathe... (57)

The repeated playing of Mrs. Calata's cry allows the TRC to put forth its nation building narrative. In Krog's text, this picture of black female suffering—although presented through a back-and-forth between Krog and the Professor—reinforces the emblematic status of the grieving black woman and enables Krog's narrative of white guilt.<sup>21</sup>

Early on in her account of the TRC proceedings in *Country of My Skull*, Krog comments on the fact that the majority of "victims" who testified were women. Audiences were getting used to the fact that witness after witness was a woman, typically a mother or a wife of someone who was murdered or disabled under the apartheid regime. Speaking of this recurring presence of female testifiers, Krog writes,

She is sitting behind a microphone, dressed in beret or kopdoek and her Sunday best. Everybody recognizes her. Truth has become Woman. Her voice, distorted behind her rough hand, has undermined Man as the source of truth. And yet. Nobody knows her. The truth and the illusion of truth as we have never known them. (74)

Krog seems to acknowledge here how women came to be identified with "truth" and how there was a misrecognition implicit in this process of identifying women with the truth. She moreover suggests that this overwhelming presence of black female testifiers was largely misunderstood, misused and deployed for its symbolic value. When she writes that "Truth has *become* Woman," Krog implies that the truth was not only the content of the women's testimonies but also the public's misrecognition of the testifier and her words. In other words, Krog calls attention to how truth is not an absolute but rather is something that is constructed in the public imagination.

As her account progresses, however, Krog's use of the notion of truth becomes increasingly problematic. She titles a later chapter of *Country of My Skull* "Truth is a

Woman (emphasis mine).” While the previous version of this statement emphasized how truth was “becoming” woman—through women’s acts of testifying but also the public’s acts of interpreting their testimonies and making them into emblems of the truth commission—here truth is personified as a woman. In other words, “truth” and “woman” are more easily conflated and identified with one another in this later moment of the text. The rest of this later chapter of Krog’s text then includes a number of excerpts from women’s testimonies, highlighting mainly acts of rape, violence against women’s body parts, and other forms of physical oppression directed against women. If the TRC, with its focus on shootings, rapes, torture, etc. as evidence of “gross human rights violations,” tended to emphasize the “facts” of apartheid’s violence towards the body, here Krog reinforces the TRC’s tendency by physicalizing apartheid’s oppression and containing the story of this oppression within the realm of the private and the bodily.

One of the testimonies Krog excerpts in her chapter, “Truth is a Woman,” is that of Nomatise Tsobileyo. Juxtaposed with Tsobileyo’s narrative, we read a number of testimony excerpts that are largely about women’s experiences of rape, police brutality, imprisonment, and torture. The excerpt from Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony appears after the testimony of a black woman who suffered gendered violence in ANC prison camps and before another testimony-fragment in which a woman testifies to being the victim of gendered acts of police brutality. In other words, Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony is used to support Krog’s exploration of cases of women who were the targets of gendered violence committed during the apartheid years. If the TRC emphasized shootings, rapes, torture, and other physical brutalities as evidence of “gross human rights violations,” then Krog’s text reinforces the TRC’s tendency to physicalize apartheid’s oppression and to treat

bodily violence—especially violence committed against women’s bodies— as emblematic of the “truth” about apartheid. Moreover, since, like the TRC itself, Krog’s chapter focuses on individual acts of violence, both the ANC and the apartheid government appear as perpetrators of this violence.

Unlike most of the excerpted testimonies that figure not just in this chapter but throughout Krog’s text, the excerpt from Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony stands out for not being a smooth first-person account but rather a constant back and forth between the witness and the Commissioner. Krog does not comment on this excerpt, however. Moreover, Krog’s excerpt ends with Ms. Tsobileyo declaring that “some of the bullets are in my vagina,” and “These bullets were—these were the first bullets that were shot at me. He shot directly there.” Krog thus frames Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony within a broader narrative of gendered violence and female suffering, understood primarily as bodily suffering. Like the TRC hearing itself, Krog’s excerpting and juxtaposition of Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony obscures the economic violence to which the witness gestures, as well as the implied tension between her plea for economic assistance and the TRC’s interest in constructing a narrative that foregrounds spectacular violence. Rather than calling attention to the back and forth between witness and commissioner, Krog frames the testimonies of Ms. Tsobileyo and other female victims of apartheid’s gender violence as a series of related “facts” about black female suffering, understood primarily as bodily suffering.

If the TRC provided one kind of frame to Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony, then Krog’s text provides a second. Krog’s excerpting, re-positioning, and re-framing of Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony within the context of her narrative about apartheid’s gendered

oppression suggests that the recognition of black suffering is gained at a cost—of the erasure of the socio-economic and political conditions that constituted apartheid. Moreover, Krog's juxtaposition of Ms. Tsobileyo's testimony alongside other female testimonials emphasizing bodily violence foregrounds the "factual" rather than the constructed nature of testimony. As a result of obscuring the dialogic dynamics by which women like Ms. Tsobileyo were constructed as victims of apartheid's violence, Krog reinforces the tendency to see apartheid and women's vulnerability in predominantly physical terms.

Much of the literary criticism on Krog's book focuses on the ethics of its incorporation of testimonies of black South Africans. Laura Moss critiques Krog's book for turning testimonies into allegories for the nation: "Krog simplifies the testimony of the victims as she repeatedly turns their individual stories either into singular metaphors or extended allegories" (90). Like Moss, Simon Lewis finds problematic Krog's allegorization of the testimony of Nomonde Calata. This allegorization of testimony leaves us with little knowledge "about the flesh and blood woman," argues Lewis (39). If Lewis believes that Krog's technique erases the corporality of the witnesses whose testimonies she transcribes, then Gillian Whitlock fears that Krog's book invites an all too easy empathetic identification with individual witnesses. In fact, for Whitlock, Krog's book raises the challenges of "listen[ing] to these narratives without moving inappropriately to an empathetic identification" (26). According to Whitlock, Krog's text exemplifies the problems that arise with the "commodification of subaltern testimony." As she puts it, "These questions about the commodification of subaltern testimony have

proliferated in Australia, in Canada ... and in South Africa. When testimony travels beyond its community of origin, it almost inevitably becomes damaged goods” (25).

On the other hand, Schaffer and Smith credit Krog for her delicacy in handling others’ stories. They compare Krog to trauma theorists who understand the intricacies of bearing witness to the trauma of others: “Like Elaine Scarry, and Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, Krog attests that testimony depends on the address to the other. If the Commission served as proxy perpetrator for victims during the hearings, standing in for the past, Krog positions herself in the text as a proxy for listeners to whom ‘truth’ is addressed” (77). If, as Mark Sanders argued, the Commission functioned during the Human Rights Violations Committee hearings as a “clearinghouse of responsibility” and as an “engine of transference,” then, according to Schaffer and Smith, Krog replicates the commission’s ethics by modeling herself into the kind of ideal listener of testimonies. Also drawing on Sanders, who reads Krog’s text as enacting “hospitality” towards witnesses by “mak[ing] itself host to testimony,” Shane Graham argues that “what [Krog] has set out to do is to create a form in which victims can be allowed not only to ‘speak for themselves’—what Sanders calls an ‘ethics of advocacy’—but to do so in a way that recreates or dramatizes the disjunctures and displacements of trauma” (27).

Literary critics have thus raised the question of whether Krog’s incorporation of testimony is a form of hospitality towards witnesses or whether it amounts to a colonialist incorporation of subaltern voices. My concern here has been not with determining whether or not the subaltern is allowed a voice in Krog’s text. Rather, my interest lies in how Krog’s text privatizes the story of apartheid’s suffering. If the notion of bodily injury is at the heart of the Commission’s framing of witness testimonies, then the white

subject's guilt and desire for forgiveness is crucial to Krog's re-framing of testimonies of black South Africans as public expressions of private suffering. Although intended to recognize black subjectivity after the dehumanization of apartheid, the individualization and performance of black suffering ironically deflects attention from the structural conditions that produced this suffering.

### Representing Testimony and Memoir: The Cinema of the Truth Commission

If the Commission, and literary works on the Commission like Krog's text, shaped testimonials as human rights narratives, then radio, television and filmic representation of the hearings produced yet another type of narrative frame for TRC testimonies. Audio-visual representations foregrounded the spectacle of TRC hearings, building on the Commission's own likening of its proceedings to Greek theater. The TRC, in fact, became a media spectacle in which sensationalistic aspects of victims' testimonies—bodily, injury, and visible human emotions— were played up and emphasized, while the underlying opposition between witness and perpetrator was explicitated and dramatized. If in the previous sections I have looked at how the molding of testimonies into narratives of human rights violations put forth the idea of a “new” South Africa, then in this final section, I will explore how the dramatization of hearings within cinematic representations of the TRC legitimize not only the post-apartheid nation, but also the perspective of a remorseful white South African subject, on the global stage.

A number of films—fiction and non-fiction—have been made about the TRC, both in South Africa and abroad. Some notable examples are *Long Night's Journey into Day* (2000), a documentary made by U.S. filmmakers Hoffman and Reid; *Forgiveness*

(2004), a South African feature film with an all-South African cast (starring the popular white South African actor, Arnold Vosloo, in the lead role); *Red Dust* (2004), a Hollywood style courtroom drama based on a novel by Gillian Slovo and starring Hilary Swank in the lead role; and *In My Country* (2005), an adaptation of Krog's *Country of My Skull*, starring Juliette Binoche and Samuel L. Jackson.<sup>22</sup> If cinematic representations of apartheid contributed to the “the worldwide fame, or infamy, now achieved by South African politics” (Bickford-Smith 256), then these more recent TRC films contributed to the international fame achieved by post-apartheid South Africa as a new nation based on a culture of multiculturalism and human rights.

In the 1980s, when the apartheid government controlled and blocked media representations of apartheid, international (especially American-funded) filmmaking became a crucial way of exposing the brutality of apartheid to the world (263). Most of these films featured white male protagonists that served “to make ... ‘obscure, squalid, tedious, and threatening “Third World” politics’ seem ‘adventurous’ and manageable’ to Westerners” (275). Internationally-acclaimed apartheid films like *Cry Freedom* (1987) and *Dry White Season* (1989) both featured sympathetic white men who come into consciousness about apartheid’s blatant injustice and brutality; Black South Africans, meanwhile, were depicted as “stereotypically poor, innocent victims” (Bickford-Smith 275). The plots of both of these films follow classical Hollywood conventions in that they depict a struggle between good and evil. Post-apartheid fiction films like *In My Country*, *Red Dust*, and *Forgiveness* continue some of these trends: they, too, feature white protagonists played by well-known actors, although perhaps what is distinctive about these more recent films is that they equally feature white *female* protagonists coming to

political consciousness. Similarly, as in the apartheid-era films, images of grieving and victimized black (and colored) characters—especially women—perform a crucial function in catalyzing narratives of white guilt and yearning for forgiveness. In a sense, these films build upon the news media’s tendency during the TRC to foreground the black South African woman as the quintessential victim of apartheid as well as the model citizen of the new democratic nation based on reconciliation and respect for human rights. Her visible performances of grief establish apartheid’s violence as well as post-apartheid South Africa’s ability to grieve and reconcile. But perhaps what makes these post-apartheid films most like their predecessors from the apartheid era is that they, too, tell the story of apartheid as a morality tale of good versus evil — obscuring, in the process, apartheid’s economic violence and systematic targeting of communities.

An adaptation of Krog’s *Country of My Skull, In My Country* features Juliette Binoche in the role of Anna Malan, a white South African poet who has been asked by the South African Broadcasting Corporation to cover the Truth Commission. Reporting on the Commission exposes her to the extent of atrocities committed by her very own family members in the name of apartheid, leaving her feeling guilty and in search of forgiveness. Antjie Krog was wary about how her book would work as a feature film. She writes that “My own feeling was that it was not possible to make a film out of my book. It has no story unless you tell the story of the commission itself and then you need to make a documentary” (qtd. in David Philips, 307). What eventually enabled the filmmakers to adapt Krog’s book into a fiction film was their centering of the film’s plot around the extramarital affair that Krog’s protagonist has with an unnamed “beloved.” While this affair is a relatively minor part of Krog’s memoir (and has been almost

exorcized from the American edition of the book), the film makes this its central plot device, thus bringing two complementary arenas of guilt—personal and societal—to the core of its representation of the TRC. In addition to literalizing an imagined romance, the film also—unlike the book— gives this romance an interracial character, thereby enacting the TRC’s motto about racial reconciliation. Although they initially feel antagonistic towards one another, Anna and Langston Whitfield (Samuel L. Jackson), an African-American reporter for the *Washington Post*, eventually become lovers. Given that he is an American, and, moreover, an African American, Langston’s recognition of Anna’s guilt and desire for forgiveness allows her to feel included in the new South African nation as well as in an international community. Meanwhile, Langston’s interaction with Anna and with white South Africa ironically puts him in touch with his African roots and strengthens his identity as an African American.

As the DVD commentary to the movie informs us, the character of Langston Whitfield was invented to appeal to an American audience who were presumed to be ignorant about apartheid, the TRC, and ubuntu, the African notion of reciprocity.<sup>23</sup> The film features a number of scenes in which Whitfield discovers some of the key contextual information about the TRC hearings—information that an American audience would need in order to make sense of the film and to connect it with their own background in U.S. race relations. The character of Langston Whitfield also invites the (American) viewer to compare and contrast apartheid with U.S. racism or to consider questions of race and ethnicity in relation to the U.S. context. As the film progresses, it “shows the sceptical outsider [Whitfield] being gradually won over to become a believer in the virtues of amnesty, forgiveness, reconciliation—and, in particular, in the African idea of

ubuntu, which is invoked and explained numerous times” (Philips 317). Moreover, as he starts comprehending African notions of justice, Whitfield also begins to accept that Anna, the white South African woman, does in fact belong to Africa and share a connection with African customs and ways of living. Whitfield, in fact, learns about ubuntu through Anna—although it is not Anna directly but rather, Anderson, an older black man and faithful servant at the farm where Anna was raised, who teaches Langston about ubuntu. Towards the film’s end, Whitfield celebrates the termination of the TRC hearings by partaking in African dancing—thereby surprising the local crowd and confirming his growing connection with his African roots. The mutually beneficial interracial relationship between Anna and Langston, however, turns the story of apartheid’s violence into an easily consumable tale of misrecognition and conflict followed by forgiveness and reconciliation.

Alongside Anderson, another black South African character who mediates Anna’s and Langston’s relationship, and simultaneously affirms Anna’s position as a non-racist white woman, is Dumi Mkhali (Menzi ‘Ngubs’ Ngubane), Anna Malan’s sound engineer. Dumi is a jovial and comic character to whom both Anna and Langston feel a connection. Anna appreciates Dumi and needs him because of his insider’s access into the local cultures of all the places to which the truth commission travels. Meanwhile, as an African-American, Langston Whitfield feels an affinity to this black South African man; the two men joke with one another spontaneously and Langston seems to trust Dumi and to rely upon him to explain what things mean or how they signify within the South African context. As both Anna and Langston need and depend on Dumi, he becomes a key figure in mediating their relationship and in enabling them to trust one

another. For Anna mistrusts Americans' tendency to see everything in racial terms while Langston mistrusts white South Africans' denial of racism. Dumi, meanwhile, is a flexible character who allows both Anna and Langston to undergo personal transformations, thereby catalyzing the eventual cross-racial romance. The film features several scenes in which the three characters travel together from one site of the hearings to another. In many of these scenes, Dumi is physically positioned between Anna and Langston and functions either as comic relief or as a comfortable and enabling presence that fuels the incipient romance.

As they grow attached to one another, we realize that both Anna and Langston are, in fact, diasporic subjects who each come from deeply divided societies, and who are hence united by their common search for a more secure sense of belonging. As a proud and culturally-rooted black South African, Dumi's presence is essential to grounding these relatively less stable subjects and to bringing them to recognize themselves in each another. If the film's flattening and instrumentalizing of this black South African character is problematic, then so is its portrayal of the legacies of apartheid in terms, primarily, of personal relations between phenotypically "black" and white characters. By staging a romance between an African-American and a white South African, the film suggests that apartheid was a problem of racism, broadly understood as interpersonal black-white relations.

I will now turn to describing how the film's portrayal of the TRC hearings as scenes of dramatic confrontation between black suffering and white guilt reinforces the TRC's tendency to individualize the problem of apartheid. In its portrayal of the TRC hearings, the film collapses into one the HRVC and amnesty hearings, thereby

constructing scenes of dramatic confrontation between black victims and white perpetrators. As David Philips points out, “The film’s scenes show what are essentially HRVC hearings, but perpetrators are also present at them and are called on to comment—a piece of false invention that is inaccurate and only serves to muddle the actual functioning and achievements of the TRC and its committees” (308). While Philips is right to point to the factual inaccuracy of the film’s collapsing of the amnesty trials and Human Rights Violations Committee hearings, my interest lies not so much in exposing the falseness of its “inventions” but rather in exploring how, like the original TRC hearings as well as Krog’s version of them, the film’s representation of witness testimonies restructures our understanding of apartheid’s injustice by emphasizing spectacular violence, wounded bodies, and visible expressions of black grief and white guilt. If the TRC hearings implicitly individualize the violence of apartheid, then the film explicitly does so and repeatedly plays up the dramatic nature of the opposition between black and white, victim and perpetrator. As a result, injustices caused by forced displacements, for instance, and other forms of systematic dispossession aimed at entire communities, are completely obscured within the film’s rendition of the TRC hearings.

If the TRC hearings consist of a dialogic exchange between witness and commissioner, then in the film this dialogic exchange is replaced by two sets of interactions – between the witnesses and perpetrators on the one hand and between the testifiers and our main characters on the other. The first hearing scene, which features two successive testimonies, cuts back and forth between shots of the testifiers, Commissioners, the white perpetrators, and the trio of Anna, Langston and Dumi seated amidst a largely black audience. As the scene progresses, it narrows its focus to close ups

of the grieving witnesses as well as of Anna and Langston. We are thus invited to probe the reactions of Anna and Langston and to guess the source of their empathetic identification with the witnesses.

In the film's re-framing of TRC testimonies, the commissioner's role in mediating testimonies is completely eliminated. The scene begins with a commissioner named Reverend Mzondo introducing the witness, Mrs. Tabata, an elegantly-dressed black woman who testifies about the disappearance of her son. Mrs. Tabata is asked to "please tell your story," and she proceeds without any interruption. Mrs. Tabata begins her brief testimony with describing how, after her son disappeared, she found out that a policeman had preserved his hand in a bottle and had referred to it as "the bottled hand of a communist." Increasingly agitated as she proceeds with her story, Mrs. Tabata finally turns to the perpetrators and demands, "How do I say this...give me back my son's hand, so I have something to bury." She then leaves the scene crying and is comforted by other black women while we listen to a voice-over that plays back Anna's internal thoughts: "Wearing their Sunday best they come, mothers and wives, searching for a place to put their grief. Truth has become a woman. Everybody recognizes her and yet nobody knows her." These lines, drawn from Krog's text, not only bring us back to the authoritative voice of the white female protagonist, but also cue us to read black woman's suffering as representative of the "truth" about apartheid.

Mrs. Tabata is then followed by yet another black woman, Mrs. Sobat, who speaks briefly and uninterruptedly about the disappearance of her husband. Triggered by the coldness of the perpetrator's bald and perverse admission, Mrs. Sobat bursts into a loud wail. At this point, the camera zooms in on Mrs. Sobat's grieving face. The wailing

woman is eventually escorted out of the room by her female friends. The apparently unrepentant perpetrator asks for amnesty; and Anna, who had been getting increasingly teary, bursts into audible sobbing and runs out of the room, leaving Langston confused about the reason behind her tears. Langston's confusion about the source of Anna's grief is crucial for bringing into relief and calling attention to the white woman's capacity to empathize with black victims and to experience guilt and shame on behalf of fellow whites. In cutting back and forth between the victims' testimonies, and the responses of perpetrators, commissioners, and of Anna and Langston, the film involves us in the dynamics of white guilt and black mourning whereby the systemic oppression of apartheid is reduced to a drama of recognition and misrecognition between individuals.

Whenever the film represents testimonies or broadly gestures towards the TRC hearings, its focus inevitably is on the violent and spectacular aspects of witnesses' stories. A montage sequence in the middle of the movie shows a number of ordinary black South Africans listening to fragments of testimony on the radio, all of which describe how mutilated bodies were discovered by loved ones; each of these unidentified listeners stops in the middle of what he or she is doing, horrified by these descriptions of graphic violence. In foregrounding the details of spectacular and bodily violence, the film reinforces the TRC's tendency to emphasize the bodily and to elide the socio-economic violence of apartheid.

While the film does not directly represent Nomatise Tsobileyo's testimony, a trace of her testimony appears briefly in a scene in which Anna and Langston angrily confront each other. In this scene, which is suffused with romantic tension, Anna has just read Langston's *Washington Post* article titled "South African holocaust" and accuses

him of sensationalizing the issues and implicating all whites in the crimes of apartheid. Langston in turn accuses Anna of being in denial about the cruelty of the apartheid regime. He then puts her on the spot by asking how she could not know about people being electrocuted, or about hands in bottles and tongues being pulled out. Ultimately, she is forced to acknowledge that she did know about these things but not about “the details”—prompting the following angry retort from Langston: “You call shooting a woman in the vagina a fucking detail?” Langston’s reference to this act of brutality brings their argument to a climax, and Dumi promptly intervenes to separate the couple and ease the mounting tension. If Krog’s excerpting of Tsobileyo’s testimony ends with the witness revealing that she was shot in the vagina, then the film further isolates this act of violence and treats it as an emblematic instance of the brutality of the apartheid regime. The film goes even further than Krog does in separating out and disembedding this act of brutality from Tsobileyo’s testimony as a whole. Moreover, if Krog positions Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony within a narrative about apartheid’s gendered violence, then the film provides yet another narrative frame for Ms. Tsobileyo’s testimony. Here, the detail about her being shot in the vagina is part of an interracial romance narrative—and in fact acts as a catalyst that brings the romantic couple together.

For shortly after this dramatic scene of confrontation, Anna and Langston make love for the first time. Langston’s confronting of Anna leads her to acknowledge her shame over apartheid. The lovemaking scene begins with Langston consoling Anna and asking her to not be ashamed. In other words, the fact that Ms. Tsobileyo was shot in her vagina is used here for its dramatic quality and its ability to stand in for the horrors of apartheid. Once again, however, the focus on bodily injury suffered by individuals

obscures the systemic violence of apartheid. Moreover, this shockingly brutal act of violence committed against a black South African body also serves, ironically, as the catalyst for cementing a form of reconciliation between Anna and Langston— and between white South Africa and an American audience.

This lovemaking scene effectively enacts a form of private “reconciliation” which makes way for subsequent scenes of reconciliation and forgiveness between whites and blacks—including both black South Africans as well as African-Americans. Soon after they make love, Anna and Langston witness a hearing where a guilty and tearful white perpetrator asks for forgiveness from a black boy who lost his capacity to speak when he saw his parents being murdered before his very eyes. The tormented perpetrator begs the boy to let him do something for him. Eventually, the boy hugs the weeping man, and the audience sighs out of relief. As with the other hearing scenes, the film cuts back and forth between the exchange between victim and perpetrator and the emotional responses of Anna and Langston. In this particular scene, Langston’s reactions are the more noteworthy; it is he—and not Anna—who seems to empathically identify with the black victim. By placing this scene right after the lovemaking scene, the film cues us to draw a parallel between Anna’s and Langston’s respective transformations. The love affair, in other words, leads both the white South African woman and the African American man to a greater sense of reconciliation with the histories of violence within their respective communities. These narratives of personal transformation, however, reinforce the suggestion that apartheid consisted primarily of misrecognition between racial groups—with race understood primarily in terms of skin color—which can hence be resolved through acts of forgiveness and reconciliation between individuals.

The film ends with juxtaposing two other scenes of reconciliation: in the first scene, Langston is on a plane back to the U.S. reading these lines from a poem by Langston Hughes: “Out of love, no regrets. Though the return be never.” Langston had been reminded of Hughes’ poetry by Anna’s mother who admired his work and told a story about meeting the poet— yet another instance in which Langston’s trip to South Africa ironically strengthens his sense of belonging in America. Langston’s reading of these lines of poetry is then followed by a scene where Anna recites her own poetry—which is also Krog’s final poem from *Country of My Skull*:

because of you  
 this country no longer lies  
 between us but within

it breathes becalmed  
 after being wounded  
 in its wondrous throat

in the cradle of my skull  
 it sings, it ignites  
 my tongue. ...I want to say  
     forgive me  
     forgive me  
     forgive me (364-365)

The film thus ends with the suggestion that Anna’s relationship with Langston has allowed her, too, to gain a sense of belonging—both in South Africa as well as in the world. As an American, and, moreover, an African American, Langston enables Anna to feel accepted and included in the new nation as well as in the larger world community in the aftermath of apartheid.

### Racisms without Racism

Speaking of racism under conditions of neoliberalism, David Theo Goldberg writes that “The individualization of wrongdoing, its localization as a personal and so private expression of preferences, erases institutional racisms as a conceptual possibility. As strictly and reductively moral matters, racist acts and institutional patterns or effects are unlikely to be prosecuted under the law” (1715). Goldberg concludes that “Racial neoliberalism...extends by building silently on the structural conditions of racism while evaporating the very categories of their recognizability” (“Racisms” 1716). *In My Country*’s narrative illustrates Goldberg’s comment about racial neoliberalism’s erasure of institutional racisms as a conceptual possibility. In fact, popular culture texts like *In My Country* play an important role in evaporating the categories that enable us to identify apartheid as institutionalized racism rather than moral depravity.

The South African Truth Commission was an historic attempt at asserting the possibility of racial equality in the aftermath of one of the most brutal regimes of internal colonialism and racial and economic segregation. While the apartheid regime had dehumanized and lumpenized entire communities, the TRC attempted a radical mode of reconciliation, in which ordinary individuals’ voices could be heard for the specificity of their experiences. For this, the TRC remains one of the most significant attempts at enacting restorative justice. At the same time, however, the TRC’s individualization of the story of apartheid’s injustices also obscured the fundamental violence of a state-authorized, legally-sanctioned, and institutionalized system of racial segregation. Cultural production focusing on the TRC reinforces its tendency to obscure the systemic nature of apartheid’s violence; furthermore, films about the TRC like *In My Country*, which are

structured as crime dramas, emphasize spectacle and thus contribute to the proliferation of narratives in which bodily pain is the ultimate expression of apartheid's injuries and images of grieving black South Africans and guilty white South Africans are exemplary of a morally-transformed South Africa.

This chapter has argued that as laudable as the TRC's efforts remain, it also ought to be recognized as part of the neoliberal turn in thinking about nation-building and collective social justice. As such, it bears a relation to other world events contributing to the rise of human rights discourse in the era of neoliberalism. According to the Commission, both blacks and whites could be the perpetrators as well as the victims of apartheid; in other words, the fact that apartheid was a state-led system of legalized racism was obscured in an attempt at an individualistic and race-neutral approach to addressing its legacies.

In the end, the language of human rights, and the TRC's mode of eliciting testimony into narratives of human rights violations limits its capacity to attend to the complexity of victims' experiences of oppression under apartheid. The result is that systemic oppression is re-scripted in terms of wounds of individuals. Returning to Hall's concept of articulation, though, it is important to note that while in this instance human rights discourse gets articulated with the neoliberal vision, it can be disarticulated and rearticulated in a number of different ways. In other words, it is not necessary that human rights discourse always result in shoring up individual autonomy, in foregrounding bodily integrity rights, in deprioritizing economic rights, or in obscuring structures of racial inequality. The TRC was by no means designed to serve the neoliberal vision; however, in the wake of a global turn towards privatization and individual rights activism, the

TRC's race-neutral discourse of human rights reinforces a growing tendency to think of oppression in terms of private suffering and of social justice in terms of reconciliation between individuals.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The complete versions of all testimonies discussed in this chapter can be found on the TRC's official website: <http://www.doj.gov.za/trc>. Transcripts of oral testimonies contain a number of punctuation and spelling errors. The parenthetical insertions within quotes reflect my edits.

<sup>2</sup> The Latin American testimonio emerged as a popular genre in the final decades of the twentieth century and in many instances featured transcribed testimonies. This is how John Beverly defines "testimonio," of which the Latin American testimonio is the latest incarnation: "By testimonio, I mean a novel or novella-length narrative in book or pamphlet (that is graphemic as opposed to acoustic) form, told in the first person by a narrator who is also the real protagonist or witness of the events she or he recounts" (70-71).

<sup>3</sup> Since the 1970s, human rights-based truth commissions have become a global phenomenon and the norm for nations transitioning from authoritarianism to liberal democracy. For more on truth commissions, see Patricia Hayner.

<sup>4</sup> They argue, moreover, that a "psychoanalytic understanding of trauma and the healing process it underwrites" has been "enlisted in human rights frameworks for telling and listening to stories" (20) owing largely to the growing global popularity of literature about trauma and traumatic remembering (for instance, Holocaust literature) both within academic as well as in popular culture.

<sup>5</sup> Narratives of human rights violations have a long history, just like the idea of human rights. According to historians like Max Du Plessis, "Perhaps the most important forerunner of today's human rights system was the anti-slavery movement of the nineteenth century and its crusaders' attempts to abolish the slave trade that had become a part of 'civilized' European and American life" (624). Extending Du Plessis's claim, we could add that perhaps one of the chief forerunners of the contemporary genre of the human rights testimonial is the slave's narrative—a form that was published and popularized by the trans-Atlantic anti-slavery movement. The TRC testimonies I analyze in this chapter have much in common with the slave's narrative: both are framed as stories that emphasize traumatic "wounds"—both physical and emotional—and in both cases, we have a narrative arc from enslavement to freedom or from oppression to liberation. Furthermore, in both cases, a performance of injury and of pain is necessary to constructing the innocent victim. What is silenced in the TRC's construction of "human rights," as well as in slave narratives' construction of the slave as human, is a) the institutional level at which oppression occurs under slavery and apartheid, and b) the power differential between onlooker and victim, and between interrogator and victim in the structure of empathetic identification that is generated.

<sup>6</sup> Apartheid, a system of legalized racial segregation, was the foundation of South Africa's government between 1948 and 1990, producing one of the most unequal societies on earth. The Apartheid state was a totalitarian one and used the law to control and limit the movement and rights of the black and colored populations. Laws like the 1913 Natives Land Act, the 1950 Groups Areas Act, the Mixed Marriages Act, the Bantu Education Act and the Separate Amenities Act restricted civil and political rights to the

white population alone. The effects of apartheid are long lasting. Even today, the poorest 40 percent of South Africa's population earns less than 4 per cent of the income circulating in the economy, while the wealthiest 10 per cent pockets more than 51 per cent (Marais 7).

<sup>7</sup> Anthea Garman and Michiel Heyns both speak of this confessional trend and its links to the TRC phenomenon. Heyns points out, however, that the confessional impetus is not new to South African literature, especially literature produced by white South Africans.

<sup>8</sup> Historical narratives about the emergence of the concept of human rights typically include certain key events such the American Declaration of Independence, the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, and the U.N.'s 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Some historians like Micheline Ishay begin this history with "early ethical contributions to human rights" in different cultures, then move to the enlightenment period in Europe and the parallel developments of a liberal perspective on human rights as well as a socialist perspective on (economic) human rights. Ishay ends her history with the institutionalization of international rights during the early twentieth century and the impact of globalization on human rights in the present day.

<sup>9</sup> Wilson suggests that the political Left in South Africa had by this time already undergone what he calls, "its own Pauline conversion" with "the social democratic current gaining preeminence over revolutionaries who had viewed rights with a Stalinist antinomianism....An awareness of the limitations of mass strategies led many activists in the ANC and South African Communist Party away from the insurrectionary seizure of power, thus marginalizing radicals and reinforcing the impetus for compromise and negotiation" (Wilson 7).

<sup>10</sup> South Africa was not alone in its turn to neoliberalism. As Patrick Bond explains, "As the Third World debt crisis mounted in the early 1980s, the [World] Bank and IMF stepped in to 'manage' the external debts—and government policies—of countries in Southern Africa, as they did elsewhere in the world...Utilizing such indebtedness as a weapon, the IMF, the Bank and other Northern creditors compelled country after country in Southern Africa to implement structural adjustment programmes under their aegis" (158). Bond adds that "The IMF ceased lending [to the Apartheid regime owing to pressure from social justice groups], but during the 1980s sent in advisory teams each year to help the apartheid government switch to neoliberal economic policies" (159), at the expense of South African blacks.

<sup>11</sup> In *Human Rights, Inc.: The World Novel, Narrative Form, and International Law*, Joseph Slaughter discusses the "legibility of human rights" in the current era, calling attention to "the shared image of the human person and its development" in both human rights discourse as well as longstanding cultural forms such as the *Bildungsroman* (4). Speaking of the TRC, he writes that at the end of the twentieth century, "The TRC was an exceptional form of the public sphere in a state of transition and transitional justice that sought to make legible what everyone already knows, to normalize a new common sense, and to transform victims into citizens" (145). It was a "traveling civics lesson," he argues, "that sought both to realize the enabling egalitarian fiction of a national public sphere open to all voices, and to normalize the deliberative habits and democratic practices of citizenship..." (144).

<sup>12</sup> According to the TRC's final report, "The mandate of the Commission was to focus on what might be termed 'bodily integrity rights', rights that are enshrined in the new South African Constitution and under international law. These include the right to life, the right to be free from torture, the right to be free from cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment and the right to freedom and security of the person, including freedom from abduction and arbitrary and prolonged detention(1:64, para 56). However, as Mamdani points out, after stating this definition, the *TRC Report* does go on to expand it to include "rights over both person *and* property" (Mamdani 40). Hence the destruction of a person's home, for instance, also amounted to a violation of one's bodily integrity rights—and hence counted as a gross violation of human rights—since it inflicted "severe mental or physical suffering on a victim" [1: 80, para 116; qtd. in Mamdani, 39).

<sup>13</sup> The TRC acknowledged the systemic violence of apartheid but could not characterize it as evidence of "gross" human rights violations. As the *Report* emphasized, "it needs constantly to be borne in mind that, while the state and other operatives were committing the murders and abductions and other violations documented in this report, a much larger pattern of human rights violations was unfolding. These may not have been 'gross' as defined by the Act, but they were, nonetheless, an assault on the rights and dignity of millions of South Africans and they were, in large part, the product of the core legislation, and subsequent amendments, outlined above" (1:34, para 43).

<sup>14</sup> Ms. Gwedla's testimony can be found on the TRC's official website under the name of her son, Albert M Kopollo.

<sup>15</sup> My reading of the hearings also departs from Mike Sanders in another way. Sanders argues that, through its enacting of ubuntu, the TRC in fact produced a kind of displacement from the self: "Even before a witness departs from the questioner's script to make unanticipated claims—for the exhumation of a body, for instance—its staging sets to work ubuntu as hearing in a way that, so to speak, removes the parties from themselves...[W]itness and questioner alike are heard in a tongue not their own. Response, responsiveness, responsibility—all appear, paradoxically, to require this apparatus of removal or displacement from self" ("Reading Lessons, 4). I would argue, however, that although the TRC's official discourse emphasized ubuntu and reciprocity, the TRC's emphasis on the model of individual rights shores up the boundaries of the self rather than producing the radical displacement from the self that Sanders suggests.

<sup>16</sup> When separate, institutional hearings were set up to consider the role of institutions like the media, businesses, courts, and hospitals in perpetuating apartheid, these hearings further reinforced the view that apartheid's policies were the background to violations of individuals' bodily and property rights. The institutional hearings thus perpetuated the divide between the individual and the institutional, between private suffering brought about by murder, abduction, torture, disappearances, etc. and economic hardship produced as a result of legally-sanctioned discrimination and segregation.

<sup>17</sup> Although the TRC did publish a report of its findings, this is an extensive document that covers seven long volumes and hence has not circulated as widely as texts like Krog's *Country of My Skull* that features excerpts from the TRC hearings.

<sup>18</sup> Anthea Garman notes that Krog was also awarded “the BookData/South African Booksellers’ Book of the Year prize; the Hiroshima Foundation Award (shared with John Kani) and the Olive Schreiner Award for the best work of prose published between 1998 and 2000” (330).

<sup>19</sup> Krog relies on the TRC transcripts but then edits them substantially so they read as fluid prose. Reading the online transcripts reveals how fragmentary and disjointed the actual testimonies can often be, how inaccurate and grammatically flawed they are, and how interrupted by the question and answer format of the hearings. Krog’s excerpts also often appear without much contextualization. Catherine Cole points out that Yazir Henry contested the use of his testimony within Krog’s book, for, in his view, his testimony is excerpted in a manner that amounts to a reinterpretation of his words, and a reinterpretation Krog leaves unacknowledged.

<sup>20</sup> Catherine Cole describes how Deputy Chairman Alex Boraine, Commissioner Wendy Orr, and Archbishop Desmond Tutu all comment on Nomonde’s wail and all single it out as an emblematic moment of the TRC’s work (78-79). It is significant that this wailing happens on day two of the hearings, and hence its novelty is even greater since others have not yet testified.

<sup>21</sup> In *Apartheid and Beyond: South African Writers and the Politics of Place* (2007), Rita Barnard describes as a “startling idea” Kondlo’s desire to make Ms. Calata’s testimony into a comic strip (119). In particular she takes issue with Kondlo’s title for the strip—“The Contestation of Spaces.” She argues that “His aim seems to be to sublimate the traditional opposition between men’s and women’s stories and spaces as presented in the firsts two frames. But the energy with which he describes these opening images suggests that he remains invested in gender distinctions” (120). She adds, “In this narrative, women do have a place.... They will tell stories and give witness. But one suspects that they will continue to speak and be spoken of as mothers and grandmothers, widows and victims. Given the uncomplicated triumphalist plot the professor has in mind, it is perhaps no wonder that he should be drawn to a highly schematic form and one that renders social space in a succession of two-dimensional squares” (121). I would add that, although she resists some of the professor’s claims, we are not clear where Krog stands in relation to Professor Kondlo’s ideas. So although we have a back and forth between the two, we also sense a convergence, often being confused about who speaks when—a convergence that leaves unchallenged the gendering of Nomonde’s testimony to which Barnard refers.

<sup>22</sup> *Long Night’s Journey into Day*. Dir. Deborah Hoffman and Frances Reid. Iris Films, 2000; *Forgiveness*. Dir. Ian Gabriel. California Newsreel, 2004; *Red Dust*. Dir. Tom Hooper. BBC films, 2004; *In My Country*. Dir. John Boorman. Columbia Tristar, 2004.

<sup>23</sup> See scriptwriter Ann Peacock’s commentary on the DVD of *In My Country*. As she puts it, “I know that we were not writing for a South African audience. If we had, it would have been a very different film ... We were writing for an American—basically for an American audience, I guess, and the rest of the world.

## Chapter Three

### Visions of Collectivity: Novel and Nation in Post-Liberalization India

In the earlier chapters, I showed how narratives of globalization obscure histories of imperialist violence and how the articulation of rights discourse with neoliberal notions of individual autonomy leads to the reframing of apartheid's history of colonial domination. This chapter explores the ways in which the concept of nation and its underlying vision of collectivity are both challenged and problematized in the neoliberal present. My focus in this chapter is the contemporary Indian Novel in English, an exemplary case of Benedict Anderson's thesis about the interconnections between the novel and the nation. Indeed, the Indian Novel in English has traditionally functioned as, what Priya Joshi calls, the 'nationsroman'—by being a form devoted to telling the history of the nation's formation and to critiquing the failure of this ideal in post-colonial India. This chapter explores the various versions of Indian history that are produced as the Indian novel in English challenges the increasing articulation of nation with narrow, neoliberal notions of nation and of private space.

I begin by exploring some of the central debates that erupt in the Indian public sphere during the 1990s, in conjunction with India's turn to neoliberalism and self-promotion as a new global power. India's self promotion as a global power often entails the referencing (sometimes nostalgically) of its long history of relationship with the West and its ongoing relationship with the English language. India's colonial history, then, became a marketing tool—part of the nation's attempt to promote itself as a land in which the East and West have mixed and merged for several generations. In all these

accounts, India's colonial history is repackaged and deployed for the purposes of commodifying global India. On the other hand, many worry that contemporary India is in fact reverting back to colonialism in its increased dependence on the economies and cultures of the advanced capitalist world.

Now as India begins to promote itself on the world stage as a new nation and global power, this produces a rise in the marketability of the Indian novel in English and its narratives about post-colonial nationalism. I show how some contemporary Indian English novels resemble Eurocentric theories about globalization in their attempts at re-telling Indian cultural history by treating the colonial encounter as the foundational and ultimately formative historical moment. Analyzing Rushdie's *The Moor's Last Sigh*, I argue that the novel practices globalization theory at the literary level in its attempts at re-telling India's history through key moments of contact between East and West. In the process, however, the novel risks fixing national history within a narrow narrative framework that runs from European colonization to globalization.

Another category of Indian novels in English, however, aims to explore the legacies of longer histories that predate India's two hundred years of colonization. Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* and Amitav Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* are powerful critiques of India's turn to neoliberalism and of its claims of emergence as a new global power. These narratives deliberately place the present in relation to histories not exclusively related to India's encounter with British colonialism. Ironically, however, the marketing of *The God of Small Things* fixates on the West-East conversations within the novel and reinstates the novel within a neo-Orientalist discourse. Meanwhile, the formal experimentation and geographical specificity of Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* makes

the novel more resistant to easy consumption as an example of what Graham Huggan calls the postcolonial exotic. At the level of form as well as thematics, Ghosh's novel offers an alternative to novelistic writings of Indian cultural history in which colonialism and neoliberal globalization function as bookends. If neoliberalism and globalization discourse produce "historial amnesia," as Stuart Hall suggests, then this is amnesia not only about colonial violence but also about the kinds of intercultural contact that preceded or coexisted with the colonial encounter. Ghosh's novel attempts to chart a longer history of imperialism— and also of cosmopolitanism and literary and cultural exchange— that precedes the colonial encounter and that includes this encounter as merely one of its phases.

#### Liberalization and the Discursive Production of a 'New' India

In the opening pages of his bestselling work on globalization, *The World is Flat*, *New York Times* columnist, Thomas Friedman, compares his journey to India with Christopher Columbus's infamous voyage to the New World. Friedman writes,

I had come to Bangalore, India's Silicon Valley, on my own Columbus-like journey of exploration ... I too encountered people called Indians. I too was searching for the source of India's riches. Columbus was searching for hardware—precious metals, silk, and spices—the source of wealth in his day. I was searching for software, brainpower, complex algorithms, knowledge workers, call centers, transmission protocols, breakthroughs in optical engineering—the sources of wealth in our day...

I just wanted to understand why the Indians I met were taking our work, why they had become such an important pool for the outsourcing of service and information technology work from America and other industrialized countries.(5)

Through the course of his narrative, Friedman manages his anxiety about India's newfound source of wealth by realizing that Indians were in fact Americans, given that they were taking on American names and accents; and thus he concludes that national boundaries had been weakened and that the world had been flattened.

Friedman's work makes visible some of the characteristic features of a contemporary discourse on globalization, a term that, as I show in Chapter one, has come to signify both a specific set of material practices—the opening up of national markets, increasing privatization, and economic deregulation—as well as a generalized notion of global interconnectedness. As exemplified by Friedman's text, narratives of globalization attempt to, first, define the term (for instance, in Friedman's case, through this idea of a flat world) and second, to retell world history via moments of capitalist expansion and intercultural exchange. In *The World Is Flat*, modern history is narrated through “three great eras of globalization,” the first phase beginning in 1492 with the discovery of the New World, and the third, most recent, phase beginning in the year 2000, with the information technology boom. I begin with this excerpt from Friedman to highlight another key tendency of globalization narratives: to figure India as a “new world” of sorts. Indeed, this figuration of India in turn contributes to putting the idea of globalization into public discourse.

This presentation of India as key site within globalization narratives is not specific to Western writers alone. In recent years, owing in part to its self-promotion as a new and “emerging” global power and a preeminent success story of free market capitalism, India has become internationally recognized as a representative case of globalization. While the post-colonial Indian state had traditionally been a social democratic state with a mixed economy that combined strategies of free market capitalism and Keynesian interventionism, during the 1980s, India began a partial restructuring of this mixed economy, making greater room for privatization and free enterprise. In 1991, India formally accepted the International Monetary Fund and World Bank's structural

adjustment policies, thereby fully embracing the neoliberal program. Since 1991, the Indian public sphere has produced a number of discourses expressing the rise of a “new” India.

The 1990s marked India’s appearance on the international stage as an exemplar of the benefits of free market liberalization and globalization. By 1991, as Rupal Oza explains, the Indian economy was in a state of fiscal crisis:

The ... deficit... in 1991 was 9 percent of the GDP, inflation levels were moving above the 10 percent mark, and foreign exchange reserves were depleted to levels that were the equivalent of three weeks’ worth of imports. In an effort to deal with the crisis, the architect of the reforms, Manmohan Singh, laid out a strategy for stabilizing the economy that entailed devaluing the currency and taking a loan from the International Monetary Fund. (15)

Thus, India formally announced its participation in the global turn towards neoliberal shock therapy, otherwise known as structural adjustment.

Following the introduction of neoliberal reform, much public discourse within India represented the nation as an “emerging” power. Manmohan Singh, finance minister in 1991, was one of the first to discursively wed the idea of economic liberalization with “emergence,” a coming forth, a rising up, or even, and—as he indicated in his 1991 budget speech to Parliament—an awakening:

[A]s Victor Hugo once said, ‘no power on earth can stop an idea whose time has come.’ I suggest to this august House that the emergence of India as a major economic power in the world happens to be one such idea. Let the whole world hear it loud and clear. India is now wide awake.

In the wake of crucial public moments such as Singh’s budget speech, India came to be regularly figured as an emerging and awakening power. The mainstream media in India, which tended to mirror urban middle class optimism about economic liberalization, came to represent India’s “emergence” through a host of images suggestive of its global reach,

some of the most notable being its call centers, its burgeoning informational technology industry, its Miss World pageant winners, and its internationally celebrated English language writers. These images portrayed India as a global power and an example of how neoliberal globalization was serving, indeed transforming, the Third World.

Since India's adoption of policies of economic liberalization, talk about a "new" India became routine. Even today, especially in the business and finance media, liberalization is depicted as a parallel moment to the birth of the nation in August 1947—a moment of re-birth as it were, launching a "new" national being.<sup>1</sup> This talk about a new nation is not unlike the way globalization discourse in the post-Cold War period has popularized the idea of a new world. As Leela Fernandes argues, "The rhetoric of globalization is often centered on a premise of newness, that is, on the assumption that contemporary globalization marks a sharp historical break from past legacies that shaped the ways in which societies organized cultural, economic, and social practices" (208). In other words, India's movement towards economic liberalization propelled a re-imagining of the nation in much the same way that the dissemination of neoliberal thinking propelled a re-imagining of the world via the discourse of globalization.

Much of this re-imagining of India in recent years has been carried out via representations of a "new middle class"—one that is overwhelmingly urban, English-speaking and cosmopolitan. Ironically, then, India's connections to Euro-America come to be deployed as means of promoting its 'global' status. As Fernandes writes, "In many ways, the new middle class is the quintessential embodiment of this rhetoric of newness; dominant representations of this social group depict it as the central agent that can effectively realize the potential of a newly liberalizing Indian nation" (208). The post-

liberalization middle class is not entirely new, however, as Fernandes shows; while it is indeed a distinctive formation, it does also have a history, one that shares many commonalities with the formation of the colonial middle class of nineteenth century India. Post-liberalization discourse about a “new” middle class eclipses this historical continuity, however. Moreover, its idealized depictions of westernized, English-speaking urban Indians serve to naturalize the privilege of the urban elite, making them representative faces of a nation in transition.

Alongside its representations of a so-called new Indian middle-class, the Indian state has also been actively promoting India in the West. In the 1990s, India celebrated fifty years of independence—an occasion that, ironically, was often advertised through nostalgic imagery of colonial India. The Indian government promoted tourism to India during the 1990s by re-deploying orientalist imaginings of an exotic India, and by presenting India as a nation that has historically been the site of mixture between Eastern and Western influences.<sup>2</sup>

At the same time as India promotes itself as a global power by recalling its historical ties to Europe and the US, many—on both the Right and the Left—have questioned whether the professed newness of the nation is in fact merely a return to the older era of European colonialism. Finance minister Manmohan Singh’s 1992 budget speech exemplifies how the proponents of neoliberal reform had to seriously take on and address concerns over the loss of India’s economic sovereignty:

Concern is sometimes expressed that the policy of welcoming foreign investment...may jeopardize our sovereignty. These fears are misplaced. We must not remain permanent captives of a fear of the East India Company, as if nothing has changed in the past 300 years. (Qtd. in Varshney 232)

But in addition to addressing fears about India's economic sovereignty, the ruling party also had to address the increasing unevenness in economic growth and development. In the immediate aftermath of structural adjustment, "rural poverty increased by over 60 million ... Prices for basic commodities went up, directly impacting household consumption" (Oza 16). The decade of the 1990s was a particularly volatile one, marked by economic unrest in addition to inter-caste and communal tension.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, concerns about India's economic sovereignty, fears over India's re-colonization, and the increasing unevenness of economic development that resulted from neoliberal restructuring gave an added boost to the rise of the Hindu Right in the 1990s.

India's self-promotion— as a 'new' yet still exotic land of East-West mixture— triggered debates about whether we were living through a new phase of imperialism. One of the key sites of contention in debates about "new" India was satellite television. A product of India's liberalization, satellite television was on the one hand hailed as a sign of India's emergence on the world stage while on the other hand viewed as an emblem of its recolonization by the West. With the arrival of satellite television in India in 1991, television viewership increased dramatically. Whereas until 1991, there were only two or three state-run channels available nationwide, with the arrival of satellite television, a number of private and foreign channels were easily available—bringing in mass entertainment as well as advertising from the West. But it was not only the foreign channels and advertising that were sources of anxiety. For the newly liberalized television industry rapidly filled the market with new, private Indian channels that competed by modeling their entertainment along the lines of what was available on the foreign networks. The Indian advertising industry had likewise undergone a

transformation: “Freed from the restrictions placed on them in the government media, and attracted by the segregation of upmarket viewership, sponsors began to flock to the satellite channels” (Rajagopal 76). The liberalization of television and advertising in the early 1990s radically and visibly re-shaped and transformed the Indian public sphere, thus becoming the locus of much celebration on the one hand and anxiety on the other.

The liberalization of mass media sparked a number of debates about representations of sexuality in general and of women’s bodies in particular. Indeed, within this transformed public sphere, images of women and sexuality proliferated. As feminist theorist Mary John points out,

Globalization in India has rightly been associated with liberalization and the ‘opening up’ of the forces of the international market, after over forty years of autarkically conceived planning and state-led development. Along with such processes, there has been a tangible sense of the ‘liberalization’ and ‘globalization’ of sexuality. Never before—or so it would appear—have our public spaces been so inundated with sexual images—on posters and billboards, in the cinema and on TV, in glossy magazines, and especially in that hoary middle class institution, the daily newspaper, which has visibly taken on the characteristics of a tabloid. Moreover, if the inroads of multinational capital have been cause for concern, the effects of the sexualization of the visual field are widely perceived as being positively alarming. (368)

The 1990s were characterized by a series of popular debates about media and representation, most of which revolved around the depiction of women and sexuality. Often, spearheaded by the religious Right, these debates played into the prevailing climate of communal tension. For instance, there were heated protests and attacks, led predominantly by the Hindu Right, around a painting of the goddess Saraswati in the nude by the renowned Muslim artist, M.F. Husain. Although this painting had been displayed in galleries since the 1970s, when it was painted, it had not attracted controversy prior to these protests led by the Right. Another related area of controversy was the representation of rape and nudity in the internationally popular feature film

*Bandit Queen* (Shekhar Kapoor 1994), which was based on the life of a lower caste woman dacoit, Phoolan Devi. The government attempted to censor nudity in this film; the film's director spoke out about the truth-value of his representation and against the middle-class morality of censorship, while public intellectuals questioned the film's ethics for representing Phoolan Devi's rape without her consent. Anxieties about the "liberalization" of the economy and its openness to the West were thus often expressed through and mapped onto controversies about the "liberalization" of sexuality and about the so-called "new Indian woman."

The figure of the new Indian woman was largely a creation of advertising and marketing companies during the 1990s. In the years immediately following liberalization, advertising and audio-visual media promoted images of Westernized, urban Indian women as exemplary instances of India's progress and westernization; these women were portrayed as empowered owing to their access to Western culture, consumer goods, and as a contrast to "earlier images of oppressed, burdened, and backward Indian women." According to Rupal Oza, the new liberal Indian woman was 'new' in the sense of both having evolved and arrived in response to the times, as well as of being intrinsically 'modern' and 'liberated'" (29). Events like India's hosting of the Miss World 1996 pageant in Bangalore promoted this new Indian woman and in doing so also triggered outrage and protest from a range of groups including women's groups, voices from the far Right, as well as trade unions. There was opposition to what some considered a new imperialism by the multinational corporations of the West and resentment at a state that was blatantly using the pageant as an "opportunity to 'showcase' a new, liberalized India to the world" (Oza 79). Often, critiques from the Right and the Left seemed to bleed into

one another; as Mary John notes “critiques of the inroads of multinational capital into the domestic consumer market come across as broadly analogous to campaigns calling for the protection of ‘Indian culture and womanhood’ from the depredations of the West” (374).

Protests against representations of female sexuality thus registered the larger anxiety about the entry of foreign capital. As Oza points out, “in the context of India’s intensified encounter with global capital, the concomitant loss of sovereignty” was counteracted by “fortifying rigid gender and sexual identities” (2). As she puts it,

[A]s satellite television signals transgress Indian boundaries, the attempt to restore national sovereignty and control is by securing the borders of the nation against the foreign. Here, women’s bodies and representational praxis represent the borders of the nation that need to be protected from the outside...[A]t the same time as women’s representational practices are the subject of protection and censorship, women are used by the state, private and domestic capital to showcase a modern, capable nation in an effort to draw in foreign investment. (7)

These contradictory pressures on Indian femininity can be seen at work in the reception within India of Arundhati Roy’s novel, *The God of Small Things*—to which I will return later in this chapter.

### The Indian Novel in English and the Promotion of a ‘New’ India

As India adopted neoliberal policies and became a posterchild of globalization, the genre of Indian English literature gained greater global visibility and began to be taken up as an exemplary cultural product of the “new,” “globalizing” India. In *The Postcolonial Exotic*, Graham Huggan discusses how 1997, the year marking the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence, is acknowledged in special editions of three prominent Anglo-American publications: the British weekend newspaper, the *Observer*,

and the literary magazines, *Granta* (from Britain) and *The New Yorker* (from the US). Huggan asks, “what, or who, is being remembered and celebrated” (62) in these special editions commemorating fifty years of Indian independence. He argues that *Granta*, like *The New Yorker*, “presents an image of India as object of metropolitan fascination: an India which, while it cannot be fully comprehended, can certainly be consumed. There is little sense in the magazine of an independent India, one that has freed itself from Britain to pursue an always uncertain future” (63). Although designed to celebrate Indian independence, these special editions ironically become the occasion for reviving colonialist mythologies about an exotic India. As Huggan puts it,

Here again then, skillfully marshaled, is the Orient as exhibition; and here a further example of the twisted logic of the tourist industry, more than capable of turning the occasion of a half-century of independence into a fanfare for colonial nostalgia and the invented memories of imperial rule.

Marketing such as this, aimed at a generation of latter-day Questeds, helped stake out India’s anniversary celebrations as a prime tourist event. This touristic sensibility was also much in evidence in a plethora of ‘new’ anthologies and special issues on Indian writing timed to coincide with the festivities of Golden Jubilee year. (58)

Huggan thus reveals how the so-called ‘new’ anthologies of Indian writing in English are deployed to promote a ‘new’ India for a metropolitan audience. He argues, moreover, that Britain, in the midst of much anxiety about its power in the new global system, was “using the new India, as it used the old, to “rejuvenate” itself” (63).

It is not only Britain, however, that engages in discourse about a ‘new’ India or that uses this mythology to rejuvenate itself. Indeed, this discourse is promoted by the Indian government and by Indian capitalists as well. Moreover, like metropolitan celebrations of a ‘new’ literary India, within India as well, we witness the irony of deploying India’s experience of colonization as part of the marketing and promotion of a ‘new’ nation. Ironically, then, the fiftieth anniversary of Indian independence becomes

the occasion of the marketing of an exotic India by drawing precisely on the colonialist imaginary of India as a land whose distance from, yet history of connection to, the West makes it exciting and seductive.

In what follows, I will explore how the Indian novel in English produces India as a ‘new,’ global power or as a quintessential site of globalization. To illustrate how the Indian English novel responds to and participates in contemporary globalization discourse, I will analyze Salman Rushdie’s 1995 novel, *The Moor’s Last Sigh*. Rushdie is one of the most renowned practitioners of the Indian English novel, and his more recent work has come to be read, received, and taught widely as globalization literature. In my reading of *The Moor’s Last Sigh*, I will focus on how the novel practices globalization theory at the literary level and, in so doing, re-tells modern Indian history as a history of intercultural contact with the East-West encounter as its primal moment.

#### *The Moor’s Last Sigh: Re-telling India’s History as a History of Globalization*

From its beginnings in the nineteenth century,<sup>4</sup> The Indian novel in English has remained a contentious genre within India, primarily because of the status of English—the language of the former colonizer and, still, the language of the elite and an essential means to privilege. Over this span of roughly a century and a half, the nation-state has emerged as a dominant thematic concern of Indian novels in English. According to Priyamvada Gopal,

the narration of nation gave the anglophone novel in India its earliest and most persistent thematic preoccupation, indeed, its *raison d’être*, as it attempted to carve out a legitimate space for itself. The conditions of its emergence—out of the colonial encounter, addressing itself to empire rather than a specific region or community—meant that the anglophone novel in the subcontinent returned repeatedly to a self-reflexive question: ‘What is India(n)?’ (6)<sup>5</sup>

For Gopal, it is the English novel's interrogation of "the idea of India" (Gopal 5)<sup>6</sup> that comes to give it its distinct identity.

The 1930s witnessed the first flowering of Indian novels in English, most of these texts explicitly thematizing British colonialism and Indian nationalist resistance.<sup>7</sup> The 1980s marked what Jon Mee calls "a second coming," its "messiah" being Salman Rushdie. According to Mee, "The appearance of *Midnight's Children* in 1981 brought about a renaissance in Indian writing in English which has outdone that of the 1930s" (318). *Midnight's Children* made way for the international recognition and celebration currently enjoyed by the Indian English novel. While the 1930s generation wrote nationalist novels, this new wave of writers wrote novels that were explicit critiques of the post-colonial nation. As Priya Joshi puts it:

*Midnight's Children* inaugurated what seemed like an endless stream of 'nationroman' in the 1980s—novels of the nation...Paradoxically, however, the most striking feature of this wave of 'nationroman' is exactly how *unnationalistic* they are. Unlike Bankim's unmistakable albeit contradictory nationalism or Tagore's more probing version of almost a century earlier, the English novelists of the 1980s seem more elegiac over than celebratory of the nation. These are national novels, yes; but hardly nationalist ones. (260)

Joshi adds: "[T]heirs is a curious obsession: to mythologize the nation not at its moment of birth when it was the glorious victor of a liberation struggle, but in its unglamorous middle age, riddled by the maladies of modernity and despair that the novels proceed to catalogue in painstaking detail" (261). So while the tone may have shifted, the focus—or "obsession" in Joshi's words—remains the nation. These novels take a retrospective look at nation formation for the purposes of critiquing the nation. In other words, Indian English novelists—especially this post-1980s generation—are preoccupied with understanding how the nation and national identity are imagined at the moment of nation-

building and what the consequences are of constructing such an imagined collective identity.

By the 1990s, the moments of independence and partition begin to lose their centrality in the historical imaginations of Indian writers in English. Even the author of *Midnight's Children* was writing a remarkably different history of India in the 1990s—one in which national independence is no longer a crucial moment. In *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Rushdie tells a history of modern India that runs from 1492-1992.<sup>8</sup> This is a version of modern Indian history where moments of intercultural interaction with colonial powers are emphasized, and India's story is told less as a narrative of liberation from colonial rule and more as evidence of the changing fate of multiculturalism.

Although the tone of Rushdie's account of globalization differs considerably from Thomas Friedman's *The World is Flat*, Rushdie's literary history of modern India also begins in 1492. But if, in Friedman's text, 1492 is the year Columbus discovered America, in Rushdie's novel, it is noteworthy for being the year that ended the rule of the Moors, or the Muslim rulers, of Spain. The novel's central character, Moraes Zogoiby (also known as "the Moor"), is a twentieth-century mixed-breed who claims ancestry from both the Muslims and the Jews of Moorish Spain as well as from Vasco da Gama, the Portuguese explorer and colonialist. (Moraes's mother belongs to the da Gama family, and his father is Jewish with roots in Moorish Spain.) Moraes is also an embodiment of Bombay city, which in turn is a synecdoche for modern, multicultural India. Through this construction of Moraes as a hybrid, Judo-Christian subject, Rushdie comments on how the numerous groups and cultures that make up India render impossible any attempt to locate an Indian essence except perhaps if this essence be a

tradition of tolerance for plurality and cultural diversity. What is interesting, however, is how India's history is re-told in a way that links its development as a nation to the emergence of world capitalism. 1492 is, in fact, a key date within post-Cold War theories and narratives of globalization. Rushdie's text participates in post-Cold War retellings of world as well as national histories which move from 1492 to the present.

Rushdie turns to Moorish Spain as a model multicultural and multi-religious society that disintegrated when the Christian despots, Ferdinand and Isabella, took over, expelling Muslims as well as Jews from Spain's borders. Likening India to Moorish Spain, Rushdie frames its story as a "tragedy of multiplicity destroyed by singularity, the defeat of Many by One" (408). The narrative sets up a series of parallels between Moorish Spain and contemporary India, between Granada and Bombay, and between the exile of the final Moorish king, Boabdil, in 1492 and Moraes's exile in 1992. Most significantly, it likens Boabdil's defeat by Ferdinand and Isabella to Moraes's defeat – and, by implication, Bombay/India's defeat—by the forces of religious fundamentalism. The narrator (who is the exiled and dying Moraes Zogoiby) is explicit in making these acts of comparison between early modern Spain and contemporary India. Like many of Rushdie's narrators, his voice is partly ironic and exaggerating and partly that of a learned chronicler:

Just as the fanatical 'Catholic Kings' had besieged Granada and awaited the Alhambra's fall, so now barbarism was standing at our gates. O Bombay! Prima in Indis! *Gateway to India! Star of the East with her face to the West!* Like Granada...you were the glory of your time. But a darker time came upon you, and just as Boabdil...was too weak to defend his great treasure, so we, too, were proved wanting. (372)

Rushdie thus deploys a mythology of multicultural Moorish Spain as the basis for his imagination of Bombay as an open and tolerant city that was produced by the colonial

encounter and that is now being reconstituted as provincial and discriminatory because of the rise of religious fundamentalism.

If anything is romanticized in this dark novel about the end of India's pluralistic tradition, then it is Bombay city, which is variously described as "the city of mixed-up, mongrel joy" (376), or as "the bastard child of a Portuguese-English wedding, and yet the most Indian of Indian cities." As the narrator puts it, "Bombay was central; had always been" (372). "In Bombay all Indias met and merged" (349-350). At the same time, though, apart from this romanticization of cosmopolitan and multicultural Bombay, Rushdie's novel is also a rich commentary on the paradoxes and contradictions of Bombay's tradition of capitalism. Moraes—the embodiment of Bombay city—is a child of an artist mother and a businessman father. Through his story, Rushdie suggests that Bombay is produced by two contradictory forces: cultural mixture on the one hand and capitalist exploitation on the other. Moraes's mother, Aurora, is a celebrated Indian artist who functions as a proxy for Rushdie and whose collage-like paintings tell India's story through the figure of Moorish Spain, which she labels "Mooristan" or "Palimpstine." In her characteristic Indian English, she describes Mooristan (and, indirectly, her art) as, a "Place where worlds collide, flow in and out of one another, and washofy away...One universe, one dimension, one country, one dream, bumpo'ing into another, or being under or on top of. Call it Palimpstine" (226). She repeatedly identifies her son, Moraes, with Moorish Spain and encourages him to think of it as a spiritual homeland of sorts. Thus, she urges him, "Go find Palimpstine, go see Mooristan." "Only don't go to the English. We have had enough of them" (235). Mooristan or Palimpstine is the lost utopia that forms the inspiration for Aurora's collage work and the trope through which she frames

her anti-colonialism as well as her commentary on the decline of Bombay's (and India's) historical openness to cultural mixing.

In addition to Aurora's influence, Moraes is produced by his father, Abraham, a businessman whose story richly captures the historical movements of Indian capital—from industrial to financial capital. Abraham's changing business activities represent how Indian capitalism increasingly becomes global in its reach and monetarist in its orientation: we hear that Abraham's enterprise "was a major player in the Khazana Bank International, which by the end of the 1980s had become the first financial institution from the Third World to rival the great Western Banks in terms of assets and transactions" (334). Abraham also gradually grows into a voice of free-market ideology, which Rushdie satirizes: the Moor hears Abraham's ideas and realizes that "beneath [his father's] glittering monetarist vision there lurked a hidden layer of activity: the inevitable secret world that has existed, awaiting revelation, beneath everything I have ever known" (334). Rushdie thus comments on how finance capital is inevitably based on invisible and insidious exploitation.

Bombay and India are thus represented as palimpsests not merely because of their constitution by layers of cultural mixture but also because of their formation through layers—some visible and others invisible—of economic injustice. This is how the narrator puts it: "The city itself, perhaps the whole country, was a palimpsest, Under World beneath Over World, black market beneath white" (184-185). Moraes, likewise, is an embodiment of Bombay not merely in that he is a mixed-breed but also in that he is depicted as a man who grows twice as fast as a normal person and who at any point looks and acts double his age. As he puts it:

Like the city itself, Bombay of my joys and sorrows, I mushroomed into a huge urbane sprawl of a fellow, I expanded without time for proper planning, without any pauses to learn from my experiences or mistakes or my contemporaries, without time for reflection. How then could I have turned out to be anything but a mess? (162)

The Moor, then—like Bombay— is many things at once: the child of cultural pluralism, the link between Moorish Spain and India, a symbol of India’s multiculturalism and an embodiment of haphazard urbanization and uneven development.

Rushdie thus presents a dark vision of contemporary India, a markedly different vision than Thomas Friedman’s depiction of India as a “new world.” But what is interesting is how the celebratory theories of globalization as well as Rushdie’s dark novel both seem to produce India as an exemplary site of globalization and multiculturalism; moreover, both re-tell Indian history by prioritizing India’s contact with the West.

What is perhaps most instructive about Rushdie’s novel is his commentary on the links and continuities between 1492 and 1992, between Moorish Spain and India. Yet, because of the dominance of the multiculturalist strain in Rushdie’s narrative, colonialism is treated primarily as a process that facilitates cultural exchange rather than as an originary moment in the history of modern capitalist exploitation. Moreover, contemporary capitalism is treated as just another force of “singularity” that is destroying “multiplicity.” Elite figures like Abraham Zogoiby are not very different from religious fundamentalists like Ferdinand and Isabella in the fifteenth century or Raman Fielding in the contemporary moment. Both—religious fundamentalists as well as capitalists are similarly implicated in what the novel describes as “the defeat of Many by One.” They are essentially both anti-democratic forces. It is in these moments that Rushdie’s critique

of economic globalization seems to get buried within a discourse that celebrates plurality, hybridity, and liberal democracy.

Rushdie's writing is exemplary of much postcolonial and globalization theory that mythologizes the virtues of cosmopolitanism. As Revathy Krishnaswamy suggests, "In many... formulations, postcolonial cosmopolitanism appears to work against all forms of totalization and homogenization, be it modernization, Westernization or Americanization, capitalism, or nationalism" (3). Rushdie's novel is in this sense a literary version of a postmodern brand of liberal globalization theory, for it reifies the liberatory possibilities of migration, cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, and places these in opposition to combined forces of religious nationalism, capitalism, and colonialism.

Although Rushdie's literary work presents a complex picture of globalization in contrast with Thomas Friedman's simplistic and celebratory account of the virtues of free market economics, his telling of Indian history through key moments of East-West intermingling also serves the mythologization of India as a key site of globalization. Moreover, despite its critique of neoliberal India, Rushdie's centering of the East-West exchange, and its reliance on tropes of hybridity and cultural mixture, reinforces a growing tendency to use India's colonial history as part of the marketing and promotion of India on the world stage under the signs of globalism and multiculturalism.

#### The Marketing of 'New' India through Roy's *The God of Small Things*

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* (1997) is unique for the tension between its content and its promotion and marketing. Within India, Roy's novel triggered much controversy. The novel's representation of incest and an intercaste sexual

relationship invited obscenity charges. Moreover, the novel's success in the West, and Roy's celebrity status as a Westernized Indian woman writer, reinforced scrutiny of the novel's content.

In the West, meanwhile, *The God of Small Things* was much celebrated. Graham Huggan attests to the novel's popularity as an exotic product and as a "tourist novel":

Such was the media hype surrounding the novel and its author that it became almost predictable that it would win that most media-conscious of awards, the Booker Prize. Riding the crest of a wave of heady journalistic clichés, *The God of Small Things* duly emerged as the latest (post-) Orientalist blockbuster—the latest Westernized novel of the East. Since then, some critical attention has been paid to its status as a so-called 'tourist novel', recycling intoxicating myths of a fabulous but dangerous Orient to an eager Western readership already attuned to the exotic formulae of Indian fiction. (76)

Roy's novel—like its celebrity author—were thus promoted and consumed as exotic products. According to Huggan,

the exotic is not, as is often supposed, an inherent *quality* to be found 'in' certain people, distinctive objects, or specific places; exoticism describes, rather, a particular mode of aesthetic *perception*—one which renders people, objects and places strange even as it domesticates them, and which effectively manufactures otherness even as it claims to surrender to its immanent mystery.... The exoticist rhetoric of fetishized otherness and sympathetic identification masks the inequality of the power relations without which the discourse could not function" (13-14).

Huggan's definition of the exotic as a mode of perception is important in reminding us of mechanisms by which Roy and her novel were received. Indeed, the exoticizing mode rendered both the novelist and the novel at once familiar and strange. Within the mode of the exotic, moreover, the novel's figuring of East-West contact, and the author's international presence as a Westernized Indian woman became crucial and weighted signifiers.

Speaking of the reception of Roy's novel in the West, Elleke Boehmer points to the elements that were

repeatedly accentuated in the critical promotion of Roy in the West. First, most prominently, there was her being female in a group of predominantly male younger Indian novelists... and, related to this, her intensely feminine elfin beauty. Another marked out feature of her experience was her own cross-caste, hybrid background (which is to an extent reflected in the central drama of the novel, the love affair between Ammu, the single mother of twins, and the 'Untouchable' Velutha). Added to this complex of promotional features, was the 'overwhelmed' response to the novel of some of its first British readers, ... the novel's 'original' use of English, its remarkable 'linguistic inventiveness' and its 'exuberant', 'shape-shifting narrative'. The verbal intricacy and play were then seen as strikingly contrasted with the disturbing subject matter, the 'intimate and revealing portrait of the caste-system', in particular the focus on the 'forbidden' sexual touch of the Untouchable, and on the horrific punishment which follows (as well as the representation of child molestation and incest between twins). In some reviews, the layerings and interconnections of contrasting experience, of national turmoil and personal suffering, of physical wounding and linguistic artistry, of pain accented by play, and play hollowing out pain, were considered as being further elaborated in the cultural and political layerings of the narrative: the minglings of Hindu ritual, especially Kathikali dance, Marxist activism and Christian proselytizing that characterized social life in Kerala in and around 1969. (64)

Boehmer then parallels this reception of Roy with the Western reception of the early twentieth-century Indian English poet, Sarojini Naidu. She argues that common to the reception of both Indian women writers is "the conflation of biography, body and writing." In Roy's case, this conflation produces both an excitement about her heroic status as a sole woman amongst men— and about the appropriate female "ornate linguistic effects" of her writing. Boehmer adds that,

In Roy's situation as in Naidu's, therefore, the critical interest in verbal effects, and the general responsiveness to their emotional, indeed 'tropical', intensity, is significantly inflected and perhaps also intensified by their being women writers, which is related to their writing as women, from women's, particularly domestic, perspectives. (Here we might think, for example, of Naidu's concern with purdah and child marriage, and Roy's with female frustrations in the domestic context, and with the status of the single mother in southern Indian society). (65-66)

Like Huggan, then, Boehmer identifies an exoticizing and neo-Orientalist mode within which Roy and her work are read and received.

This reception of Roy's text made it a symbol of transgressive sexuality on the one hand (especially within the Indian context) and of exotic, feminine India on the other. In other words, in both India as well as abroad, Roy's text came to be overwhelmingly received as a defense of the private realm and of liberal individuality. The Marxist critic, Aijaz Ahmad, takes issue with Roy's romanticization of private acts of transgression. Ahmad argues that Roy "is a representative intellectual of this particular moment in India in her preoccupation with the tie between caste and sexuality; in her portrayal of the erotic as the real zone of rebellion and Truth" (108).<sup>9</sup> For Ahmad, the novel is limited by its construction of "the erotic as that private transgression through which one transcends public injuries":

The problem is that in order to construct eroticism as that transcendence which takes individuals beyond history and society, straight into the real truth of their beings, Arundhati Roy in fact reduces the human complexity of the characters she herself has created and whom she wishes to affirm and even celebrate, albeit in the tragic mode. (105)

Ahmad's assessment of the novel's politics overlooks the latter's self-consciousness about the tensions between public and private within neoliberal India. In what follows, I will explore how Roy's novel explores the tensions between public and private that are characteristic of the neoliberal moment, and how it also problematizes the increasing emphasis on privatization and autonomy. I see the novel's preoccupation with caste and sexuality and with acts of personal transgression as part of its attempt to connect the culture of neoliberalism with a deep past and with prior traditions of boundary-making. Moreover, as opposed to the fetishization of the East-West exchange within novels like Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* or *The Moor's Last Sigh*, Roy's novel—despite its promotion as an example of a new, globalizing India—places this exchange within a

longer history of conflict. Put differently, in Roy's novel, the colonial encounter emerges as just one moment in a longer history of relations between public and private.

The Contradictions of Bounded Individuality in *The God of Small Things*

One of the central concerns of Roy's novel is the contradictory state of individual freedom and autonomy—a concern that arises perhaps in response to neoliberal celebrations of personal freedom on the one hand and the rise, on the other hand, of rules and laws to enforce boundaries between individuals and between private properties. Rahel and Esthappen, two of the novel's central characters, are fraternal twins who in their childhood “thought of themselves together as Me, and separately, individually, as We or Us. As though they were a rare breed of Siamese Twins, physically separate, but with joint identities” (4-5). Much of the narration is filtered through the children's perspectives—the novel insisting on revealing the world through the lens of little beings predisposed to look on separation and individuation as unfamiliar, and to see boundaries as foreign and incomprehensible. For instance, the narrator tells us that “According to Estha, if they'd been born on the bus, they'd have got free bus rides for the rest of their lives” (6). The childish beliefs of Estha and Rahel are the source of much humor in the novel, but they also serve the added function of defamiliarizing our understanding of why societies work the way they do, why some things are free, for instance, and others not. Much of the dramatic energy of Roy's novel thus derives from its thematization of individual freedom.

The confusion that the children experience over what is free, what is public, and what is private continues into their adult lives and lives on as a discomfort with accepting

social boundaries, rules, and expectations. Roy seems to interpret the growing tension between the public and the private in neoliberal India by throwing into question the systems and structures that secure boundaries between these two realms. Rahel is divorced at a young age, like her mother, Ammu, an upper-caste woman who transgresses the “Love Laws” (33) by loving an Untouchable man, Velutha. When Rahel returns to her childhood village of Ayemenem in Kerala, after years of being away, she begins to see that her difficulty with conformity has a long family history. She realizes that “Perhaps Ammu, Estha and she were the worst transgressors....They all broke the rules. They all crossed into forbidden territory. They all tempered with the laws that lay down who should be loved and how. And how much” (31). Through Ammu, Rahel and Estha, Roy links her critique of neoliberal privatization with a more general critique of how social norms have policed the interaction between individuals and social groups in India’s history. Neoliberal modes of segregation are seen as continuous with longstanding practices of domination and subordination.

A character who is crucial to Roy’s critique of the effects of neoliberal privatization is Rahel’s aunt, Baby Kochamma. Baby Kochamma, a rather unsympathetic character, is the only one who stays on in the village of Ayemenem and her adaptation to the new conditions of life in this village reveal the cultural shifts that mark the various stages of India’s post-colonial history. In her younger days, during the 1940s and 50s, Baby Kochamma had also crossed social boundaries by falling in love with an Irish priest, Father Mulligan. But as this transgression was not reciprocated by Mulligan, nor tolerated by her family, she was forced to “tame” her passion through her aggressive pursuit of ornamental gardening. Trained in the United States, Baby Kochamma had

learned how to cultivate a number of exotic species in her garden. Baby Kochamma's ornamental garden—in which she aggressively “tamed” existing plant life and cultivated foreign species—was the outdoors space provided her in order to manage her internal turmoil. It is through this skill that she manages to displace her pent up emotions towards Father Mulligan. As she grows older, Baby Kochamma abandons her ornamental garden and retreats to a life indoors—in the company of her maid and the newly-arrived luxury of satellite television.

Liberalization had produced some shifts in the relations between classes, for as the narrator tells us, “In an unconscious gesture of television-enforced democracy, mistress and servant both scrambled unseeingly in the same bowl of nuts” (84-85). Yet, this shift was at best a superficial one, for despite the television-enforced democracy, Baby Kochamma's suspicion and mistrust of her servants is only intensified.

Through the trajectory of Baby Kochamma's life, Roy throws light on the impact of neoliberalism's entry into the Indian social scene and its “creative destruction” of social relations and “habits of the heart” (Harvey, *Neoliberalism* 3). However, the novel also insists that this creative destruction is only the newest phase in a much longer history of boundary making. Despite the shift in Baby Kochamma's lifestyle, some things remain the same. She had always been one to lock her possessions, to keep the servants away from them, and this habit remains—in fact, it only gets strengthened in the era of liberalization:

She was frightened by the BBC famines and television wars that she encountered while she channel surfed. Her old fears of the Revolution and the Marxist-Leninist menace had been rekindled by new television worries about the growing numbers of desperate and dispossessed people. She viewed ethnic cleansing, famine, and genocide as direct threats to her furniture.

She kept her doors and windows locked, unless she was using them. She used her

windows for specific purposes. For a Breath of Fresh Air. To Pay for the Milk. To Let Out a Trapped Wasp (which Kochu Maria was made to chase around the house with a towel). (28-29)

As the narrator informs us, “Hers too, was an ancient, age-old fear. The fear of being dispossessed” (67). But although this fear of dispossession consumed her throughout her life, in the era of liberalization it resulted in a further shutting out of the outside and a retreat indoors. We learn that the house in which she lived had also been renovated; the back verandah had been closed in so that “You couldn’t see the river from the window anymore” (30). In other words, with the coming of satellite television, Baby Kochamma now lived locked up in a private universe: she had abandoned her garden, and she lived in a house that had been increasingly sealed off from the outside world.

Doors and locks are crucial signifiers in the novel, and are emblems that register the continuities and discontinuities between past and present forms of exercising boundaries. Murlidharan, the level-crossing lunatic, whose arms had been blown off in Singapore in 1942 (when he fought as part of the Indian National Army), and who subsequently had been honored as a “Grade I Freedom Fighter,” is described as having “no home, no doors to lock, but he had his old keys tied carefully around his waist. In a shining bunch. His mind was full of cupboards, cluttered with secret pleasures” (61). For the underprivileged, privacy was a luxury, a fantasy, while for the privileged, as we see with Baby Kochamma, privacy was something that had to be asserted with fearful violence and with an anxious adherence to boundaries. The novel powerfully reveals the fear and anxiety with which the wealthier characters guard their privacy. Partly, this anxious guarding of privacy arises because, as the narrator comments, they lived in a country in which “various kinds of despair competed for primacy. ...[P]ersonal despair

could never be desperate enough” (20). Baby Kochamma was the prime example of someone whose personal despair had to be hidden, or displaced through her aggressive acts of self-preservation.

But in addition to emphasizing the fear of dispossession among the bourgeoisie, Roy’s novel comments on the kinds of dispossession of rural populations that occurs as a result of state practices. The river Meenachal is one of the novel’s clearest emblems of neoliberalism’s “creative destruction.” When Rahel returns to the village in the early 1990s, she notices that the river had shrunk and that it “smelled of shit and pesticides bought with World Bank loans. Most of the fish had died” (14). In a visually evocative passage, the narrator tells us that “Once it had had the power to evoke fear. To change lives. But now its teeth were drawn, its spirit spent. It was just a slow, sludging green ribbon lawn that ferried garbage to the sea. Bright plastic bags blew across its viscous, weedy surface like subtropical flying-flowers...” (119).

On the other side of the river a slum had grown. A five-star hotel chain had developed further inland in the area where The History House once lay. This was once an abandoned house, where “History” intervened into the characters’ lives when the lower caste laborer, Velutha, was beaten and tortured by the police for his affair with Ammu, a Touchable woman, and where the twins’ innocence was shattered as they witnessed this act of police brutality. Now this house had been transformed by the hotel industry that “had built a tall wall to screen off the slum and prevent it from encroaching on Kari Saipu’s estate. There wasn’t much they could do about the smell” (119). Thus, at the History House, the terror and the violence of the past get buried under tourist hospitality. Just as with Baby Kochamma in the Ayemenem House, there seemed to be a

general tendency toward closing off and privatizing spaces. Neoliberalism had brought with it an aggressive demarcation of territory and a naturalization of bounded space.

Tourism had, in other words, transformed the ecology as well as the social relations of the place. Even the traditional Kathakali dancers were forced to become subservient to the tourism industry. These dancers—who typically performed in temples—were forced now to do “truncated swimming-pool performances” in order to “stave off starvation” (218). As the narrator puts it, the Kathakali dancer had now become “unviable” and “unfeasible:” “He cannot slide down the aisles of buses, counting change and selling tickets. He cannot answer bells that summon him. He cannot stoop behind trays of tea and Marie biscuits...He becomes a Regional Flavor” (219). Through figures like the Kathakali dancer, and through her attention to the changing geography, ecology, and culture of the village of Ayemenem, Roy foregrounds the material and cultural damage caused by the ascendancy of neoliberalism.

Yet, Roy also reveals how the kind of boundary-making that the tourist industry—a symbol of India’s turn to neoliberalism—supports is continuous with the casteist mode of boundary-making that had prevailed for generations within Indian society. In other words, neocolonial forms of asserting privacy are shown to be continuous with traditional as well as postcolonial modes of domination.

#### A Long History of Imperialism and Cosmopolitanism in Ghosh’s *The Hungry Tide*

Arundhati Roy’s much celebrated essay “The Greater Common Good,” explicates much of the critique of neoliberalism that underlies *The God of Small Things*. First published in 1999 in the prominent English language magazine, *Frontline*, this essay

describes the battle over natural resources in the Narmada river valley. Roy's non-fiction writing has brought much international attention to those in the Narmada Bachao Andolan (Save the Narmada) movement who are fighting against the government's dam-building projects that have dispossessed millions in the Narmada river valley. The Narmada valley activists have for many years now brought to light both the human and the environmental costs of development, highlighting the atrocities committed by the government as it bulldozed its way into poor villages and forced the local inhabitants out of their homes in order that dam building could continue. Roy lays bare the state's injustices against its most marginalized populations—its attempts to deny them of their right to inhabit the land on which they have lived for generations, in the name of national interest and a “greater common good.”

In “The Greater Common Good,” Roy critiques the policies of contemporary liberalization in India alongside the vision of modernization that propelled the early post-colonial state, thus pointing out the continuities between the ideologies of development and neoliberalism. As she shows, India's romance with “Big Dams” began with nationalists and modernizers like Nehru who saw dam building as equivalent to nation building and who instructed villagers, “If you are to suffer, you should suffer in the interest of the country.” In the contemporary moment, the dam— this prominent symbol of post-colonial nationalism— has become embroiled in the neo-colonial politics of aid. Supported by transnational institutions, such as the World Bank, the Indian state acts without a consideration of how such a big dam-building project would negatively alter the ecology and culture of the river basin. The World Bank in its turn “was ready with its cheque-book before any costs were computed, before any studies had been done, before

anybody had any idea of what the human cost or the environmental impact of the dam would be!” Roy is incensed by the ways in which, in the contemporary moment, the tragedy of displacement is disguised through a culture of commercialism: having evicted people from their land, the authorities consider a scheme that “envisages a series of five-star hotels, golf courses and water parks” in order “to raise money to complete the project.” She emphasizes the physical and emotional suffering of those who have been displaced, often repeatedly, by dam-building projects. As she puts it, “The millions of displaced people in India are nothing but refugees of an unacknowledged war... [that is] being done in the name of Progress, in the name of National Interest...”

Like Roy, Amitav Ghosh has also expressed outrage at how the Indian state, now acting in concert with foreign capital, evicts people from their land and then suppresses the human tragedy of this displacement. Ghosh is one of the preeminent voices emerging out the 1980s generation of Indian English novelists—a writer of international renown whose novels appear to be at once works of history, anthropology, and fiction. Perhaps his best-known work is *The Shadow Lines*, an emblematic post-1980s Indian English novel and a powerful critique of the parochialism that underlies nationalist thinking. The novel explores the lingering psychic effects of the violence of Bengal’s partition along national lines.<sup>10</sup> “Shadow lines” refer to the borders—geographical and mental—that divide people from one another, people who otherwise share a common culture and even a common language. How internal divisions within culturally unified groups could become the grounds for such horrific violence is the mystery that the novel ponders. In one of the most memorable moments from the novel, the narrator declares: “It is this that sets apart the thousand million people who inhabit the [Indian] subcontinent from the rest

of the world—not language, not food, not music—it is the special quality of loneliness that grows out of the fear of the war between oneself and one’s image in the mirror” (200). In November 2003 Ghosh wrote “Folly in the Sundarbans,” an essay in which he argues against a proposed plan to make a tourist beach resort<sup>11</sup> in the Sundarbans archipelago off the North-east coast of India.<sup>12</sup>

At the time that Ghosh wrote his essay, the plan— put forth by the business group, Sahara Parivar— was being reviewed by the government of the state of West Bengal, and there were concerns that the government was going to support the business group in its efforts. In addition to laying out the practical problems with such a project,<sup>13</sup> Ghosh also considers its potential human and environmental costs. “The Sahara Parivar claims that it will open 'virgin' areas to tourists,” Ghosh writes. “But the islands of the Sundarbans are not 'virgin' in any sense.” The Indian part of the Sundarbans alone has a population of up to four million people—people who, as Ghosh describes, have suffered displacement and eviction at the hands of the state government in the name of the very ecological concerns that it would be ignoring were it to permit the beach-resort project. Not too long ago, the islands had been “forcibly depopulated in order to make room for Project Tiger”—a conservation project run by the Indian government and heavily funded by foreign environmental groups. Moreover, in 1979, West Bengal’s Left Front government evicted tens of thousands of mostly Dalit, or lower caste, refugee settlers from the island of Morichjhapi,<sup>14</sup> with the aim of making the island into a forest reserve. Pointing to the contradiction in the government’s recent turn from an agenda of conservation to privatization, Ghosh writes: “It is scarcely conceivable that a government run by the same Left Front is now thinking of handing over a substantial part of the

Sundarbans to an industrial house like the Sahara Parivar. It runs contrary to every tenet of the Front's professed ideology.” He concludes that “The Sahara Parivar's project would turn large stretches of this very forest, soaked in the blood of evicted refugees, into a playground for the affluent.”

Like Roy, Ghosh also shows how the logic of “National Interest”— or ecological conservation, in this case— is used to justify human displacement; further this displacement is naturalized by the culture of tourism and commercialism.<sup>15</sup> Ghosh’s 2004 novel, *The Hungry Tide* is a novelistic exploration of the aftermath of the Morichjhapi massacre to which he refers in his essay, “Folly in the Sundarbans.” *The Hungry Tide* explores the partitioning of space, thus continuing the questioning of the logic of boundary-making that Ghosh’s *The Shadow Lines* initiated. In what follows, I will argue that Ghosh’s novel attempts to write a long history of imperialism and cosmopolitanism—one that predates India’s colonial encounter with Europe. Moreover, I will show how, through its stylistic experimentation, the novel attempts to find a form that reflects an ecologically- and geographically-conscious view of the relationship between people and place. Ghosh’s novel suggests that it is precisely this sort of consciousness that is missing in neoliberal and other longstanding attempts at dispossessing groups of their ties to land.

*The Hungry Tide* is also set in West Bengal and also traces the aftereffects of the human exodus that followed the 1971 Bangladesh war of independence. Many of the settlers on the island of Morichjhapi—who were eventually evicted or killed in the 1979 massacre— were refugees from Bangladesh. Having already been pushed around in various refugee camps in North India, they were desperate to make West Bengal their

home, given that they were from just across the border and were familiar with the geography and language of the region. This novel, then, like *Shadow Lines*, is also about the consequences of boundary-making, but here Ghosh's canvas is broader—as he explores neoliberalism's privatizing view of land and conservation that puts into contest human and animal welfare and that views humans as separable from ecosystems. One of the novel's key characters, Kusum, a settler at Morichjhapi, describes how the police would bombard the settlers with announcements stating that “This island has to be saved for its trees, it has to be saved for its animals, it is part of a reserve forest, it belongs to a project to save tigers, which is paid for by people from all around the world” (261). Kusum wonders how their living in Morichjhapi could possibly be a crime when this was in fact how “humans have always lived—by fishing, by clearing land and by planting the soil” (262). Like his essay, Ghosh's novel is also in a way a response to the follies of governments—past and present—who assume that people and place are somehow easily separable or dissociable and that modernization can and ought to happen without taking into consideration people's lived relation to their environments. Ghosh's novel, like Roy's, provides us with a microcosm of the “creative destruction” unleashed by the postcolonial state in the name of environmental conservation and in order to align itself with Western models of development and ecological consciousness. What the novel calls our attention to is the modes of belonging forged by the settler-migrants that are destroyed by the state's modes of boundary-making.

A densely layered text, *The Hungry Tide* interweaves multiple narrative perspectives, geological, ecological and historical facts, poetry, and folklore within a narrative plot that traces the experiences of newcomers to the islands. What the novel

foregrounds are the ways in which language in general and stories in particular carry the traces and memory of people's lived relation to place. It alternates between the experiences of three primary characters: Piya, Kanai, and Nirmal. Piya, an American cetologist of Indian origin, comes to the Sundarbans to study the region's river dolphin. Born in Calcutta but raised in the U.S., Piya speaks only English and comes to rely on Kanai as her translator. Kanai, an elite cosmopolitan, runs a translation business in Delhi and has been called to the islands by his aunt, Nilima, a well-known longtime resident who started a non-governmental organization on the islands, and who discovers the notebook that her deceased husband, Nirmal, left behind addressed to Kanai. Nirmal, a Marxist and an aspiring writer, spent most of his life as a schoolteacher on the islands. When Kanai begins to read his uncle's notebook, he finds that much of it is an account of the Morichjhapi incident of 1979 and of his uncle's growing (but unconscious) romantic attachment to Kusum, one of the Morichjhapi settlers who is eventually tragically killed in the massacre.

The narrative goes back and forth in time—between Nirmal's 1979 first-person notebook entries and third person narration of Piya's and Kanai's present-day encounters on the islands. Just as living on the islands forced Nirmal to rethink his established Marxist worldview, so also Kanai is being forced many years later to question his comfortable urban middle-class worldview. Parallel to his discovery of his uncle's attachment to Kusum, Kanai develops a romantic interest in Piya. As the plot progresses, a love triangle of sorts develops between Kanai, Piya, and Fokir—an expert fisherman, who also happens to be the son of Kusum, and who becomes Piya's primary resource in her marine expeditions. Piya finds herself divided between the connections she is

beginning to forge with Fokir and Kanai—the former a non-verbal connection and the latter mediated through language. In the end, Fokir dies while trying to protect Piya in the midst of a massive storm; both Piya and Kanai are transformed by their experiences on the islands and by the final storm. Piya decides to settle in the Sundarbans and continue her work there; Kanai moves to Calcutta to be closer to the Sundarbans. He loses his uncle's notebook in the storm but decides to write the story of the notebook—including what was in it and how he came to find and lose it. Nothing definitive happens between Piya and Kanai, although Kanai's romantic desire becomes the sign of the empathic transformation that he undergoes as a result of his encounters on the islands.

Through Nirmal's writings—and Kanai's recollections of his uncle's words—we are exposed to a number of other stories that constitute the culture of the place. Kanai describes his uncle as a “historical materialist,” one for whom “everything which existed was interconnected: the trees, the sky, the weather, people, poetry, science, nature. He hunted down facts in the way a magpie collects shiny things. Yet when he strung them all together, somehow they did become stories—of a kind” (283). Nirmal's fascination with particularities parallels the novel's own fascination with collecting facts and stories about the island's history and geography. The narrative is interspersed with large sections of detailed factual and scientific information about the river dolphins, the tide patterns, the tiger population and how they were being affected by changes in the habitat. And in addition to facts, the narrative is further interspersed with stories and tales. As we learn about the experiences of Piya, Kanai and Fokir in the present, and those of Nirmal and Kusum in the past, we intermittently learn about Britishers discovering the Gangetic dolphin, about the Lady Lucy after whom the island of Lusibari is named, about Francois

Bernier, the French traveler who wrote about the tide country, about Lord Canning, after whom the port of Canning is made, and about the myth of Bon Bibi. The overall effect is that the novel reads as an assemblage of sorts—an assemblage of different points of view and of a diverse range of facts and stories.

Much like Roy's novel, Ghosh's text shows how the fear of dispossession is a feeling that is shared across class and caste lines. In his diary, Nirmal recounts a moment when he witnesses the Morichjapi settlers protesting against the police by shouting, "Who are we? We are the dispossessed." Nirmal is moved by this protest and sees reflected in it many of his own dilemmas:

How strange it was to hear this plaintive cry wafting across the water. It seemed at that moment, not to be a shout of defiance, but rather a question being addressed to the very heavens, not just for themselves, but on behalf of a bewildered humankind. Who, indeed, are we? Where do we belong? And as I listened to the sound of those syllables, it was as if I were hearing the deepest uncertainties of my heart being spoken to the rivers and the tides. Who was I? Where did I belong? In Kolkata or in the tide country? In India or across the border? In prose or in poetry? (254).

Through Nirmal, the novel foregrounds the continuities in the structure of feeling between the social classes living on the island. When Alexa Weik discusses this moment in the novel, she quotes most of this passage but leaves out Nirmal's final question, "In prose or in poetry?" I want to suggest that Nirmal's final question is crucial for through this question, the novel reminds us of its own search for a form that is appropriate to the Sundarbans. Like Nirmal, the utopian, dreamer, and aspiring artist in search of a literary form that reflects the geography of the islands, the novel, too, is framed by the desire for a form appropriate to the complexity of the islands. Weik reads the passage as evidence of the novel's preoccupation with an attitude of 'eco-cosmopolitanism'—which she finds emblemized by Nirmal's ability to see the links "between the settlers, himself, and all

of mankind” (133). Indeed, if the novel expresses its cosmopolitanism, it does so through Nirmal’s voice. I would like to suggest, moreover, that through Nirmal’s discovery of the Bon Bibi myths and of the cultural history of the Sundarbans, the novel aims to expose a longer history of cosmopolitanism that predates the moment marked by the arrival of the British colonialists to the islands. By foregrounding the islands’ unique ecosystem and its role in shaping life in the Sundarbans, Ghosh wishes to call attention to the interaction between geography and the culture of a place.

As is the case with Roy’s novel, local specificity is crucial to *The Hungry Tide*. As he does in “Folly in the Sundarbans,” here too Ghosh is interested in narrating details of the geography and ecology of the islands which get obscured in the interest of politics or commerce. The novel luxuriates in detail about the islands’ unique ecosystem. Although it is part of India, the archipelago with its unique ecology of mangrove forests, mud flats and tidal patterns forms a world unto itself—a sealed off “tide country,” as the islands’ residents refer to the place. It is Nirmal who most explicitly contemplates the unique geography of the region:

There are no borders here to divide fresh water from salt, river from sea. The tides reach as far as three hundred kilometers inland and every day thousands of acres of forest disappear underwater only to re-emerge hours later. The currents are so powerful as to reshape the islands almost daily—some days the water tears away entire promontories and peninsulas; at other times it throws up new shelves and sandbanks where there were none before.

When the tides create new land, overnight mangroves begin to gestate, and if the conditions are right they can spread so fast as to cover a new island within a few short years. (7)

In the tide country it is nature itself—and not the forces of modernization<sup>16</sup>—that speeds up the pace of life. The constant re-shaping of the islands by the currents, the appearance and disappearance of land, gives new meaning to the problems of flux and instability that

typically are said to accompany modernization and the space time compression that accompany it. On another occasion Nirmal reflects,

What was happening here, I realized, was that the wheel of time was spinning too fast to be seen. In other places it took decades, even centuries for a river to change course; it took an epoch for an island to appear. But here, in the tide country, transformation is the rule of life...Could it be that the rhythms of the earth were quickened here so that they unfolded at an accelerated pace? (224)

Nirmal remembers the story of an English ship that capsized in the tide country in the seventeenth century. He wonders what the fate of this ship would have been in the “benign waters of the Caribbean or the Mediterranean” (224). He imagines that the ship would be preserved as a wreck in those waters while in the tide country it was “digested” and “vanished without a trace” (224). Nirmal’s urge to leave his journal for his nephew comes out of a sense of needing to leave behind a “trace, some hold upon the memory of the world” of what happens in the tide country. As he puts it, “No one knows better than I how skilful the tide country is in silting over its past” (69).

In addition to conveying the geographical specificity of the islands—that which is most often obscured within capitalism’s logic of accumulation— Ghosh also seems concerned with revealing its cultural specificity—that which is obscured by the state’s logic of conservation or by prior regimes of colonial power. For not all of the past has been “silted” over; on the contrary, the islands have a long and vibrant culture. One remnant from the past is the Hamilton House, named after a Scotsman, Sir Daniel Hamilton. According to Nirmal, Hamilton was a “monopolikapitalist” and a dreamer (an attribute with which Nirmal seems to identify) who bought the islands from the British government with the hope of establishing a utopian society, where “people would live together without petty social distinctions and differences” (53). When Kanai returns to

the islands many years after he first visited as a child, he notices this surviving relic that is the Hamilton House. And he notices how it seemed to be forced to compete for space amidst all of the other busy-ness of the island. As Kanai observes,

It was clear at a glance that the area around the compound [of Hamilton House] was among the most heavily trafficked in the whole island. Clusters of huts, houses, stalls, sweetshops and the like had grown up around the compound. The lanes that snaked around its perimeter echoed to the sound of *filmi* music and the air was heavy with the smell of fresh fried *jilipis*. (38)

While it had not exactly been silted over, the centrality of the Hamilton House in the islands' formation had been offset by the teeming variety of life that gathered around it. It coexisted as one among a number of other influences on the island. The accelerated pace of life on the islands had produced a culture where competing influences were absorbed and in turn transformed such that no one influence stood out as dominant or foundational. The legacies of colonialism competed for space among the island's teeming cultural variety. As we learn, through Nirmal's and Kanai's reflections, the islands' distinctive geography had produced a heightened pace of life and distinct forms of spatial organization.

In his notebook, Nirmal reflects, "In what way could I ever do justice to this place? What could I write of it that would equal the power of their longing and their dreams? What indeed would be the form of the lines? Even this I could not resolve: would they flow, as the rivers did, or would they follow rhythms, as did the tides?" (216). In a manner similar to Nirmal's search for a form appropriate to the geography of the place, the novel too attempts to "do justice" to the place. It therefore alternates between prose, poetry, myth and song—the effect being that we are exposed to a number of literary forms through which to access the lifeworld of the islands.

While these stories –of Hamilton House or of the goddess Bon Bibi— are part of the larger narrative, they also seem to stand out as autonomous elements. The novel seems to almost emulate the islands’ unique geography and heterogenous culture by layering stories, as well as by alternating formally between prose, poetry, myth and scientific details about the islands’ ecology. While the love triangle moves the plot forward towards closure and resolution, which seems to give the novel unity and flow, the narrative’s periodic departures into tale-telling, historical accounting, or scientific rumination seem to destabilize its novelistic identity. If the stories seem at times to stand out as autonomous, this is partly because the novel seems deliberate in its attempt to tell these stories in a fashion that conveys not only the events involved but also the manner in which they are orally told and transmitted. One senses a concern with conveying how stories “live”— depending on the teller, the moment, context and, of course, the language in which they are told.

Take for instance, the story about Canning, a port city built by the British. In fact, Ghosh ends “Folly in the Sundarbans” with this story. This is how he tells the story in the essay: in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, the British “dreamt of creating a port on the Matla river [of the Sundarbans] that would replace Kolkata and be a rival to Bombay and Singapore.” A pioneering British meteorologist, Henry Piddington, wrote to the government warning them about the danger of cyclones in the region. The British government paid no heed to Piddington. But then in 1867, the region was battered by a storm and the British’s grandiose project was forced to be abandoned. Treating this story as precedent, Ghosh suggests that the government and businessmen would repeat the folly that Piddington warned against.

In the novel, Kanai tells this story to Piya, attempting to channel his uncle who told him the story in the first place. When narrated from Nirmal's point of view (which is further mediated through Kanai), this story emphasizes how words and names bear the traces of people's lived relation to place—traces it would be worth our while to attend:

Now it's no secret that the word 'matla' means 'mad' in Bangla—and everyone who knows the river knows also that this name has not been lightly earned. But those Ingrej town-planners were busy men, who had little time for words and names. They went back to the *laat* and told him about the wonderful location they had found: they described the wide, mighty river, the flat plain and deep channel that led straight to the sea; they showed him their plans and maps and listed all the amenities they would build—hotels, promenades, parks, palaces, banks, streets. Oh, it was to be a grand place, this new capital on the banks of the mad Matla—it would lack for nothing. (284-285)

It's hard not to see the links between the British in this instance and the Indian planners Ghosh addresses in "Folly in the Sundarbans." The novelistic telling of this story emphasizes how place is more than just space—how it possesses a memory that lives on in "words and names." This is something that both the colonialists and the post-colonial governments miss in their approaches to privatize the economy of the Sundarbans and thereby displace its inhabitants and its longstanding culture.

As it appears in the novel, the story about Canning also emphasizes the act of translation. Kanai is acutely aware of the difficulties of telling the story that was told to him in Bengali and that he was going to be "translating in [his] head" (283). He begins by playfully performing his uncle's storytelling style, interspersing his version with Bangla words to evoke authenticity: "Kanai held up his finger and pointed it to the heavens. 'All right then, comrades, listen: I'll tell you about the Matla river and a storm-struck *matal* and the *matlami* of a Lord who was called Canning. *Shono, kaan pete shono*. Put out your ears so you can listen properly.'" (283) In this moment, as in several others, the novel

appears self-conscious about the limits of translation—not only from one language to another but also from oral to written form. And this wariness of what is lost in translation seems tied up with its critique of those who refuse to attend to the particularities of place and to the words and names that constitute this particularity. The novel comments on the forces that desensitize us to the ways in which people are tied to place. If it critiques the assumption that you can move and dissociate people from the places to which they are tied, then this critique is very much bound up with the novel's own wariness of the extraction of stories out of the contexts in which they "live," in which they are told and have affective resonance.

Another way in which the novel introduces us to the islands' cultural specificity is by exposing us to multiple versions of the Bon Bibi myth. We learn that the myth exists in the form of a booklet but that it is also regularly performed in theater and in song. When he first visits the island as a young boy, Kanai watches the villagers' enactment of *The Glory of Bon Bibi* and finds himself surprised at his reactions to this story about how the goddess defeats the demon king, Dokhin Rai, in his attempts to kidnap a young boy called Dukhey. What amazes Kanai is that even in this amateur low budget folk performance, this "rustic entertainment," the

terror he had felt when the demon charged Dukhey was real and immediate, even though there was nothing convincing about the tiger and it could be plainly seen that the animal was only a man, dressed in a painted sheet and a mask. No less real were the tears of joy and gratitude that flowed from his eyes when Bon Bibi appeared at Dukhey's side (105).

As an adult and a translator who can speak five languages, he retains the memory of this performance which comes to remind him of the affective power of this non-verbal form

of communication and indeed of ways in which his exposure to “rustic” life challenged his urbane beliefs and ways of looking at the world.

Similarly, when Piya is on the boat with Fokir, she hears him sing a song—which we later find out is also the story of Bon Bibi:

There was a suggestion of grief in it that unsettled and disturbed her...She would have liked to know what he was singing about and what the lyrics meant—but she knew too that a river of words would not be able to tell her exactly what made the song sound as it did right then, in that place. (99)

This story/song later plays a vital part in the love triangle that forms between Piya, Fokir, and Kanai. Once he realizes his inability to win Piya’s heart, the chastened Kanai gives Piya a parting gift— a written version of the song she heard but could not understand. In the letter that accompanies Kanai’s gift to Piya, Kanai writes, “[T]his was the story which gave this land its life...This is my gift to you, this story that is also a song, these words that are a part of Fokir” (354). Through such episodes the novel foregrounds its sensitivity to the islands’ various cultures: oral, performative and written.

It is Nirmal who encounters the written version of the Bon Bibi tale after having witnessed the islanders perform a religious ceremony. Nirmal is amazed by the easy coexistence of Islamic and Hindu traditions—the mixing of a Hindu style prayer ceremony with Arabic invocations. “I was amazed,” he writes in his book. “I’d thought I was going to a Hindu puja: imagine my astonishment on hearing these Arabic invocations! Yet the rhythm of the recitation was undoubtedly that of a puja” (246). He experiences a similar surprise when he peruses the written text which resembled Bengali folklore except that its pages opened to the right as in Arabic texts. And just as it seemed to fuse these aspects of Hindu and Islamic culture, the text also fused aspects of prose and poetry in remarkable ways:

Although the lines rhymed, in a kind of doggerel fashion, they did not present the appearance of verse; they followed continuously on each other, being broken only by slashes and asterisks. In other words, they looked like prose and read like verse, a strange hybrid. I thought at first, and then it occurred to me that no, this was something remarkable and wonderful—prose that had mounted the ladder of meter in order to ascend above the prosaic. (247)

In this booklet, Nirmal finds evidence of a form that had emerged out of the islands' unique history and culture. As the plot advances, and as we get further into Nirmal's notebook, we find that while he was once prone to reject myth and religion as a form of "false consciousness," he finds himself warming up to the tide country's faith, seeing its texts as representational forms that consist of and transmit the spirit of the place. Through these multiple iterations of the Bon Bibi myth, the novel gives us a sense of the lifeworld of the tide country. It suggests that perhaps these are what give the "land its life"—as Kanai puts it—their collective memory proving especially valuable in an environment prone to "silting over its past."

Through its attempt to do justice to the specificity of place, and through its attention to local myth and storytelling traditions, the novel attempts to showcase local histories of cosmopolitanism that predate the colonial encounter. Moreover, Ghosh's novel puts forth a hybrid style that resists its easy marketability as a tourist novel. Challenging both the nationalist project of boundary-making and the contemporary, neoliberal project of privatization, Ghosh foregrounds people's emotional and affective ties to place and thereby counters the folly of governments both past and present.

#### The Indian Novel in English in the Context of Neoliberalism

Despite continuities between the two novels, the story of the birth of the nation is not as central to *The Hungry Tide* as it is to *The Shadow Lines*. Although *The Hungry*

*Tide* is certainly a critique of the government's "folly" in the Sundarbans, the birth of the nation-state exists as only one among a set of interrelated concerns. Ghosh's later novel seems less concerned with the "idea of India" than with exploring people's lived relation to place—as this is expressed and captured within language, storytelling, and myth. The birth of the nation and the colonial encounter are relatively minor themes within *The Hungry Tide*. This later Ghosh novel seems to offer a broader view of the nation and of national history—a view that prioritizes the intricate dynamics between geography, place, and culture. What do we make of this broadening of focus in Ghosh's work? Is *The Hungry Tide* even a "nationroman" since it is not a narrative about the birth and development of the nation?

I want to suggest the possibility that in *The Hungry Tide*, Ghosh seems to be moving away from the Indian English novel's tendency to prioritize the birth of the nation out of the colonial encounter and to foreground the question of Indianness. As Priyamvada Gopal states in her description of the novel, "Although 'nation' and 'Indianness' are not explicitly foregrounded as themes, the novel is, nevertheless, inflected by questions of home, belonging, and community" (185). The fact that the novel does not tell the story of the birth of the nation is a suggestive one—it appears that Ghosh's work is moving away from questions of Indianness to broader questions of boundary-making, dispossession, and belonging. What is distinct about *The Hungry Tide* is its attempt to explore a history of cosmopolitanism that at once exceeds the formation of the nation as well as the moment of contact between India and Europe, East and West.

Critics of Indian Writing in English, including Gopal, argue that the focus on the nation and national identity is an ongoing one. In Gopal's view, "[T]he contemporary

scene in anglophone fiction [shows] that [it] continues to be preoccupied with the idea of India, marked as much by fissures and faultlines as by a continued hold on the imagination” (8). Mee concurs, adding that in fact Indian writing in English is “uniquely positioned to reimagine the nation”:

The idea of India has been subject to reassessment across the whole range of Indian culture in the past two decades, from Bollywood to literary criticism... English is perpetually on the internal and external boundaries of Indian culture. By virtue of this position, Indian writing in English is uniquely placed to re-imagine the nation...It has been deployed to call the globalization of culture to local account, to foreground the difficulties of translation and the possibilities of dialogue. (335-36)

If *The Hungry Tide* is in any way illustrative of an alternative trend within the Indian novel in English, then perhaps it suggests that the preoccupation with national identity seems to also be giving way to an exploration of belonging broadly understood. The nation’s formation is only one part within a set of interrelated concerns expressed in *The Hungry Tide*: its scope is at once narrower—the “tide country”—and broader—place and people’s relation to it. While the 1980s and 1990s novels might have foregrounded the critique of nation as an imaginary construct, this is not an explicit concern in this novel. Although it is clearly a critique of state practices and while it raises questions of belonging, these are questions that are not framed in terms of a history of the emergence of the nation out of the colonial encounter. Even when it deals with displacement—a classic thematic of the Indian English novel—the emphasis is not so much on the diasporic Indian’s displacement but rather on patterns of internal displacement.

While public discourse in the wake of India’s liberalization has emphasized the nation’s “newness” on the one hand and expressed anxiety about policing its boundaries on the other, this latter category of the Indian novel in English seems to be moving in a direction in which the narration of nation no longer gives the novel its primary impetus.

Internationally celebrated works like *The God of Small Things* and *The Hungry Tide* are attempts at seeing the present in terms of its continuities with pre-colonial as well as post-colonial practices of boundary-making and dispossession. If they tell histories, then these, too, are not histories of the formation of the nation out of the colonial encounter; instead, Ghosh's novel is an attempt to recover histories of dispossession that are erased within narratives of the formation of the post-colonial nation-state.

Considering Rushdie's novel alongside Roy's and Ghosh's suggests that as the Indian novel in English gains greater visibility and acceptance in the global marketplace, it exhibits tendencies to on the one hand re-frame its traditional narration of nation-formation in terms of global history and on the other hand to tell minor histories that are erased within narratives of nation formation. As opposed to Rushdie's novel, the novels of Ghosh and Roy de-center the colonial encounter. Roy's novel reveals how the boundaries produced in a climate of neo-liberalism fit seamlessly with traditions of boundary-making emerging out of the pre-colonial history of the caste system as well as out of the practices of the post-colonial developmentalist state. Ghosh's novel is an attempt at exploring the history of practices of segregating, policing, and managing land and space that have become naturalized in the present climate of neoliberal modes of accumulation by dispossession of peoples.<sup>17</sup> The time frame of both novels is not tied to the birth of the nation and national consciousness; indeed, both novels emphasize the partitioning of land and space more generally rather than the partitioning of the nation-state at the time of independence from colonial rule. In other words, although these novels deal with broad public issues in the life of the post-colonial state, they seem less

interested than the “nationsroman” novels that Joshi describes in narrativizing how the nation is born out of the colonial encounter.

### Conclusion

In “The Local and the Global: Globalization and Ethnicity” Stuart Hall argues that “we suffer increasingly from a process of historical amnesia in which we think that just because we are thinking about an idea it has only just started” (20). Hall, of course, is referring to the idea of globalization, countering claims that the globalizing processes implied by this term are unprecedented in human history. This chapter suggests that this amnesia manifests itself in two different ways: first, as we saw in the case of U.S. discourse on globalization from the 1990s, there is a tendency to obscure the legacies of colonial violence, and to suggest that we are at the end of history. There is another kind of amnesia, and this is manifested in some instances of the Indian English novel, an exemplary form of world literature. This second type of historical amnesia involves fixing the colonial moment as the foundational moment within national and global histories—and fixing the East-West encounter as crucial to the definition of cosmopolitanism. Such a prioritization of the relationship between colonizer and colonized, West and East, and core and periphery risks erasing histories that predate the formation of nation-states. Moreover, telling history solely from the point of view of the nation’s relationship with colonial powers can create the sense that this relationship remains unchanged. While it is important, on the one hand, to keep the colonial moment in mind as a parallel moment of globalization and to see how the legacies of colonialism shape the present, on the other hand, we need to be wary of retelling history in such a

way that fixes relations between colonizer and colonized, core and periphery, so that it is hard to imagine how these relations might have been modified or how the relationship between colonizer and colonized might interact with regional dynamics and longer local histories.

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> The business media portrayed 1991 as a moment of India's re-birth. In 2009, some in the media celebrated eighteen years since the introduction of structural adjustment, as though it were a sort of coming of age point, or the beginning of young adulthood for the "new" nation.

<sup>2</sup> See, for instance, "Consuming India" in Graham Huggan, *The Postcolonial Exotic*: 58-82.

<sup>3</sup> The 1990s began with politically charged, often violent, debates about the fate of reservation (of affirmative action) for the "scheduled castes and tribes" and "other backward caste" groups. In addition, with the Hindu Right had been gaining power during the late 1980s, communal tension between Hindus and Muslims was at its peak.

<sup>4</sup> The Indian novel in general and the Indian English novel in particular emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century. "This was roughly a generation after Macaulay's 'Minute' decreed English as the language of higher education, exposing an entire class of urban Indian men to British narrative models" (Mukherjee 94).

<sup>5</sup> I might add that the struggle to carve out a legitimate space for itself was played out not only on a global stage but also within India. English is spoken by less than 5% of the Indian population: how does a literature in a language that is spoken by such a limited group of people claim to be truly Indian and to speak for all of India? Attaching itself to the nation was an important way for the Indian novel in English to establish itself, within India, as legitimately "Indian."

<sup>6</sup> Here, of course, Gopal is drawing on political scientist Sunil Khilnani's famous phrase.

<sup>7</sup> Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, and R.K. Narayan, whose novels appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, are often slated the founding fathers of the Indian novel in English.

<sup>8</sup> Other Indian English novels like Kiran Desai's *Inheritance of Loss* (2006) are also structured as histories that take us from colonization to globalization, even though, in the case of Desai's novel, the colonial moment is located in the early twentieth rather than in the fifteenth century. Desai's Booker Prize-winning novel is explicit in its charting of the history of modern India through moments of contact between cultures of East and West. This is how the novel describes Biju's *Gulf Air* flight from the US to India: "The first stop was Heathrow and they crawled out at the far end that hadn't been renovated for the new age of globalization but lingered back in the old age of colonization" (313). If in this sentence time periods are juxtaposed with one another, then in other instances, places and diverse geographies are juxtaposed. Both temporal and spatial juxtapositions recur throughout this novel which, like Rushdie's novel was hailed as a "sprawling" account of the history of modern India. Moreover, the migrant subject, a key trope of postcolonial and now globalization theory, also figures prominently in this novel.

<sup>9</sup> Ahmad also argues that Roy is representative of her generation for her anti-communism and her inattention to social class (in strong contrast to her interest in caste dynamics). This aspect of Ahmad's argument, which has been much refuted by

subsequent critics of Roy's novel, is his least convincing point. Yet, although Ahmad might be too quick to lump Roy within a general climate of anti-communism among the Indian intelligentsia, I agree with his assessment that Roy's novel is representative of its times—especially for its overt thematization of sexuality.

<sup>10</sup> India gained its freedom from British rule in 1947—the birth of the nation of course coincided with the Partition of India and Pakistan. The state of Bengal was partitioned between the regions of West Bengal (the Indian side) and East Pakistan (the Pakistani side). In 1971, East Pakistan in turn separated from Pakistan and became the sovereign state of Bangladesh. Both of these moments of Bengal's history—1947 and 1971—involved massive violence, death, and displacement of people across the border.

<sup>11</sup> Ghosh describes the project as envisioned by the Sahara Parivar business: “According to the [Sahara Parivar's web]site, the project will include many different kinds of accommodation, including '5-star floating hotels, high-speed boathouses, land-based huts, luxury cottages and an 'eco-village'. Landing jetties are to be built and the project is to be serviced by hovercraft and helicopters. 'Exclusive, beautiful virgin beaches' are to be created and hundreds of kilometres of waterways are to be developed. The facilities will include 'a casino, spa, health, shopping and meditation centres, restaurant complexes and a mini golf course', and tourists will be offered a choice of 'aqua sports' including scuba diving. The total cost of the project will be somewhere in the region of six billion rupees (155 million US dollars). In short an industrial house that has no special expertise in ecological matters is proposing a massive intervention in an area that is a designated World Heritage site and Biosphere Reserve.”

<sup>12</sup> The Sundarbans archipelago spreads across regions of India and Bangladesh and is home to the famous Bengal Tiger. In the words of one of the foremost scholars on this area, Annu Jalais, “The Sundarbans are a truly unique ecosystem. Apart from providing home to an important number of rare and endangered flora and fauna, it is the only mangrove forest in the world inhabited by tigers.”

<sup>13</sup> Ghosh challenges the government's and the capitalists' “folly” in thinking that the Sundarbans could possibly become the site of a beach resort. This is, as he points out, a region of “mud flats and mangrove islands,” home to sharks and crocodiles, and particularly vulnerable to cyclones and tidal waves. Not only is the site unfit for a beach resort, it is also extremely dangerous.

<sup>14</sup> For more on the massacre—one of the main defenses for which was the project of tiger conservation, see Ross Mallick.

<sup>15</sup> Indian writers in English have also represented the increasing brutality of slum evictions and other private and governmental attempts at demarcating space within *urban* contexts. Another internationally celebrated Indian novel in English from the 1990s, *A Fine Balance* (1995) by Rohinton Mistry, represents the brutality of life in Bombay's slums during the late 1970s and early 1980s. Mistry's portrayal of Bombay in *A Fine Balance* has received much visibility on the international stage, exemplifying how local conflicts over land and housing in India have figured within international discourse and how they have served as an important springboard for broader discussions about the shifting meanings and values accorded to the private and the public in neoliberal India. The voices of these Indian writers in English are some among many within the Indian public sphere who have been challenging the government's violent dispossession of local

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populations in the name of state-sanctioned objectives—be they ecological preservation or modernization.

<sup>16</sup> Typically, modernization is associated with the quickening pace of life. Theorists of globalization like David Harvey speak of the notion of time-space compression. Harvey writes: “I use the word ‘compression’ because a strong case can be made that the history of capitalism has been characterized by a speed up in the pace of life, while so overcoming spatial barriers that the world sometimes seems to collapse inward upon us” (Harvey. *Condition of Postmodernity* 240).

<sup>17</sup> “Accumulation by dispossession” is a phrase coined by geographer David Harvey. Harvey argues that neoliberal policies of dispossession build on the processes of, what Marx called, “primitive accumulation.” Neoliberalism continues capitalism’s mode of primitive accumulation, particularly through its dispossession of people from their land or property so that the engines of capitalist accumulation are kept in motion. For more on this idea, see the Conclusion.

## Conclusion

### Spaces of Utopia: The Imaginative Labor of Contemporary Science-Fiction

#### Cinema

[W]hat distinguishes human labor and the worst of architects from the best of bees is that architects erect a structure in the imagination before realizing it in material form.... Critical reflection on our imaginaries entails...both confronting the hidden utopianism and resurrecting it in order to act as conscious architects of our fates rather than as 'helpless puppets' of the institutional and imaginative worlds we inhabit. If, as (Roberto) Unger puts it, we accept that 'society is made and imagined,' then we can also believe that it can be 'remade and reimagined.'

David Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* 159

My first three chapters suggest that one of the ways in which popular and internationally-circulating cinematic and literary texts respond to the rise of neoliberal utopianism is by offering us new narratives of colonial history. Through their denial of colonial violence, or their recasting of colonial violence as moral and individual failure, or their exoticization of colonial-era intercultural contact, these texts produce new histories of colonialism in the neoliberal present. In this concluding chapter, I discuss two recent, globally successful science fiction films—*Avatar* (2009) and *District 9* (2008)—whose utopian and dystopian fantasies address and critique the legacies of colonial histories of domination and subordination. I explore the extent to which these films perform what Fredric Jameson considers to be one the crucial political functions of science fiction, viz. the defamiliarization of the present. How do films like *Avatar* and *District 9* defamiliarize—and thereby allow us to apprehend—the anxieties and contradictions of the neoliberal present? Moreover, if, as David Harvey argues, we need to resurrect a dormant utopianism to challenge neoliberalism's vision of a world flattened by capitalist expansion, then to what extent do films like *Avatar* and *District 9* offer us

ways of remaking and reimagining the present? What are the possibilities and limits of their utopian imaginations?

*Avatar* and *District 9* draw on the conventions of Hollywood science-fiction thrillers as they dramatize the conflict between human and alien populations. While *Avatar*'s celebrated writer-director, James Cameron, has produced a number of epic Hollywood (including science fiction) films, *District 9* is the first feature film of South-African-born writer-director, Neil Blomkamp. Although Blomkamp's *District 9* is set in South Africa, not yet a typical setting for most Hollywood films, it too, like *Avatar*, addresses itself—and has been marketed and distributed—to a diverse, international audience.

According to Fredric Jameson, science fiction has the power to

defamiliarize and restructure our experience of our own present, and to do so in specific ways distinct from all other forms of defamiliarization....It is this present moment—unavailable to us for contemplation in its own right because the sheer quantitative immensity of objects and individual lives it comprises is untotalizable and hence unimaginable, and also because it is occluded by the density of our private fantasies as well as of the proliferating stereotypes of a media culture that penetrates every remote zone of our existence—that upon our return from the imaginary constructs of SF is offered to us in the form of some future world's remote past, as if posthumous, as though collectively remembered. ("Progress" 151-52)

Jameson concludes that, "SF thus enacts and enables a structurally unique 'method' for apprehending the present as history, and this is so irrespective of the 'pessimism' or 'optimism' of the imaginary future world which is the pretext for that defamiliarization" ("Progress" 153, emphasis mine). *Avatar* and *District 9* share a number of thematic preoccupations and narrative techniques which enable them to defamiliarize the neoliberal present, thereby allowing us to 'apprehend the present as history.'

In fact, both films can be seen as revealing the consequences of ‘accumulation by dispossession’—by which David Harvey means longstanding processes of capitalist modernity involving the privatization of land, the forceful expulsion of peasant populations; the conversion of natural resources and public assets into private property; and the use of debt and credit apparatuses for usury and other forms of dispossession. Contradicting the view that these means of exploitation are exceptional to capitalism, Harvey writes that, “capitalism always requires a fund of assets outside of itself...If those assets, such as empty land or new material sources, do not lie to hand, then capitalism must somehow produce them” (143). In other words, “capitalism necessarily and always creates its own ‘other.’ The idea that some sort of ‘outside’ is necessary for the stabilization of capitalism therefore has relevance” (*Spaces* 141). Harvey adds that these processes of dispossession, which were crucial for sustaining European colonial domination, have assumed renewed significance over the last thirty years, taking precedence over industrialization as preferred modes of capitalist accumulation. In other words, the rise of neoliberalism has brought with it an acceleration of methods of capitalist accumulation that involve the dispossession of individuals and communities.

The recurrence of dispossession as a thematic within globally popular films like *Avatar* and *District 9* speaks to its ubiquity as a mode of capitalist accumulation in the neoliberal present. Indeed, what is powerful about these films is their attentiveness to regimes of inequality created by ongoing processes of capitalist accumulation by dispossession. James Cameron’s *Avatar* represents Harvey’s notion of capital always needing an outside for its sustenance: when the Earth is not enough, then capitalism turns to the distant moon, Pandora, as a new source of raw materials. The film reveals the roles

played by science, commerce and the military in dispossessing communities for the sake of continued capitalist expansion. It is no wonder, then, that the film, released in 2009 in the midst of the US's imperialist war against Iraq and in the wake of a global economic recession, struck a chord with audiences in the US and abroad. Like *Avatar*, *District 9* represents the segregation and displacement of alien groups in a dystopic, 21<sup>st</sup> century Johannesburg, thereby recalling the practices of apartheid and suggesting their ongoing life within the so-called new South Africa. As opposed to celebrations of the newness of the post-apartheid nation, Blomkamp's film calls attention to the ways in which techniques of apartheid's colonial domination live on beyond the formal end of apartheid rule, especially through the practices of private and multinational capital.

At the same time that these films perform the function of defamiliarization, however, they also mark our ideological limits. According to Jameson,

[I]n order for narrative to project some sense of a totality of experience in space and time, it must surely know some closure (a narrative must have an ending, even if it is ingeniously organized around the structural repression of endings as such). At the same time, however, closure or the narrative ending is the mark of that boundary or limit beyond which thought cannot go. The merit of SF is to dramatize this contradiction on the level of plot itself, since the vision of future history cannot know any punctual ending of this kind, at the same time that its novelistic expression demands some such ending. Thus Asimov has consistently refused to complete or terminate his *Foundation* series; while the most obvious ways in which an SF novel can wrap its story up—as in an atomic explosion that destroys the universe, or the static image of some future totalitarian world-state—are also clearly the places in which our own ideological limits are the most surely inscribed. (“Progress” 148)

In what follows I will first describe the ways in which these films defamiliarize the present and then turn to the ways in which their acts of closure simultaneously mark our ‘ideological limits’—the limits of our collective imagination in the neoliberal present.

Slums and Body Horror: The Dystopia of *District 9*

At the same time that it is a Hollywoodesque film, Neil Blomkamp's *District 9* also has much in common with a number of apartheid and post-apartheid films that thematize the injustices of South African racism through narratives about the ideological transformation of white protagonists. Set in Johannesburg, this science-fiction fantasy film portrays a new form of apartheid, one that revolves around the forced removal of insect-like alien creatures from the township of District 9. The plot revolves around Wikus Van De Merwe, a corporate bureaucrat at Multinational United or MNU who is placed in charge of evicting aliens—that are derogatorily referred to as “prawns.” When conducting these evictions, Wikus is exposed to an alien biofuel that begins his transformation from human to prawn. Whereas he was once discriminating of the aliens, following his exposure to the biofuel and his subsequent ostracization from the human community, Wikus seeks refuge in the township of District 9. And while he once naively believed that the MNU's mission was that of engaging “with the prawn on behalf of humans,” he soon learns that the real reason behind MNU's and the South African government's ostensible humanitarianism is the acquisition of the aliens' sophisticated weapon technology. Whilst in exile in District 9, Wikus develops a friendship with an alien named Christopher Johnson whom he heroically helps return to his planet in exchange for the promise that Christopher would come back in three years with the technology needed to effect Wikus's conversion back into becoming a human being. At the end of the film, Christopher returns to his planet; the MNU complete their resettlement program, demolishing District 9 in the process; and we are left unsure, yet

hopeful, that the remaining aliens will return to their planet and that Christopher Johnson will come back to Earth to return Wikus's favor and to reverse his transformation.

The film draws on a number of genres. First, it draws on the conventions of Hollywoodesque science fiction fantasy films (like Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*, for instance) with their representations of alien-human conflict in futuristic, dystopian worlds. Moreover, as is typical of a number of South African township films, *District 9* cues the viewer to read its portrayal of township life as authentic. Not only is the film shot in the township of Soweto, but also its simulation of documentary style and its use of video cue us to read its imagery as "real." Indeed, much of the film's pleasure lies in its deft movement back and forth between the styles of documentary and science fiction, between video and film, and in its blurring of our sense of the boundaries between reality and representation. For viewers familiar with apartheid's history, the film's title recalls the District 6 township in Cape Town, a prominent site of forced removals during apartheid. Although it never mentions the word apartheid or ever explicitly refers to apartheid's history, through its title, the film suggests a link between this history and the conditions of the contemporary South Africa it represents. Finally, Blomkamp's film also contains echoes of the gangster film, a prominent, globally exported product of post-apartheid South Africa. In particular, its representation of Wikus's conflicts with the cannibalistic Nigerian gangsters living in the township of *District 9* is immediately reminiscent of the genre of the South African gangster film.

Through the course of the film's unfolding, we go through a number of stages of identification and disidentification with its central character. The opening sequence efficiently introduces us not only to our protagonist but also to the story of how the aliens

arrived in Johannesburg. The use of video— and the presence in the frame of time code and of subtitles introducing us to the various speakers—invites us to see the footage as part of a (mock) documentary film. In a tightly-edited sequence, that cuts between archival footage of the aliens' arrival (shot in analog/ Hi-8 video) and the retrospective comments of scholars and experts (shot in digital video), we learn of how the aliens' spaceship unexpectedly appeared over the skyline of Johannesburg in the early 1980s. Our first view of the alien creatures is through the archival footage, which reveals a horde of malnourished insect-like creatures that are barely able to stand up tall. In the sequence of shots that follows, we see the aliens resisting human attempts to help them, or fighting against one another, or being arrested by the police, or hungrily hacking down large chunks of animal carcass in the township of District 9, which they have made their home. Through these images, and because our view of the aliens is consistently mediated by the experts' horror-filled commentary, we see the former as essentially belligerent creatures, competing with one another to survive, showing little concern for the life around them. This opening sequence then ends with a birdseye view of vast expanses of slum, overlaid by the title of the film, and accompanied by orchestral music whose tone evokes the intractable "problem" that is District 9 and its inhabitants. With its rapid cutting, its aerial shots of an impoverished township, and its evocation of the misery of township life, the film's opening sequence simulates the style and tone of contemporary documentary films that aim to expose and comment on social problems. While the perspective of these experts and of our protagonist is all we have in the early stages, as we get closer to some of the aliens through the course of the film, and as our central character also transforms

into an alien, we are invited to critique the arrogance of these detached, expert perspectives that punctuate the film.

One of the film's foremost strategies for conveying its critique of the aliens' dispossession involves representing a metropolitan character's physical and spiritual transformation as he encounters groups of displaced aliens. In an early moment of the film, prior to his transformation, Wikus explains to the camera that, "The prawn does not really understand the concept of ownership of property. So we have to come there and say, listen this is our land, please will you go." Wikus's subsequent transformation leads him to question the MNU's claim to the land and its right to dispossess the inhabitants of District 9. As Wikus is the locus of the film's plot, his questioning cues the audience to in turn question the privatization practices of Multinational United. In many ways, this form of narrative—one that revolves around the transformation of a single character—fits within the tradition of postcolonial narratives that are about protagonists who become aware of their complicity in the status quo—protagonists, that is, whose exposure to marginalized groups radically transforms them. In the case of *District 9*, this transformation is literalized and rendered visible in Wikus's metamorphosis from human to prawn.

Indeed, the film's mise-en-scene invites us to pay close attention to the bodily changes Wikus undergoes as he metamorphoses into a prawn. In one of the more visually shocking moments within the film—one that marks a turning point in its narrative—a doctor examines Wikus's injured arm only to see emerge out of it the burgeoning claw of a prawn. The camera's proximity to the claw accentuates its size in the frame—as does Wikus's horrified scream. Subsequent moments emphasize Wikus's torment as he

discovers increasing evidence of his alienation from his own body. In another memorable moment, Wikus tries unsuccessfully to axe the half of his arm that has turned into that of a prawn; he then examines himself before a broken mirror, only to find that his back is developing prawnlike characteristics as well. Such moments of body horror, inevitably accompanied by Wikus's anguished cries, ensure our attentiveness to our protagonist's physical transformation. By taking us through Wikus's emerging realization about his complicity in an apartheid-style system of dispossessions, *District 9* thus makes visible the dispossession of communities at a time when neoliberal privatization normalizes and institutionalizes forms of predatory capitalism that destroy ties between living beings as well as between people and place.

### The Utopian Paradise of Pandora

Released only a few months after *District 9*, *Avatar* is a futuristic science-fiction fantasy film that, like its South African counterpart, thematizes the dispossession of communities owing to a power nexus between science, the military, and forces of corporate globalization. The RDA mining corporation is in search of the rare and lucrative mineral, Unobtainium, which can be found on a distant moon, Pandora. Their main obstacle, however, are the Na'vi, a population of gigantic, blue-skinned humanoids that live on Pandora and resist the mining company's exploitation. The protagonist, Jake Sully, is a disabled former marine who has been enlisted to function as an agent. Jake works with a team of scientists that although primarily interested in researching the ecology of Pandora partially assist RDA in its mercenary mission. The scientists enable Jake to temporarily assume the humanoid form and to thereby gather important

intelligence about the Na'vi and the environment in which they live. As opposed to the mining company (headed by the appropriately-named Parker Selfridge) that aims to extract a raw material from its environment, the Na'vi believe that all plant, animal and mineral life is intricately connected and that any attempt at extraction is in effect a destruction of a whole way of life. Jake is seduced by the Na'vi worldview and finds himself falling in love with the beautiful Neytiri, who introduces him to the magic of Pandora and educates him about the Na'vi's beliefs and ways. Through the course of the film's narrative, Jake learns Na'vi methods of self-preservation and warfare. He eventually plays a heroic role in defending the Na'vi from the RDA onslaught and, in the end, chooses to abandon his human form and to be reborn as a Na'vi.

If *District 9* invokes the history and legacies of apartheid, then *Avatar* reflects on ongoing US and Western imperialism. The film appeared in cinemas during an escalation of US military aggression and a global economic crisis that brought into the mainstream a critique of corporate globalization and Western imperialism. The film makes explicit references to America's war in the middle-East: we learn, for instance, that the colonialists are waging against the Na'vi a "shock and awe campaign" (thus drawing on the language that the George W Bush government used to describe the "war on terror" against allegedly terrorist nations). The film also comments on the imperialism of corporate globalization that brings science as well as military power within its fold. Although the scientists are portrayed as relatively benign figures who are interested in protecting Na'vi ecology rather than in destroying it, we are also made aware of their proximity to the business and military interests that are ultimately responsible for the attack on the Na'vi.

Unlike *District 9*, *Avatar* was shot in the 3-D format, thereby inviting viewers to immerse themselves more fully in its imagined utopian paradise. Pandora is a lush world filled with flying humanoids, floating mountains, luminous plant life, and a number of scientific mysteries including brightly-colored flowers that magically open and close at the touch of a finger. The Na'vi are the exotic Other who inhabit an alternative spatio-temporal order and live by an ecological spiritualism that sees all living things as connected by energy flows. Paraphrasing Neytiri and the Na'vi more generally, Jake speaks of how all energy is borrowed and one day you have to give it back. The film suggests that the bulldozers that arrive in Pandora—and that present a sharp contrast to the colors and scale of life in this biosphere—are not only displacing living beings but are also destroying collective memory and connections between these beings and the land on which they live.

Like Ghosh's *The Hungry Tide* and Blomkamp's *District 9*, Cameron's ecocritical intervention revolves around the transformation of a metropolitan protagonist following his exposure to marginalized groups who are the targets of imperialist violence and dispossession. Like *District 9*, *Avatar* goes back and forth between third person omniscient narration and the central character's video log about his encounters with the Na'vi people. Jake's first-person narration opens the film: in the opening scene he reveals his recurring dreams of flying, as the camera soars over a misty landscape. This internal narration aligns us with Jake from the outset and cues us to anticipate his subsequent transformation. Like Wikus in *District 9*, Jake assumes a new bodily form that is half-human and half-alien. Jake's rediscovery of himself through taking on this new form is a

crucial device that, in addition to its imagination of the alternative universe of Pandora, allows the film to offer a defamiliarizing view of the present.

A montage sequence midway through the film compresses the key transformations and confirms the major developments in the film's plot. This montage sequence foregrounds how the interactions between our protagonist and Neytiri make Jake into a "softer" man and her into an increasingly maternal figure who oversees Jake's development from infancy (she often refers to him as a 'baby') to maturity. The montage sequence cuts back and forth between Jake's life in the base camp and among the Na'vi. In both spaces, hair is a key motif that marks his transformation. In the base camp, Jake's appearance changes rapidly: no longer the jarhead he once was, he now sports a beard and appears to have a softened look. In Pandora, Jake is initiated into the Na'vi community when he learns how to use his hair to connect with the other beings.

But in addition to this softening, Jake is also metamorphosing into an invincible Na'vi warrior, who will eventually become their leader and savior. At the end of this crucial montage sequence that shows the protagonist's transformation, Jake is presented with the ultimate challenge of learning to fly. Like *District 9*, then, *Avatar* too, is a narrative about a western subject's rehumanization. We identify with Jake as he engages with a foreign culture, as he learns how to compete with the Na'vi, by deploying their tricks and survival strategies, and as he learns what it means to live in harmony with nature.

*Avatar* and *District 9*: Marking Our Ideological Limits

There arises a tension, however, between *Avatar*'s critique of corporate greed and domination and the conventions of European literary sentimentalism on which the film's narrative relies. The hero needs not only to belong and find acceptance within an alternative universe but also to retain his position of exceptionality by becoming the eventual leader and potential savior of the Na'vi. Indeed, while the film extols the Pandora inhabitants' view of living in harmony with nature and of being part of a larger whole, much of its narrative energy derives from the hero, Jake Sully's transformation from jarhead to foremost critic of the human military-industrial complex and sole defender of the Na'vi. Like much colonial and some post-colonial discourse, the narrative revolves around a relatively benign privileged subject whose transformation requires the support of an entire population of colonized peoples. Much relies on this subject—not only his own fate but also the eventual fate of the indigenous population he will protect. Although there are moments when we see him cooperating with the military, moments that momentarily break our identification with him and cue us to see Jake as complicit with the imperialist project, we are repeatedly reminded that he is on the road to transformation, and to being reborn.

Jake is both critic and savior; his role as resister serves mainly to glorify him as a renegade, and to render him heroic. In the scenes in which Jake learns to fly, the film begins to absorb us in his fantasy of self-mastery. Jake's disability and his subsequent training by Neytiri into becoming a better man make him an increasingly sympathetic character. We watch him train among the Navi; we want him to succeed and to excel at the skills that the Navi teach him. After he has learned to fly, Jake and Neytiri look like

planes flying beside one another. But now, Jake often takes the lead and even saves Neytiri when they are threatened by the much-dreaded giant red bird. This moment marks a turning point in the film and foreshadows Jake's eventual heroic feat that saves the Na'vi from human attack. Jake thus metamorphoses from victim to savior of an endangered people.

The film's critique of the violence of capitalist dispossession rests on its attributing this violence to the problem of human arrogance and intolerance—and on its creation of a paradise that is sealed off from the world of humans. Even when the Na'vi talk about their history, they give us the impression of being relatively untouched by human civilization, their contact with the human race being a relatively small aspect of their overall experience. Indeed, much of the film's seductiveness rests on its creation of an exotic, premodern Other that needs to be demystified and made comprehensible to humans. This exotic Other, a staple of colonialist mythology, is in turn the catalyst for the metropolitan subject's radical transformation and rebirth. The creation of this sealed-off extra-human space, however, both enables and blunts the film's political critique.

As with *Avatar*, much of the narrative of *District 9* revolves around Wikus' transformation and eventual emergence as the savior of the prawns. This narrative structure—with its emphasis on a metropolitan subject's transformation brought on by his exposure to dispossessed groups—results in the reprivatization of oppression, rendering scenes of dispossession as merely new settings for the consolidation of the metropolitan subject. As the film's mise-en-scene consistently cues us to focus on the gradual shifts in Wikus's anatomy—making us increasingly conscious of the takeover of the human body by prawn features—and as the narrative revolves around Wikus's heroic attempts to resist

the MNU and save his new prawn friends, our focus gets increasingly narrowed to Wikus's transformation. As the *New York Times* review says about the film's arc: "Once a terrible accident befalls Wikus, we are at his side and under his skin, and 'District 9' subtly shifts from speculative science fiction to zombie bio-horror and then, less subtly, turns into an escape-action-chase movie full of explosions, gunplay and vehicular mayhem."

Moreover, as is the case with *Avatar*, *District 9* presents apartheid-style segregation as an example of human intolerance. On one level, the film invites us to think of apartheid as a historically-specific process of dispossession and segregation that lives on—though in a different form—in the present moment. As the narrative progresses, however, the film figures apartheid as xenophobia and discrimination, broadly understood. The post-apartheid attacks on immigrants recalled for many the violence of the apartheid days. According to David Theo Goldberg,

The deadly Johannesburg township violence against migrants from other parts of Africa, especially Zimbabweans, the poorest of the poor characterized as criminals and job thieves, evidences the limits of neoliberal sociality. Reminiscent of collaborator necklacings from the 1980s, these migrant murders and beatings signal in the most extreme mode the furious frustrations over neoliberal disposability and invisibility, pitting the socially poorest against the most precarious, both with little if anything left to lose. (*Threat of Race* 312)

*District 9* suggests that this kind of violence entails a new form of apartheid, one in which black South Africans are equally complicit. Indeed, the filmmaker, Neill Blomkamp, has on many occasions talked about how the riots in recent years between Zimbabweans and South Africans inspired his allegorical narrative—and at various moments, the film draws parallels between apartheid and xenophobia, expressed by both whites and blacks. For instance, shortly after the title sequence, a black woman who is

being interviewed in the fake documentary comments: “They’re spending so much money to keep [the aliens] here when they could be spending it on other things. But at least they’re keeping them separate from us.” This black woman is one among a number of black characters who openly expresses xenophobic sentiment towards outsiders and that demand segregation.

In the process, however, the film reinforces a growing tendency within postapartheid cultural production to represent apartheid through the lens of human intolerance. While on the one hand the film recalls the colonial violence of apartheid and foregrounds the repetition of apartheid style policies in the present moment, on the other hand the rendering of apartheid as a case of human intolerance ironically flattens out the specificities of the imperialist logic that underlay its policies. This tendency is repeated in a lot of postapartheid cinema that represents the TRC’s work. Indeed *District 9* fits within a longer trajectory of films about the South African TRC that mask the basis of apartheid’s violence in the systematic dispossession of people of color by a white-dominated government. Adopting the TRC’s race neutral stance, a number of post-apartheid films foreground cases of black-on-black violence or cases in which blacks were perpetrators. For instance, the award-winning documentary film about the TRC, *Long Night’s Journey into Day* begins and ends with cases of violence committed by blacks against whites or against other blacks. Similarly, while the South African production *Forgiveness* begins with the search of a white protagonist for forgiveness for his complicity in apartheid, it ends with scenes of black-on-black violence. As Mahmood Mamdani has pointed out, the TRC’s focus on identifying individual perpetrators and victims of violence meant that it ironically heard more cases of “black-on-black” violence

than violence committed against blacks by the white-dominated apartheid state—which clearly skewed our understanding of apartheid. What both the TRC and much postapartheid cinema obscure is the specifically institutional nature of apartheid’s racism.

This tension within *District 9*’s representation of apartheid is partly explainable as a manifestation of what David Theo Goldberg calls racial neoliberalism. The emergence of ideas of race neutrality and post-racialism in the era of neoliberalism leads to a proliferation of talk about the need for tolerance that occludes systemic racism. In its portrayal of apartheid as violence arising from human intolerance towards an Other, Blomkamp’s film reinforces the logic of racial neoliberalism to which Goldberg refers. At the same time that the film remembers apartheid through its acts of segregation, eviction, and dispossession, by conflating apartheid with xenophobia towards an other it also, ironically, contributes to the disavowal of apartheid’s particular history of institutionalized racism directed against black South Africans.

Hence apartheid’s history is flattened as it comes to be folded within a broader discourse of xenophobia and intolerance. Moreover, this history is also flattened by the film’s reliance on colonialist tropes and mythologies. The tropes of colonial racism remain crucial, for instance, in how we read a group of predatory Nigerian gangsters who live in the townships alongside the aliens—and who literally feed on and ingest alien flesh. Moreover, these tropes are also crucial in how we read the township as a site produced not by apartheid but rather by the much-detested prawns themselves.

Indeed, *District 9* reinforces colonial and neoliberal mythologies of slums as inevitabilities. According to the narrative put forth by the experts interviewed in the mock documentary footage of the opening sequence—a narrative that the film supports

with visual evidence and does not complicate or challenge— the South African government gave refuge to a weak and destitute population of aliens by placing them in a refugee camp. However, their sheer numbers and the extent of their destitution was hard for it to control, leading to the creation of the slum. In the realm of the film's narrative, the slum was produced by factors outside of the government's control. Although the government's and MNU's subsequent actions maintained segregation between the alien and the human populations, the creation of the township itself was a product of necessity in the face of the government's inability to address the arrival of the alien spaceship while being under pressure not only from an international community but also from local populations that wanted the prawns to be kept separate from them. Although to a large extent a critique of apartheid's segregationist policies, the film leaves unchallenged the myth that slums and the segregationist policies associated with them are inevitable. This replaying of the tropes and mythologies of colonial racism further flattens the film's representation and critique of apartheid-style practices of colonial domination and dispossession.

It seems to me that films like *Avatar* and *District 9* throw up many of the same tensions observable in the workings of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission and in cultural production about the TRC. By eliciting our identification with characters' guilt-induced transformations, the films prematurely resolve, or bring closure to, the conflicts and ongoing issues of social exploitation that its narrative brings to light. Through their framings of narratives of a metropolitan subject's identity crisis and self-transformation, both *Avatar* and *District 9* dramatize, yet contain, the tensions they identify as definitive of the neoliberal present. As much as they defamiliarize the

processes of capitalist dispossession, they also reinforce a tendency to disavow—i.e. to at once acknowledge and obscure— histories of systemic violence through narratives of a metropolitan character’s guilt-induced identity crisis. The boundaries of these utopian and dystopic visions thereby allow us to understand, what Jameson calls, our “ideological limits.”

### Conclusion

Neoliberalism normalizes and naturalizes the idea that the world’s salvation depends on a pure and unmediated form of capitalism. The global spread of this political and economic philosophy of neoliberalism offers up a utopian vision of a world in which the individual is completely free; economic activity depends entirely on individual enterprise, unhindered by government intervention; and inequality has been replaced by the universal spread of free markets and capitalist progress. Much of the genre of science fiction has critiqued the injustices of late capitalism and the privatizing vision on which it depends, with contemporary science fiction films like *Avatar* constructing alternative utopias to the one imagined by neoliberalism. The world of Pandora, *Avatar*’s ecological utopia, is one in which all creatures live in a state of deep connection with their environments. Here private and public are completely enmeshed and freedom derived from belonging to a web of connectivity and from living in harmony with nature.

Histories of literary utopia inevitably include Plato’s *Republic* and Thomas Moore’s *Utopia*. As Harvey describes More’s work, “More’s aim, and this is characteristic, was social harmony and stability (in contrast to the chaotic state of affairs in England at that time). To this end, he excluded the potentially disruptive social forces

of money, private property, wage labor, exploitation..." and so on (159-160). He adds that "All these forms of Utopia can be characterized as 'Utopias of spatial form' since the temporality of the social process, the dialectics of social change—real history—are excluded, while social stability is assured by a fixed spatial form" (*Spaces* 160).

Given that neoliberal utopianism fetishizes individual freedom and autonomy, and throws into question the desired relationship between individuals and their social systems, what might a counter-utopian vision entail? According to David Harvey, a counter utopianism to neoliberalism should be thought of "not in terms of some static spatial form or even of some perfected emancipatory process. The task is to pull together a spatiotemporal utopianism—a dialectical utopianism—that is rooted in our present possibilities at the same time as it points towards different trajectories for human uneven geographical developments" (*Spaces* 196). Perhaps the value of contemporary science fiction fantasy lies in its ability to offer a range of imagined spatialities as means of exploring alternatives. Its challenge, however, lies in ensuring that these alternative spatialities open our gaze to critique—rather than merely offering us means of escaping this present.

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